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The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

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(Thebacha)

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Friday, February 12, 2021****Members Present**

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

The House met at 10:01 a.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.): Colleagues, before we begin, I just want to send my condolences to the Kendall family in Tsiigehtchic for the passing of elder Thomas Kendall yesterday. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and the community at this time. Thank you. Item 2, Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 113-19(2):
WORKERS' SAFETY AND COMPENSATION
COMMISSION SERVICE INNOVATIONS DURING
COVID-19

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I wish to provide an update on some of the service improvements, including the financial relief measures the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When the pandemic hit, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission responded quickly to adapt its operations. In line with public health guidelines, all employees in Yellowknife, Inuvik, and Iqaluit were swiftly equipped with the right technology, moved to work from home, and safely transitioned back to offices once appropriate safety measures were put in place. Since March 2020, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission has successfully maintained services to 4,000 employers and almost 40,000 workers in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut without significant interruption, a commendable achievement.

Mr. Speaker, one of the ways the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission continues to ensure business continuity and to enhance front-line services for employers and injured workers is by offering virtual and online alternatives. Prior to the pandemic, work was already well underway to expand online options, such as Mine Supervisor

Certification and e-business services offered through WSCC Connect. However, it was undeniable that the practical challenges posed by COVID-19 had accelerated the adaptation of some digital platforms and business transformation through sheer necessity.

The Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission has taken a highly flexible and adaptive approach. For example, claims services are working with service providers in healthcare to provide some of the practical barriers to provide virtual-based care plan options for injured workers. In suitable cases, services officers have arranged for medical appointments, follow-up, counselling, physiotherapy home exercise plans and assessments, and Vocational Rehabilitation assessments and follow-up. These improvements are in the early days and, though modest, are meaningful and will ultimately offer a more responsive and supportive service for injured workers and their family, a quicker resolution for employees, and a reduction in case costs.

Mr. Speaker, Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission educational outreach and inspections are an important part of ensuring the health and safety of the workplace across the Northwest Territories. In 2020, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission adapted these in-person activities and provided assistance to over 2,760 employers through alternative means such as phone and online. Educational tools and guidance were developed and rolled out for industry use and the webinars and Zoom meetings that replaced annual events with partner organizations and professional associations were well attended.

Inspections are an essential mechanism for accountability, to ensure that employers are meeting their legal obligations under the Safety Act and Occupational Health and Safety Regulations and the Mine Health and Safety Act. Engagement and outreach gives employers access to guidance and best practices tools so that we can create and maintain strong safety plans and also ensure the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission remains responsive to the challenges they face.

Mr. Speaker, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission is also making continual improvements to the more established e-

business services on WSCC Connect. A new service for employers to report workplace safety incidents or injuries was recently launched on the platform. Employer's Report of Incident joins existing services, such as payroll reporting, online payments, assessment rate information, clearance requests, and reports of unsafe work. For example, employers who reduced their workplace during the pandemic had the opportunity to submit a revised payroll estimation online and to make their payments without penalty at a later date.

At this challenging time for many businesses, the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission announced last November that the average rate for employer's assessment will be maintained at the 2020 rate levels. Employers have already received notification of their industry assessment rate. That the average rate is holding steady at \$2.40 per \$100 of assessed payroll is positive news at a time of economic uncertainty for so many.

The Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission remains committed to making northern workplaces the safest in the country and to delivering care to injured workers, to work collaboratively with the Office of the Chief Public Health Officer to reduce the risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19 in workplaces, and to provide practical support to employers and local businesses to operate safely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Ministers' Statements. Minister of Health and Social Services.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 114-19(2):
MENTAL HEALTH AND ENGAGEMENT ON
ADDICTIONS RECOVERY AND THE NWT
ALCOHOL STRATEGY

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Legislative Assembly has identified increasing the number and variety of culturally respectful, community-based mental health and addictions programs, including aftercare, as one of its priorities. The Department of Health and Social Services is improving services to individuals with addictions, and I am committed to achieving this mandate commitment.

In the Northwest Territories, mental health and addictions are a pressing concern for all of us. While there are supports and services already in place and available, we know we need to further strengthen our system to help those who are struggling most. This is particularly true when it comes to addictions recovery supports.

Mr. Speaker, our goal is to ensure quality addictions-recovery services that meet the needs of our residents, but, in order to understand best what

these individuals need, we need to hear from them. Hearing from individuals who have personally experienced or had a family member experience addictions will best inform our approach. The GNWT knows that one size doesn't fit all when it comes to mental health and addictions, and it's important that residents are provided options as they move toward recovery.

Our first step toward gathering this information and better understanding these needs will be to conduct an addictions recovery survey which will focus on hearing from people about programs and services they have accessed in the past. We want to learn what has worked, what has not, and what residents feel they need to support their recovery. The GNWT will be asking its partners, including service providers, for their support in sharing the survey with clients, as well as using traditional and social media to raise awareness. Hard copies of the survey will also be available for those who are unable to access the online version at their local community counselling program office and treatment facilities. The survey will open on Monday, February 15th.

Mr. Speaker, a key component of this survey will be to focus on barriers or challenges experienced by people seeking help. We need to understand what gets in the way of recovery so that we can work to overcome it. We need to understand what works best when it comes to supporting recovery so we can do more of it. This survey is critical towards the understanding, and it will be followed by more focused efforts, where we can dive deeper into lived experiences to shape our plans moving forward.

The GNWT is also moving forward by developing an NWT alcohol strategy. The intent of this strategy is to reduce alcohol-related harms. "Alcohol-related harms" refers to a wide range of impacts associated with heavy or risky alcohol use, including chronic health problems, injuries, violence, lost productivity, criminal justice issues, family problems, and death.

The development of the alcohol strategy will be informed by feedback from stakeholders and led by a team of professionals who understand outreach and engagement, addiction medicine and treatment, and include representatives from GNWT departments, and evaluation and surveillance experts to ensure measurable results.

Mr. Speaker, I am looking forward to reviewing the feedback received from residents and service users about the effectiveness of the addictions recovery supports we provide. The GNWT wants to ensure that services offered are to meet our commitment to provide appropriate choice, cultural safety, and person-centred care. These elements are incredibly important to the effectiveness of services, and I

look forward to sharing the results of the survey with Members as one way to fulfill our mandate commitment to assist residents with addictions recovery. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 115-19(2):
MINISTER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to advise the House that the Honourable Diane Archie will be absent from the House to participate in a conference call with federal-provincial-territorial Ministers of transport and highway safety. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Premier. Ministers' statements. Item 3, Members' statements. Member for Hay River South.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government promised change. Prior to being voted into office, I heard stories and complaints from persons working in government who informed me of a toxic working environment where bullying and belittling was a common occurrence in some departments under certain managers or by co-workers. As an MLA, I now hear those same concerns and, unlike before, I am in a position that will allow me to address it and do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, employees at every level of this government deserve to be treated with respect, not only by management, but by their co-workers, as well. Each employee brings a particular set of skills and knowledge to their position which should be recognized and appreciated. Many of these employees may be young persons who are just starting to build the career they have dreamed about for years. They should not be put in a position where they are afraid to come to work or afraid to speak up when being treated inappropriately or intimidated by management or others.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that each person, while bringing their own knowledge and experience to a position, may also bring an arrogance that could result in the workplace becoming a toxic work environment because one's power is misused.

This government has in place a Harassment Free and Respectful Workplace Policy. As politicians, we must ensure that each Minister and their deputy

ministers is held accountable for the administration and implementation of that policy. Employees also have other avenues to address workplace harassment; however, they may not have the financial resources to take advantage of such avenues. Government, on the other hand, has deep pockets and resources which place it in a position of power when it comes to addressing allegations of harassment and protecting management. It is here where fairness becomes questionable.

Mr. Speaker, it all comes down to treating people with respect. We, as regular MLAs, must ensure that this government is held accountable if we expect departments to hold management accountable when it comes to the treatment of employees. To accomplish this end, it is incumbent upon each of us to lead by example. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Members' statements. Member for Frame Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
NORTHERN RESIDENT TAX DEDUCTION

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. We all love to hate northern resident tax deductions. I seem to raise these deductions on an annual basis, like a broken record. I know this is not our Minister of Finance's program, but it is going to take our Finance Minister's intervention to get this fixed. We all know the ridiculous problems with the northern resident deductions: they are not indexed in any way; it takes monumental efforts to adjust the amounts; Northerners are subjected too often to time-consuming audits; and the annual guessing game of what the Canada Revenue Agency might accept as a lowest return airfare rather than setting it at a reasonable rate and making it publicly available.

Back in April 2018, CBC reported that residents of the three northern territories were being audited about three times more often than taxpayers in the South. The then-federal Minister of National Revenue promised to look into it. In August 2018, the Canada Revenue Agency opened offices in each of the three territorial capitals. While service may have been improved, the core problems with the northern resident deductions were not fixed. The federal Minister then opened a so-called consultation on the lowest airfare requirement for the northern resident deduction. The deduction is set by regulation and has been in place since 1987. Northerners have been complaining ever since. The consultation proposed that a taxpayer would be required to determine a reasonable amount of a return economy airfare ordinarily available for the date of travel. For example, a claimant is supposed to obtain a reasonable airfare amount for the day of

travel from a travel website in the days leading up to a trip. Mr. Speaker, that might work if you have Internet access and the Internet actually works when you need it.

The consultation on the lowest airfare closed on April 17, 2019, and it has been radio silence ever since. There is no "what we heard" report, no policy or regulation change, nothing. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Finance, to see if there has been any progress on fixing these chronic problems with the northern resident tax deductions. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON WOMEN IN SCIENCE

MS. NOKLEBY: Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the United Nations' International Day of Women and Girls in Sciences; sadly, something I wasn't aware of until after I had done my Member's statement for the day. However, as I think every day we should be focused on this important topic, I've decided to speak on it today, as well.

My career prior to politics, for those who may not be aware, was in engineering, and one of my passions in life is advancing the opportunities for women and non-binary people in the field of science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM. You may have heard me quote the statistic in the past that only 13 percent of engineers in Canada identify as women, a statistic that I have felt the personal toll of. When we look more locally, we hear the Minister of ECE say this week that only 5 to 7 percent of tradespeople in the territory identify as women. While I don't fault the Minister for this dismal statistic, it does tell me I need to be a thorn in his side to ensure it improves.

Women have done remarkable things in the scientific realm, made even more outstanding that a lot of them did it by teaching themselves when the barriers in place to education and experience must have seemed insurmountable. Women have taken us to the moon, photographed DNA for the first time, and discovered new elements. Marie Curie, the only person to win two Nobel Prizes in separate sciences, did so over 100 years ago. As a woman struggling to cope with sexism in our modern society, where we've never had it so good, I can't imagine how she felt, struggling to be heard in a world that felt she shouldn't even be bothered to learn to read.

When I look around our territory, when I think about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, when I reflect on my own life, I know we still

have a very long way to go, a long journey ahead before we ever reach the point where an international day of anything for women is no longer needed. However, I commit to continuing to march down that path, using whatever tools I have towards that day, and I will continue to try to pave that road for all the girls who will come after me. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FUNDING FOR BUS SERVICE IN REINDEER POINT

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents of Tuktoyaktuk who live in Reindeer Point are 7 kilometres outside of the community. Like other municipalities in the Northwest Territories, Tuktoyaktuk is underfunded; they stretch every dollar. The hamlet has been running the busing service for the last few years at a capital loss and using their funds, \$57,000 a year. That is the cost of running the bus for people with no vehicles. Our government promised to provide the busing funds, Mr. Speaker. The hamlet asked MACA for funding assistance. The previous Minister told them, "Prioritize your money and your spending." The current Minister has offered to help the hamlet to develop a business plan. That response is not good enough. It was a GNWT decision to re-establish Reindeer Point, and the hamlet says that the GNWT made a commitment at the time to fund bussing. According to MACA's own research, we are underfunding our community governments by \$25 million a year. They expect small communities to keep making up the shortfall.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I will be seeking commitment from the Minister to provide money, and not moral support, to help Tuktoyaktuk provide bussing to Reindeer Point. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES SUMMER STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I would like to discuss GNWT summer student employment and affirmative action. These jobs are extremely important for our post-secondary students, not only to assist with the cost of school, but these jobs provide opportunities to gain valuable work experience that will assist them when they have completed their studies.

I have experienced what the hiring process of the summer students from my previous roles. This process includes the hiring manager filling out an application to request to hire a summer student. The hiring manager would then receive a master list of all of the students who had submitted their resume. This list would include students' first and second choice of department where they would like to work and whether they are P1, P2, or P3. Then the manager would scan the entire list to identify their top choices and send the names of the applicants back to HR and receive their resumes. The hiring managers would then set up interviews and did not need to include human resource officers on this interview.

There was no mechanism in place to ensure hiring managers considered GNWT affirmative action policies when choosing who they will interview. I have heard many Indigenous students not getting summer student jobs or not even being interviewed for jobs in their field of study when the job was filled by a P2 student. In some cases, I have even heard a P3 student getting a summer student job ahead of a P1 candidate.

Mr. Speaker, the summer student hiring process needs to have strict mechanisms in place to ensure that government's Affirmative Action Policy is followed. I will have questions for the Minister of Finance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON MAKING A HOLIDAY IN FEBRUARY

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am so glad it's a long weekend. I am so glad we are heading into Friday with Monday as Family Day. Oh, wait, Mr. Speaker, I thought for a second we were in Alberta, or BC, or possibly Ontario, maybe Saskatchewan, or even New Brunswick, but we're not. We are in the Northwest Territories, and we don't get a statutory holiday in February. In fact, after new year's, I have to wait over three dark months until the next holiday.

It doesn't need to be Family Day, Mr. Speaker. PEI has Islander Day. Manitoba will be celebrating Louis Riel Day. Maybe we could have Elders Day or NWT Days. I'm not picky. I will even compromise on the date. The Yukon celebrates Heritage Day on the 26th. I will even take a St. Patrick's Day in March, if it's good enough for Newfoundland to make it a stat. It's been a long year, Mr. Speaker. February has been a hard month for all of us, and with the highest suicide rates in this month, I believe we need to give our workers a break.

In a weird twist of fate, most schools have PD or sick days on this day, leaving parents to scramble to find childcare at their work anyways: a family-free Family Day. We don't have a single piece of legislation before us in this House this sitting, nothing for us to do. I can't think of anything more politically palpable than creating a holiday called Family Day. I will have questions for the Minister of Justice, or in this case, the Minister of holidays, about whether we can get a Family Day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON APPRECIATION FOR ALL RESIDENTS OF FORT SMITH

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to use my Member's statement today to give my thanks and appreciation to all of the residents of Fort Smith. Specifically, I would like to thank all workers from both private and public sectors, as well as all business owners within the community. Places like Kaeser's grocery store, the Northern Store, Wally's drugstore, Fort Smith Construction, Petro Canada, Tim Hortons, and the staff at the Bank of Montreal, TDC, Berro's pizza, and Anna's Home Cooking, to name a few.

It has been a tough and uncertain year for many people as we navigated through this pandemic. Therefore, I just want to thank my constituents for the strength, determination, and resilience that they have demonstrated since last March. I also want to thank my constituents for their continued support and need as MLA for Thebacha. As I have said before, it is truly an honour to represent Fort Smith in this Assembly, and I will continue to do my best to serve the people and interests of the amazing community I come from, Fort Smith.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I would like to once again say thank you to the staff here at the Legislative Assembly. Thank you to my two capable CAs, Pascal Erasmus and Priscilla Lepine, for their hard work as well. I wish my colleagues in this House a restful week ahead. I also would like to thank the Speaker for always being so patient. Happy Valentine's Day to everyone, and I hope everyone has a good week. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank listeners for following Avery's story this

week. It represents the experiences of many NWT residents. Avery's search for government help highlights the shortcomings of our system. The GNWT's current service delivery model is failing clients and costing taxpayers. We serve dozens of Averages and many more turn away in despair because they cannot get the help they need. This government must learn from Avery's experiences and implement preventative client-focused care before more Averages fall through the cracks.

Avery's journey included the FASD diagnostic clinic. According to Government of Canada 2017 estimates, more than 3,000 babies a year are born with FASD, and about 300,000 people are currently living with it. Research suggests that the occurrence of FASD is significantly greater in Indigenous populations and in rural and remote northern communities. We don't really know how much higher the rates are here in the NWT, but we do know, Mr. Speaker, that transgenerational trauma and substance abuse is staggering in our small territory.

FASD and complex developmental behavioural conditions sit on a spectrum without a one-size-fits-all solution. Treatment requires case-by-base management with compassionate trauma-informed wraparound care. British Columbia has an entire division focused on FASD and complex developmental behavioural conditions. Key workers provide assessment and life planning programs, educational resources and materials, family nights, regular check-ins with staff, therapeutic and skill-building groups, short-term counselling, support for schools and other community partners, and referrals to other support services.

The NWT currently has one FASD diagnostic clinic for children and one for adults. Each clinic has one employee. One, Mr. Speaker. This is not nearly enough. Once a person receives an FASD diagnosis, there are no case workers and no support. NWT adults need regional trauma-informed wraparound case managers providing clients with one-on-one supports for employment, housing, and life and financial skills. To reduce recidivism, we also need supports within our correctional facilities to provide care while people are incarcerated and after they are released.

Mr. Speaker, we also need supportive housing for families. I would like to see the GNWT develop a comprehensive plan for expanding future services, and I will have questions for the Minister later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
TRAVEL DURING COVID BY PUBLIC SERVANTS

MR. LAFFERTY: [Translation] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the COVID, it has been over year now. Again, we are getting orders from the Chief Public Health Officer. To be going around for travel has also been restricted since COVID, with doctor's orders, time to take their orders, but some of the front-line workers are also doing some travel, and we really do not believe that is right because we all know there the high are people for all people of the -- so this is what I want to speak on. [Translation ends].

Mr. Speaker, the people of the Northwest Territories should be very proud. Through self-sacrifice, community spirit, and civil-mindedness, they stood shoulder to shoulder to keep COVID at bay. As a result of that courage and commitment, Mr. Speaker, we stand among all provinces and territories in our success in battling the COVID-19 virus. It came at a heavy price. Families were separated. University students were stranded. Weddings were postponed. Even the funerals were unattended. Vacations were cancelled.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, not everyone shared the burden. Some people felt it beneath them. Remarkably, We find those shirkers at the high level of our COVID bureaucracy. While Northerners were doing their part and staying home, these privileged bureaucrats were quietly travelling across the country, visiting families instead of setting the good example Northerners have the right to expect from these highly qualified bureaucrats. Even more sadly, we have a Premier who excuses such behaviour and tells us even in public that it is none of our business, even when faced with a groundswell of public displeasure. She justifies these double standards by her stonewalling. That is instead of moral courage and leadership by example that Northerners deserve out of a Premier.

Mr. Speaker, this raises questions about her abilities and about the transparency. We are talking about public funds and public servants. There has to be an accountability from this government. At an appropriate time, I will have questions for the Premier. Masi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Members' statements. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Nahendeh.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize the interpreters here, who are doing a great job. Yes, I speak fast, and I apologize, but I want to specifically recognize Mary Jane Cazon, a constituent from the Nahendeh region. She has

been a strong advocate of Dene Zhatie in the region and in the Northwest Territories, so I would like to welcome her here to the Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Item 6, replies to budget address. Member for Yellowknife North.

Replies to Budget Address

MR. JOHNSON'S REPLY

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the Minister of Finance for her budget address last week. I also want to thank all of my colleagues for their dedication and hard work over the last year. We executed a model response to a pandemic, and, with vaccines well distributed, relief is in sight. Our Cabinet and public servants can hold their heads high in our response to COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, it's hard to disagree with much of the new-initiative spending in this budget: \$1.7 million for a small business tax cut which brings us in line with other jurisdictions and is most certainly needed for our small businesses these days; \$7 million for Child and Family Services, long overdue money for that system; 27 new counsellor positions and a travelling mental-health team for our public schools; additional funding to expand our healthcare systems capacity. These are all much-needed supports and will directly assist the residents of this territory. A few initiatives, I could probably live without, but, all around, the new spending aligns well with the mandate of this government.

However, my job is not to stand here and sing Cabinet's praises. My job is to hold them to account for the change they promised in taking their positions. We cannot lose sight that this budget is a moral document. Each dollar spent is a choice, \$2 million, each weighed against the other, \$45,000 for every person in this territory, we are entrusted to spend, one of the highest per-capita spendings of any government on the planet, Mr. Speaker. There are no easy decisions in allocating this money. There is no easy metric to value nurses over teachers over road-builders, but we must conduct that hard work.

In our system, we don't vote on parties, we don't vote on platforms, we don't vote on the mandates or the workings of departments. That power lies with our Premier and executive Cabinet. However, we do vote on budgets. We do not necessarily have confidence votes in a consensus government, but deciding whether to approve the budget as presented by this Cabinet is about as close as we get to one. Before this fiscal year end, I must vote yes or no to this budget, a cruel simplicity.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is easy to find money when a clear vision is put forward. When cuts are made for a clear vision for funding other priorities, then we can put together and accomplish what we set out for the people of the Northwest Territories. I do not believe this budget looked into the core spending and the base spending of departments hard enough. A year and a half ago, when Caroline Cochrane made her bid to become Premier, she stated, "Our economy is in trouble," and pledged a 10-year plan to turn the NWT's economic fortunes around; "we need to act fast, and we need to act now." I could not agree more, but I have still not seen that 10-year plan. I still have not seen an "emerge stronger" plan. Apparently she and I have a different interpretation of "fast."

Additionally, we were promised during her "bid for Premier" speech that we would rename the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment the "Department of Economic Diversification and Development." We were told the territory's environment ministry would become the "Department of Environment and Climate Change." Mr. Speaker, name changes signal a new mandate and a new direction for those departments. We were told the Department of Lands and the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs would be amalgamated. This budget does none of those things, another broken promise of change.

I am in daily fights with lands, who then point to MACA, who then point to ENR. I actually believe the silos have gotten worse under this Cabinet. I will not be voting for this budget unless the Premier lives up to her promises. I want to see the plan for corporate restructuring that we were promised. I want to see the economic plan that we were promised.

As an added benefit, every time you get rid of a department, we save a few million dollars in duplication, and the GNWT is presently a top-heavy organization, with many managers with not enough staff to actually manage. I believe we must take a look at our management-to-staff ratio for some further cost savings.

Despite my frustration, I believe there is a path for a vision forward. I believe we need to revisit our priorities and mandate and truly come to a consensus. Finding consensus is difficult, but I believe this Assembly has a clear agreement that housing is a priority and has a true willingness to address our housing prices. When I ran to be an MLA, I have to admit housing was not my number one priority, but, in listening to my colleagues and listening to the struggles of the people of the NWT, I believe we need to do more for housing. In fact, we have a Premier who spent her entire life trying to advocate for housing, as she often says. I believe this is the appropriate legacy for this

Assembly, so maybe we can actually invest the amount of money it needs. If we are ambitious, I believe we can cut our housing wait list in half in the life of this Assembly, not simply settle with 25 units a year.

During the course of this pandemic, a spark emerged, the notion that we could truly operate differently as a government. We moved thousands of civil servants home, and changes were made in days rather than months. We passed more regulatory changes in a year than I expected us to do in an entire Assembly. We have seen what a motivated civil service can do under strong leadership, and I was inspired that we might see that change into the future of this Assembly. Yet, Mr. Speaker, we are dialling back that promise. When we pass this budget, some 2,000 low-wage workers will have their wages cut from \$18 an hour to an unjustifiable \$13.46 in cases, with no increases to the minimum wage in sight because apparently those works are no longer essential.

During COVID-19, we begged childcare operators to remain open so our essential workers could continue to work. We subsidized their costs. We saw how childcare was essential to keeping the economy open. Yet, this budget comes nowhere close to addressing the childcare needs in this territory, which are only getting more expensive, let alone implementing a universal daycare. We have added \$500,000 to our childcare infrastructure, but that is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$20 million we need a year to truly support the children of the NWT.

In addition, this government has doubled down on its love of P3 contracting. Despite knowing we can't afford much of the infrastructure, we are pretending we are actually going to build. A program can always be cut, but a 30-year P3 contract binds the next generation of Northerners. It is undemocratic financing at best and determination to bankrupt our budget at worst.

Mr. Speaker, our current infrastructure is crumbling, and our goal seems to be to let it collapse while we build more. Our deferred maintenance budget is out of sync with reality. Not to mention, our municipalities infrastructure is in the same state. I would gladly pour more money into maintaining what we already have as opposed to continuing to pretend that we can afford to build more.

This government needs to come back and ask that our priorities and mandate be assessed in light of the largest global event of many of our lifetimes. The sad reality is that we can't afford the big three infrastructure projects. We probably can't even afford one of them. I honestly wish we could afford them all, but let's pick one and actually get it done. The Mackenzie Valley Highway makes the most

sense to me, considering we build it every year, and then it melts.

During COVID, our Cabinet was given a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. They were given a full pass to reform the GNWT, to change how it operates, how it is funded, and leave a truly nimble public service, but much of that opportunity has gone to waste. We moved our public service to remote work in weeks. Instead of capitalizing on that and creating a proper work-from-home policy, we called them back at the first sign of criticism. I may also add that remote work means lower leasing, office, and travel costs in our budget. As well, it is proven to improve productivity. It's a no-brainer, Mr. Speaker.

Instead of addressing the fact that a person is just as capable of not working from home as they are from an office, we kept the same measurement of productivity in our public service: hours in a chair. We have not seized the opportunity to switch our public service to a results-based workplace instead of one measured purely by time in an office.

Mr. Speaker, the core budget of the GNWT, which we have failed to really delve into and change, is one that has been designed by committee over consecutive Assemblies, where too many competing interests and mandate items have often led to the safest bet: not moving too strongly in any direction.

We are trying to be leaders in climate change while also pushing for offshore development of Arctic reserves. I believe at one point we had more people working in the GNWT regulating oil and gas than were actually producing it in the Northwest Territories. With the exception of Norman Wells, we are more likely to take on liabilities in both Cameron Hills and the Beaufort-Delta from oil and gas than we are to make any money off of it. Not to mention, all major Canadian banks are rapidly divesting oil and gas from their portfolios and have refused to fund other Arctic drilling projects.

We have made no progress on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. We don't even have a terms of reference or a working group yet. My dream is one day I will see a budget where half of the money is missing because we gave it all away, and half of the power is gone because we legislated it to the Indigenous governments to whom it rightly belongs.

We have no significant legislation this sitting. Nothing. We are going to sit here for two months as legislators and not pass legislation because no department over there can think of anything they want to do.

We can't afford many of the things that this Assembly wants without giving others up. If we are

going to make cuts, we need to buy ourselves some political capital first, and I think a good place to get that political capital is to reduce the generous ratio of all of our pension plans. For some reason, I get a pretty good pension if I do this for eight years, a pension it would take many in the public service 25 years to earn. This isn't short-term servings, but, in the long term, an adjustment saves millions.

Additionally, top pay for a deputy minister is \$268,000 plus bonuses. I don't think we can continue to justify the long march to paying all of our DMs at the highest rate. I propose capping it at \$250,000, conducting a public review of all of the bonuses senior management make, and starting all new deputy ministers at the first pay level, of which none are currently at.

Next, I believe we need to drive a harder bargain at the negotiating table. I don't believe our two-tiered system of medical travel benefits are warranted, where GNWT workers get full per diems for medical travel and the rest of the citizens get a lesser service. I believe the GNWT can cut its travel budget in half. The next year, we should be limiting all travel internationally and out of territory. We should be switching to an online model of meetings. COVID has already done this for us. Let's keep it up. Maybe we can actually cut the number of meetings in half in government, as I am confident many of those meetings actually could have been an email.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I believe we need to create a high-income tax bracket. Our current tax bracket stops at \$142,000, meaning someone who makes \$142,000 is paying the same rate as that deputy minister making \$268,000 plus bonuses. There is room for one or even two high-income tax brackets.

I also believe that we can identify numerous jobs that can be replaced or combined. I believe a reasonable target in this area is 100 positions. I will note that that is less than the amount this current budget is adding permanently. In the context of this budget, this would still be a net gain of public service jobs. As a place to start, I am convinced that, by adopting a Service GNWT model, government service officers, Income Assistance officers, housing officers, and many other positions can be moved into one single position to eliminate duplication. We may need to actually simplify the applications and rules to make that work. Perhaps payroll more people, or even a basic income model. I have a dream of, one day, a single form for such services on an online portal, but that's just me being radical.

Our work on e-services is not adequately funded nor ambitious. When we bring more services online, we create a more user-friendly government and reduce the overall labour needs of our GNWT. As

an example, as we bring most of the DMV services online, I hope to see a change in the amount of labour that office needs. Let's get the rest of our services online and adjust staffing needs accordingly.

Not to mention, a cultural change is long overdue to actually empower our frontline workers to make changes without running up and down a bottlenecked bureaucratic ladder. We need to empower our frontline staff to actually make decisions. As we free up time in passing up and down decisions, we free up more labour.

We have a GNWT operating on an HR manual from 1980, an obsession with hierarchy. The days of running a public service where a manager can actually use the word "insubordination" with a straight face are long gone, but instead, we have a series of people fighting over power while pushing paper. We are nowhere near to delivering the change that is required with our outdated bureaucratic model.

Mr. Speaker, I tried to speak of a number of ways I believe we can find efficiencies in this budget. This is not to just find efficiencies for efficiency's sake, because the reality of our fiscal situation is that we will need to find them, but I also believe that, if we work to find cuts, with a clear vision for housing, we can actually make progress on this issue, which I believe is shared by all Members.

I believe we have been pulled in too many directions at once. I propose a new direction, one where housing is first, one where we make the tough decisions in pursuit of housing. Housing is a win for everyone. It saves us money in Health when people are housed. It saves us Justice costs when people are housed. It helps students succeed, and it breaks cycles of poverty. It employs northern contractors, and it can fuel a building industry that creates more tradespeople. It can spur a whole economy based on trades and building.

I am proposing that this Assembly readjust its priorities, its budget, and its mandate to make the tough decisions we need and come back with a new and powerful vision for housing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Replies to budget address. Item 7, acknowledgements. Item 8, oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 552-19(2):
WORKPLACE HARASSMENT WITHIN THE
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The questions will be directed to the Minister responsible for Finance and human resources. The first question I have for the Minister is: how many harassment complaints does this government receive annually? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We receive an average of 27 complaints per year.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: A follow-up is: what is the most common workplace harassment complaint?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: The most common workplace complaint cites either personal harassment or abuse of authority.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: I would like to ask the Minister: on a percentage basis, what is the outcome in favour of the complainant?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: On some occasions, certainly, alternative remedies would be recommended or utilized, which take an approach that is not necessarily ending with a win/loss per se, but, to the extent that there is a tracking of those that do have a formal finding, it is 68 percent that come out in favour of the complainant.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary. Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also ask the Minister: what, if anything, is the Minister's department doing to ensure government employees are provided due process and fairness? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: We certainly do have a policy on harassment-free and respectful workplace. That is a stated policy of the Department of Finance and human resources. Indeed, there is to be an updated policy with new accompanying guidelines expected to come out this fiscal year. With that, of course, there needs to be significant training done to ensure that not only managers but employees and managers are aware of those policies. To date, I can say we have had over 550 employees and over 630 managers participate in the existing harassment-free and respectful workplace training, with much more to come. Some of that slowed down during COVID, although we have shifted to online models of training over the last year.

I say all this, and yet I want to say that there is always more that needs to get done. We also have a strong partnership with the union. Employees can always go to their union. They should be employing

their workplace policy, and I really encourage them to do that. I will say one last thing. Interestingly, when people have their training and become aware of their policies, sometimes complaints actually go up. That is not a bad thing. That means people are aware of their rights, aware of the tools that they have in their workplace to solve these issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister. Oral questions. Member for Monfwi.

QUESTION 553-19(2):
PUBLIC SERVANTS' TRAVEL DURING COVID-19
PANDEMIC

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. The two most senior bureaucrats in the territorial fight against COVID vacationed outside the territory during the holidays last December. They did this as the Premier and also the CPHO were calling on Northerners to do their part and stay home. I would like to ask the Premier about the process of what took part, so the first question I would like to ask the Premier is: who was it who approved the out-of-territory travel for the following people: the associate deputy minister of the COVID secretariat, the deputy minister of Health and Social Services --

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I have to rise on a point of order. We are not to be discussing individuals who are not in the Chamber to defend themselves. It is clear in the rule. I appreciate the Member is trying to get information and that what he is doing he thinks is for the public good, but we can't discuss people not in the Chamber who are not here to defend themselves. It's fairly clear. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. The Minister is making a point of order which is accurate. We cannot discuss members who are not here to defend themselves, so please refrain from your question. Member for Monfwi.

MR. LAFFERTY: Mr. Speaker, that is where I was leading to, where I am asking about the process itself. It is not me who is asking. The public is asking: who made the decision on these staff travels? That is the process I am asking, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As our Government House Leader raised in the point of order, it is inappropriate to speak about people who are not in the House. I will not speak about the people who left because of extenuating circumstances. What I will speak about is to the process. Ministers are directly responsible for approving leave for their deputy ministers.

However, in saying that, deputy ministers have to notify, but they are responsible for their own. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Premier. Just to be clear, you can reference public servants, but not specifically to single them out. Member for Monfwi.

MR. LAFFERTY: The next line of questioning is obviously on the expectation of the general public. How can our Premier, the head of government, expect Northerners to answer the call for personal sacrifice when her most senior COVID officials ignore the same call?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: I will start by saying that no Minister, no elected Minister in this House, left during Christmas because I believe that, as elected officials, all of us, all of us in this House as elected officials, are responsible for being role models to the residents of the Northwest Territories. We cannot change the past, but I do know that the public was hurt. I also know that over 1,500 people from the Northwest Territories left the NWT for leisure travel during that time. I also know that it was not an order; it was a recommendation, so nobody broke the law, even the residents who left. No one broke the law.

It has been a tough, tough year. People have gone, as the Member said, without funerals, without seeing families, all kinds of issues. People are making personal choices. However, I do believe that everyone who left made those personal choices and had tough decisions to make and that they made them in the best interests as they saw fit.

MR. LAFFERTY: I was referring to public servants, not elected officials. Yes, we elected officials, we have not been travelling. I have not been travelling since the announcement came out, so I am speaking directly about public servants. They are responsible for their public funds. They are public servants, so these are areas of concern that were brought to our attention, and we have to keep in mind that there is accountability from this government to the public. The public, there is an outcry, and who is accountable? The Premier is accountable for that. The next line of question will be that I would like to get more information. Will the Premier provide this Assembly with a complete list of ministerial travel, including destination and purposes, both personal and official, since the COVID public health emergency was first declared last spring?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Actually, I do believe that the ministerial travel is posted on the website and is available to all Members already. I think it has been done. My understanding is that no

Minister, as I said, has left the territories since COVID-19. The only Minister who actually left the territories when COVID started was myself, as Premier, at the beginning of COVID, when I was down there and I got hit. Sorry, I have been corrected. There was a Minister, again, who left because of extenuating circumstances, but not during the Christmas period. That record is public. That record can be obtained. If the Member does not know where to access it, let me know, and I will let him know where to access it.

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

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. For the sake of the public trust, which I feel the trust has been broken, our political leaders and senior bureaucrats must set the high standards of conduct, whether it be in this House or outside this House, especially during a public health crisis. What rules is the Premier putting in place to ensure such regrettable double standards are not seen again in the ranks of our government? Masi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Again, we can't change the past, but we need to learn from the past. As stated to Members when we spoke in other times, I made a commitment. I did. I talked to all of our Ministers and said, "Please, don't leave unless it's extenuating circumstances." People do have extenuating circumstances, medical travel, loss of family members, horrible stories have happened over COVID-19, and I wouldn't want to penalize anyone for those things. That's not the goal of protecting our residents, is to penalize people; it's to keep people safe.

I had spoken to our Ministers, and I had spoken to all of our senior official staff. I told our senior staff verbally and in writing, and I believe I shared that with the Members, the standing committee on the other side, as well. I have told them that there are legal issues with that. We can't tell people that they can't leave the territory. That is a human right of people, but I have told them that I will not be supporting any travel, unless its extreme situations, until COVID-19 is done. We try to learn from our lessons. I apologize to the public who have been hurt by this. That was not the intent. I want to also state that, not only Ministers, I'm hoping that all Members will also be role models and not leave the territory until COVID-19 is done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 554-19(2):
FUNDING FOR BUS SERVICES IN REINDEER
POINT

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, my questions are for MACA, and I am asking for help in regards to bussing services in the community of Tuktoyaktuk. This past week, the weather has been minus 63 for a few days, and we are looking to seek pots of funding and to work with the Minister in the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk. I know that the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk has a letter in to the Minister. We would like to work with her going forward to try to provide funds for the community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nunakput. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member is correct. I have been having conversations with the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk in regards to their busing services for Reindeer Point. It is located, I don't know how many kilometres, outside of the community, and I do hear the Member about the weather conditions as well, having the residents access basic needs in the community, as well, getting to the Northern Store, getting supplies, health appointments. I do want to assure the Member that we do have the operation and maintenance funding to the communities, water and sewer capital, and gas tax funding, as well, but we don't have specifically for these type of services. I will be working with the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk to resolve this issue. It does open up the conversation, as well, for the other communities in the Northwest Territories that do have these built-up areas located outside of their local communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JACOBSON: I thank the Minister for that. Would the Minister at least agree to cost share the bussing services for the community? They have been doing this for the past three years, and it is really affecting what they are able to do to provide other services to the community. Is the Minister willing to at least provide some sort of funding relief for the community?

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: This year MACA did provide additional funding for our COVID response for communities throughout the Northwest Territories. It just lay within their hamlet and their council, how they were going to spend this additional funding throughout their community. I will follow up with the Member, as well, and I would like to take another look at their business plan and what my department has created with the hamlet out of that and looking to see what funding we could possibly be looking at. Once again, MACA doesn't have funding that is specifically provided for bussing; 87 percent of our budget is distributed out to the communities, hamlets, charter communities, towns, and villages.

MR. JACOBSON: Would the Minister look at just talking to her federal counterpart in regards to getting that funding and increase the budget for the hamlets across the territory? I know that everyone is struggling and trying to provide services due to influx of COVID monies from the federal government. Are they able to try to redirect that to the communities across the territory?

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Yes, we are in conversations with the federal government in looking at the additional funding for smaller communities. I just wanted to reassure the Member that the funding that Tuktoyaktuk receives annually, all combined together with the pots, is approximately \$4 million annually.

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

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk, the executive, I guess, that I will be meeting with next week to try to come to an agreement to work with the Minister, are coming to Yellowknife next week for meetings. I would like to ask the Minister if she would be willing to meet with the SAO and the mayor of Tuktoyaktuk when they're in town in the next two weeks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Unfortunately, I will be returning back to my riding, and we will be having a grand opening in one of the smaller communities for our seniors centre, but I will follow up with the Member for future dates that we would be able to meet with the Hamlet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 555-19(2):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES SUMMER STUDENT
EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

MS. SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, the GNWT has launched their annual summer student recruitment campaign. Last year, due to COVID, this was cut short. Many students were impacted. I am happy to hear that the Minister advised my colleague from Thebacha yesterday how it is moving ahead. My question for the Minister of Finance is: how is the government's Affirmative Action Policy incorporated into the government's summer student hiring process? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Minister of Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Affirmative Action Policy applies to the summer student and internship programs, just

as it does to all GNWT hires. Hiring managers are expected to be fully aware of all of those policies, certainly, and as I had referenced earlier, there are a variety of training tools, including an online tool kit for new managers as maybe needed so that they can employ that policy in this form of hiring as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: When a request is received to hire a summer student, is the hiring manager provided with information on the government's Affirmative Action Policy and how it applies to summer students?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes. There is a database that gets created, which is why summer students are asked to register and interns are asked to register as part of the process. When a hiring manager wants to participate in that, they have to get access to the database. When they get access to the database, they are reminded that the hiring process does still need to apply the Affirmative Action Policy. That reminder is right there. Again, at this point, they really should be versed in those policies as part of their training as being managers.

MS. SEMMLER: I'm just going to go down to my next question. What mechanisms are in place to assisting hiring managers to ensure they are appropriately applying the Affirmative Action Policy when hiring summer students?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I sense the theme of where this is going, and really, all of the policies in the world are really only as good as the people who are applying them. I am conscious of that. We certainly talk a lot within the Department of Finance around making sure that training is available and accessible; that the drive to give employees time to take their training is there; and that there's a conscious awareness from the top down that, really, we want employees to take the training. We want managers to be abreast of their training. We want them all to have those opportunities to take the right training so that they can do the best to employ the good policies that we do have and raise issues if there needs to be changes.

I do gather the general direction of the questions here, but more specifically on this one, I will also say, if there are students who are looking to be hired who are not a priority 1 or a priority 2, it is expected that the manager will go back to human resources, will check back in with them before simply proceeding, and, indeed, if in the end there is a hiring that is outside of those priority candidates, they are expected to go through the deputy ministers.

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

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Does the Department of Finance conduct audits or reviews of the summer student hiring program to ensure that affirmative action policies have been fairly and appropriately applied, ensuring that our Indigenous students have fair opportunity to gain the valuable employment with the government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: No. Right at this point, there is not a formal audit that takes place of the summer student program. In general, right now, we do certainly get feedback, and the feedback as I've been told is that it's positive. It's a program that is well received by students and well received by departments as this is a great tool for them to recruit and retain northern Indigenous students. Certainly, if there are concerns, I want those concerns brought forward. I would say, at this point, out of the 84 students registered, 21 are Indigenous Aboriginal and 54 are Indigenous non-Aboriginal, and those are the terms, I know frustrating to many, but they harken back to the policy itself. Really right now, almost entirely, the whole cohort is northern students, because I agree with the Member, we want to have this opportunity for northern students. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 556-19(2):
NORTHERN RESIDENT TAX DEDUCTION

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My question is for the Minister of Finance. I raised the usual issues around the northern resident tax deductions earlier today. The deductions are not indexed. Northerners get audited far too often, and we have to guess at the lowest return airfare. Look, I understand that the Minister here is not responsible for this, but she is our liaison with the federal Minister for the Canada Revenue Agency and speaks on behalf of Northerners. Can the Minister tell us whether there were any outcomes or changes as a result of the April 2019 federal consultation on lowest return airfare requirements? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not the federal Finance Minister and I don't control the federal taxation. There is a new Finance Minister over in the federal government, as well, so it may well be that there is more change yet to come. As for any formal changes, I can say that we've been advised that the Canada Revenue Agency expects that some of the challenges that may have led to more audits have been resolved and, indeed, that that hopefully should not continue

to be a problem for residents of the Northwest Territories. Aside from that, I don't have a, "what we heard" report from the federal government. I can certainly follow up and see if they have anything further, but that's really the best I can offer, being the Minister from the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that offer to follow up. I would encourage her to do that. That consultation finished in April 2019 and, as I said, it's been radio silence ever since. A lot of residents did not travel South in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. It is my understanding that recreational trips taken within the NWT are still eligible for vacation travel assistance deductions, as long as people have receipts. Can the Minister tell us whether this is still the case and whether there have been any discussions with Canada Revenue Agency officials about flexibility with this travel within the North as people begin to file their income tax for 2020?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, trips in the Northwest Territories do qualify for the travel deduction. That is specifically a maximum of two trips per year per household member, so please go take your staycation and continue to do so. For those eligible trips, Northwest Territories taxpayers are claiming, well, there's a number of different things, and I don't know if this is the right opportunity to be going through all the tax advice that people might need, but the advice is out there. In short, yes, the staycations people have been taking to support our local economy are, indeed, eligible for claiming.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. The flawed system of northern resident tax deductions has been in place for about 33 years. Can the Minister tell us whether she has ever raised this issue with federal officials and what the response was?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I can't disagree that the indexing or the lack of indexing is certainly a challenge. It doesn't allow us to be matching up to inflation, necessarily, but we certainly do get a benefit in terms of our northern residence deduction, so I want to be a bit cautious before biting the hand that feeds us all. That said, the last year, I've had a lot of engagement with the federal Finance Ministers, both of them, and it's been positive. The focus has been on COVID-19 relief and supports. It is certainly my expectation that, as we have all gotten back a bit more to some of the more regularly scheduled programming between finance departments, while we will continue to have those conversations about COVID-19, we'll be in a better position now to get back to conversations, including this one about indexing.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. The issue is not just about indexing, though, it's about trying to guess what the lowest return airfare is each year. I just don't know why Canada Revenue Agency just can't set what it is and tell people or make it publicly available. It's a bundle of issues there, and I'd rather not be here next year or the year after, maybe even the year after that, bothering the Finance Minister about it, so I would like to encourage her to try to work with her colleagues in Nunavut and Yukon, maybe even get together with them and write a joint letter, but somebody has to start this again, this conversation and putting some pressure on the federal government. Can the Minister tell us what she is prepared to do to resolve these chronic problems with the northern resident tax deductions? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: I am glad the question stays on the same train of thought because I should add that officials actually have continued to engage on this topic. So, to the extent that there has been some improvement with respect to Canada Revenue Agency looking specifically to Northerners as well as trying to simplify at least a little bit the lowest return airfare, that is the benefit of having the officials continuing to engage on the day-to-day work that does impact us. Look, I'm happy to commit to checking in with my colleagues in Nunavut and Yukon to see if this is an issue that is of shared interest to us, and to then consider whether or not a joint letter would be appropriate, but I'll make that initial engagement first. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 557-19(2):
FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions this morning to start off are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Does Health and Social Services plan to expand the FASD clinic to adequately support children and NWT adults with FASD and cognitive disabilities, including hiring caseworkers and occupational therapists? Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. There are a number of supports in place now if a youth is provided with an FAS diagnosis. The youth FAS coordinator will work with that person and his or her family to

ensure collaboration and coordination of the response. That could include things that the family already has in place, that will remain in place. It also may include connecting the person with Inclusion NWT or the Northwest Territories Disabilities Council or the Foster Family Coalition, depending on the circumstances. So there is a robust system of supports that clients are referred to, and so we don't have any plans at this point to hire more health staff to support this program. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: How many people currently living out of territory in residential care are there because they have FASD or cognitive disabilities, and how many would be able to be brought home if we had appropriately resourced FASD support services?

HON. JULIE GREEN: The answer is to question 136, and the answer to question 2 is this area is under review by the supported living review.

MS. CLEVELAND: I am wondering if NWT residents are funded by medical travel to participate in the FASD diagnostic clinics. If yes, how many participated in 2019 and 2020 and, if not, why not?

HON. JULIE GREEN: The FASD clinic provides for the costs of travel to people to attend the clinic in the NWT. They have also taken the youth diagnostic clinic out to the communities of Behchoko and Fort Providence so that people can directly participate there. The youth FASD clinic completed 16 assessments in 2019, and 17 in 2020. The adult clinic provided for six individual assessments since it opened in January of 2020.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We all know that travel can eat up a budget pretty quickly and that, having fewer than 40 people having gone through the assessment, I think we could stand to maybe add some more resources to that. However, will the Minister commit to developing a comprehensive plan for the treatment and support of FASD and complex developmental behavioural conditions in the NWT? Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This program is relatively new. The youth clinic has been in place for nearly two years, the adult clinic for just over one year, so we are still getting a feel for what the needs are. I feel confident that we are providing good service to the people of the NWT. Of course, we could certainly do more and do better, but we have a lot of pressures on the Department of Health and Social Services for

spending, so we are doing the best we can for FAS at this point, and I am sure that an evaluation will be forthcoming, as it is with every new program. However, it's too early to begin evaluations at this point. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 558-19(2):
MAKING A HOLIDAY IN FEBRUARY

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Justice. When are we going to get a family day, Mr. Speaker?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are no plans to make family day a territorial holiday. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: It's about three months without a statutory holiday, depending when Easter lies, and it is a dark time of the year for many people. Are there any plans to add a statutory holiday in between New Years and Easter?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: No.

MR. JOHNSON: Is there anything preventing the Minister of Justice passing a holiday? Legislatively, is there anything preventing us from creating another statutory holiday?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Creating a new statutory holiday would go through the same legislative process as amending other pieces of legislation, so it is within the power of the government and the Assembly working together to make something like that happen. No, there are no barriers.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Has any work been done to consult the people of the Northwest Territories about whether they would like another holiday? I really have a hard time believing that, if we listen to the will of the people, they would not want a Family Day, so my question: has the department done any work reviewing the number of holidays and asked the people whom we serve whether they want a Family Day, Mr. Speaker?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: We have about as many holidays as other jurisdictions. We do not have Family Day. We have Aboriginal Day, which is not a holiday outside of, I believe, the NWT and Yukon. We have the same number of holidays as everyone else, and, no, we have not gone out and asked, "Should we have more holidays?" Thank you.

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

QUESTION 559-19(2):
FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Justice or, sorry, now the Minister of Holidays. I am wondering: how many inmates have participated in the FASD diagnostic clinic from any of our correctional facilities in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Holidays, I give the Member the rest of the day off.

--Laughter

I do not have that number, but that is something we can find and provide to the Member. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: I would rather ask the Minister questions. What FASD support services are available within North Slave Correctional Centre, or any of our other correctional facilities, for inmates who receive a diagnosis or who are diagnosed already with FASD?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Of course, inmates can be referred to the FASD diagnostic clinic, and they do not need a diagnosis to access individualized supports or supports for individuals with complex need. Perhaps I can offer to provide the Member with some comprehensive written information, because there are a number of supports and I just do not have them at my fingertips.

MS. CLEVELAND: I am wondering: what supports are provided to inmates upon release, to reduce recidivism?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Upon release, former inmates work with their case managers and they identify what is available to them in their community and work with them to do everything they can to ensure that they do not come back. It does not always work, obviously, and there are differences across the territory. It often depends on who you are working with and in what community you are, but, again, I can provide this information to the Member.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am wondering if the Minister of Justice would commit to working on an FASD services plan

-- sorry. My brain has just gone today. It's been a long week. I am wondering if the Minister of Justice would be willing to develop a comprehensive plan for the treatment and support of FASD within their correctional centres and if they would also be willing to include in that comprehensive plan a plan for after-care for inmates once they are released into the community. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Perhaps, once I get all this information, I can share with the Member and we can discuss about what the next steps might be and what supports could be offered. Right now, without having that information, it's hard to stand up and say, "Well, this is what we need to do," so I am happy to continue having this conversation with the Member. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 560-19(2):
FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am not quite done, I think, with questioning the Minister of Health and Social Services. I understand that this program is fresh and it is new, but FASD has long been a challenge in the Northwest Territories, and I do not believe that we are quite there yet and that people are getting the support that they need. I would just like to ask the Minister again: will she look at creating a comprehensive plan for the treatment and support of people with FASD and complex behavioural conditions within the Northwest Territories? Because it is something that we really need additional supports for. The supports are not available in communities as they are in Yellowknife, and even the supports within Yellowknife are lacking and not wraparound services like they need to be. Our people need more support, not less and not stagnant support, either. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am certainly willing to have that conversation with the Member about where she thinks the gaps in services are and what kind of supports she thinks are needed and not currently provided, so I invite her to come and talk about that. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: I will have an offline conversation first.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services. I will take that as a comment. Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

QUESTION 561-19(2):
WASTE WATER TESTING

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I have a question for the Minister of Health and Social Services about wastewater testing. First off, I want to commend the Minister and the department for their leadership in doing the wastewater testing. I think it's a really good early warning system that we have in place here for the capital and the regional centres. Unfortunately, though, I have asked several times, and some constituents have raised with me the fact that there is no way of finding out about the results of this wastewater testing. Can the Minister tell me or tell the public about the status of some kind of public reporting of the wastewater testing results? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member said, wastewater surveillances helped us to detect cases in three communities, and so it has proved a very effective system. At this point, the samples are sent to the National Microbiology Lab in Winnipeg, so there is some lag in getting test results back. It's our hope that we will be able to invest in the Taiga lab here in Yellowknife to examine those wastewater samples and provide more timely responses on them. That said, I am not aware that the dashboard has been set up or that it will be set up until that new system is in place. Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY: I want to thank the Minister for that. Look, as I said before, this is a great system, and I really do truly appreciate the work that has gone into setting it up. I'm just wondering, though, in the dashboard, could we have something like the presence or absence of COVID and whether the levels are constant, increasing, or decreasing, and the dates of the tests? Is that the kind of information that could be put on the dashboard when it's available?

HON. JULIE GREEN: I would have to inquire about the level of detail that is being contemplated for the dashboard. I think that we would want to have the dashboard launched with some public education about how to interpret the results so that the results don't create panic in communities that are being reported on. Certainly, I am willing to inquire about what the dashboard is going to look like.

MR. O'REILLY: Nothing further.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

QUESTION 562-19(2):
HOUSING UNITS IN HAY RIVER

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have questions for the Minister of the Housing Corporation. Can the Minister confirm when Hay River can expect more public housing units? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right now, the Housing Corporation is in the process of constructing market housing units. That is an RCMP initiative. Presently we don't have any future public housing units to be allocated for the community of Hay River, but in result, we are working with the homelessness strategy in the community and looking at finding long-term solutions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Hay River is in dire need of housing for single families, for single people, for larger families. People have been on the waiting list for up to three years. We have to look, I guess, outside of the box on this and figure out how to get more housing in there. Is the Minister willing to consider talking to and using the private sector to build housing that could then be leased back or used for public housing?

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: I appreciate the Member's comment. Looking at this approach is different, and I would like to look at unique opportunities throughout the Northwest Territories. If we have an opportunity with private sector, I would like to take a look at that. Also, just looking at the City of Yellowknife, we do hold a number of leases already within the apartments that are established here. I would like to follow up with the Member. I am quite interested in that approach.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Right now we have a high-rise in Hay River with 122 apartments, and I am not sure if there is something that we can do to get that up and running. It would alleviate some of the housing concerns in Hay River and help out the Housing Corporation. Can the Minister confirm where we may be with making any head way working with the owner to get that operational again?

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: The Hay River high-rise is a collaborative approach throughout the government departments. Right now we do have an initiative that we have spoken with the management of the high-rise in looking at a possible co-investment fund application and how we are going to be working with that applicant to make sure that that application is successful.

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

QUESTION 563-19(2):
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION POLICY AND SUMMER
STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have one question for the Premier and, if I get the answer that I am looking for, then I won't have any further questions. Would the Premier have the discussion with all of her Cabinet colleagues to ensure that their departments follow the Affirmative Action Policy this summer and every summer after for the GNWT summer student program? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Mr. Speaker, that is probably the easiest answer. We have been having those conversations at our table on a regular basis, so yes, I will absolutely commit to having that conversation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Premier. No further questions. Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

QUESTION 564-19(2):
EXTENDED AND LONG-TERM CARE IN HAY
RIVER

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of health. I have a number of constituents getting a hold of me, talking about the new extended care facility slated for Hay River. I would just like the Minister to provide an update of where we are at with that so I can report back to my constituents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for his question. I have no new information to offer him about the extended care or long-term care bed project, but I do expect to be able to provide one before this sitting ends at the end of March. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 566-19(2):
APPLICATION PROCESS FOR HOUSING

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have some questions for the Minister of housing. The Housing Corporation has something called the community residency requirement where somebody must live in a certain community for a certain number of months, and sometimes it's up to a year, before they can actually put their name on a

wait list for public housing. I am just wondering what the purpose of that policy is. 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. Looking at the resident requirements for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation and for our public housing units provides consistency through our application process, and it eliminates people coming from the South or people coming from the smaller communities and bombarding one housing wait list. I need to make sure that we deliver our programs fairly and that we are meeting the needs of the people of the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: The problem with this policy is that it inadvertently, I believe, affects women. If a woman is trying to flee family violence, leave her small community, and go somewhere else, she can't put her name on a list somewhere other than her home community. She has to be willing to move to a community and couch surf or be homeless in order to escape family violence. If somebody wants to be able to move from, say, Yellowknife, where they came for extra services, and move home to their home community, they also have to be willing to live homeless or couch surf before they can move home. Is the Minister willing to revamp this policy or, better yet, get rid of it?

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: In regard to the family violence and looking at relocation, the Housing Corporation has worked, I want to say, fairly with individuals throughout the territory. We were able to look at a transfer from one community to another in regard to fleeing a domestic situation. I will take a look at that policy and I will make sure that we do recognize this situation when we're looking at reallocation or transfers.

MS. CLEVELAND: Is the Minister willing to consult with the Standing Committee on Social Development with this one?

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Once I do have the conversation with my department, because I just made this commitment on the Floor, so I will be speaking with my department prior to requesting a meeting.

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

QUESTION 556-19(2):
LACK OF CELL SERVICE IN BEHCHOKO

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] We have Highway No. 3 leading to our community,

and I'd like to ask a question regarding that to the Minister of Finance. We have no cell service between these two communities. The people I represent are asking me questions regarding this, so I'm asking her these questions. [End of translation]

Mr. Speaker, I just have a quick question for the Minister of Finance. Two weeks ago Monday, we had a meeting in Behchoko on the lack of cell service. There was an expression of interest that went out. Can the Minister please explain what it means, "expression of interest?" My constituents like to know exactly what is going to be taking place and the process itself. Masi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The expression of interest is a tool that we're using right now in the Department of Finance essentially to suss out what the options might be. An expression of interest is just that, to go out to the private market to see what options they may have, what ideas they may have available to us so that, indeed, we can look for a solution to this problem. As I've said before in the House, there is not an obvious market solution. There are no profits to be made or gained from opening up cell towers, but technologies are constantly changing, technologies are emerging, and it certainly incumbent on us to make sure that we go out, see what's available, and that's the first step of this expression of interest. The deputy minister of Finance was at the meeting that was called by the Tlicho, as was the deputy minister from Infrastructure, and that was an exceptional first step, to start to bring together the Tlicho Government, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and other stakeholders. I think there were members of the private market and private service there, again, at that meeting. I understand it was a good dialogue had. We are taking our steps to get our information from the private sector, and I am looking forward to hopefully finding a solution that will benefit this stretch of road and maybe other stretches of roads if we are innovative in what we find. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. LAFFERTY: The meeting we had was very productive. I'm glad that the Ministers sent their senior staff to attend. These constituents who travel on a daily basis, there are upwards of 53 for one organization, between Behchoko and Yellowknife. I would just like to know the time frame. The expression of interest went out two weeks ago. Where is it at and, on the process itself, if there can be some timelines pertaining to that?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: To give some context and some background, the request for the

expression of interest was issued on February 1st, and it closes February 22nd. From that point, then, obviously we will be reviewing what's in there. We would expect to review those proposals beginning on February 28th and we would have to conduct some internal reviews and no doubt engage with stakeholders further before anything further might take place. Hopefully, we would be in a position, subject to those reviews, to be soliciting for formal proposals, if we do indeed go that direction, by the summer.

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

QUESTION 567-19(2):
NORTHERN ADDICTIONS TREATMENT
CENTRES

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government spends a lot of money on sending people South for addiction treatment and, when they come back, we have resources to support them, but one thing that I've heard from some of the people is that they're looking for a place to go, whether it be for a day, an hour, a week, when they feel that they may relapse. I would to ask the Minister of health if her department is willing to take a look at maybe identifying a centre or addressing that somehow, so people don't have to leave the Northwest Territories when they feel like they're going to relapse, but where they have a place to go, a safe place to go and get some treatment. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an interesting idea, and I understand the intent there, to sort of have what they are now calling a "circuit breaker" so that, if somebody has had a slip, rather than going back into a full 28-day treatment program, there would be a shorter and more immediate intervention. That is something that I would certainly be interested in talking to the Member about. Thank you.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: I thank the Minister for considering that. What I would expect is that, you know, we don't look at it being in just one community. I don't expect we have to spend a lot of money on it, but we should have something in the south and something in the north, as well, just so that people have easy access. So I would just ask the Minister that she consider that, as well.

HON. JULIE GREEN: We are currently looking at ways to strengthen after-care, as you know. We've just started with our survey of people who have used our services to find out how well it worked, what else could be done. This is something we will

certainly put into the consideration. It is a serious commitment of our mandate, to improve after-care services, and this is a potentially promising way of doing that.

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

Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

BILL 3:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE PUBLIC HIGHWAYS ACT

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee would like to report that consideration of Bill 3, An Act to Amend the Public Highways Act, received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on March 13, 2020, and was referred to the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment for review. On February 10, 2021, standing committee held a public hearing with the Minister of Infrastructure on the bill and completed a clause-by-clause review of the bill. The committee reports that Bill 3, An Act to Amend the Public Highways Act, is ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole as amended and reprinted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nunakput. reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, reports of standing and special committees. Item 15, tabling of documents. Member for Monfwi.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 312-19(2):
LETTER FROM DEHCHO FIRST NATIONS
GRAND CHIEF TO PREMIER DATED JANUARY
8, 2021 REGARDING GNWT OFFICIALS TRAVEL
FOR NON-ESSENTIAL PURPOSES

MR. LAFFERTY: Masi, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a document today dated January 8, 2021, to the Honourable Premier Caroline Cochrane, regarding GNWT officials travel for non-essential purposes, from the Grand Chief of the Deh Cho First Nation. Masi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Tabling of documents.

TABLED DOCUMENT 313-19(2):
OFFICE OF THE LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER
FOR THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ANNUAL
REPORT 2109-2020

Pursuant to section 23 of the Official Languages Act, I wish to table the "Office of the Language Commissioner for the Northwest Territories Annual Report 2019-2020."

Tabling of documents. Item 16, notices of motion. Item 17, motion. Member for Frame Lake.

Motions

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. WHEREAS the Standing Committee on Rules and Procedures, in Committee Report 6-19(2), considered the question of remote sittings of the Legislative Assembly and made recommendations regarding changes to the Rules of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly;

AND WHEREAS, on November 5, 2020, the Committee of the Whole adopted all the recommendations contained in Committee Report 6-19(2);

AND WHEREAS the current Rules of the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly were adopted on December 10, 2019;

AND WHEREAS a copy of an amended Rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, which includes the rules for remote sittings, was tabled on February 10, 2021, and identified as Tabled Document 305-19(2);

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. The motion is in order. To the motion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

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

---Carried

Motions. Item 18, notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Item 19, first reading of bills. Item 20, second reading of bills. Item 21, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: 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; 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. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Committee would like to consider Tabled Document 286-19(2), Main Estimates 2021-2022, with Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I will now call Committee of the Whole back to order. Committee, we have agreed to continue on with Executive and Indigenous Affairs, and we will continue on page 126, Indigenous and intergovernmental affairs operations expenditure. Madam Premier, are your witnesses here?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I have witnesses.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the

Chamber. Welcome. Madam Premier, will you please introduce your witnesses for the record.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. With me today, I have Mr. Martin Goldney, the secretary to Cabinet and the deputy minister of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, and Ms. Amy Kennedy, the director of Shared Corporate Services for Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Welcome back. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. There are three areas I'd like to question on page 126. Maybe I'll start with the lines around implementation, intergovernmental relations, and negotiations. There is no increase in any of those lines. You know, I was in the 18th Assembly. The candidate who eventually became the Premier promised that all of the ongoing negotiations were going to be completed in the four years. Do you know how many agreements we actually reached in four years? One. It was an agreement in principle for self-government in Norman Wells, for the Metis local there. One agreement in four years. Madam Chair, I don't want to be back in that position at the end of this Assembly, and I continually hear from negotiators, people involved in the negotiations with Indigenous governments, that the problem now at the table is GNWT. It's not the federal government anymore. They are a minor player, for the most part. The problem is our government. That's really not a great place to be, to start with.

I know that we have a new Cabinet and they promised new things, but there is nothing to deliver on that promise in this budget, no additional resources. Anyway, my question for the Minister here is: do the negotiators at any of these tables have new mandates that have been developed by this Cabinet to try to move this forward, and why is there no new money in here to try to help move these negotiations along? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. At the beginning of this Assembly, we did have a presentation to the Executive on the negotiations. They do have mandates. They know exactly what. As stated yesterday, Madam Chair, the difficulty is that, when it becomes too financial, monies et cetera, they need to actually come back to the executive for approval. The negotiators are not executive. They do not have that authority to make excessive decisions without a Cabinet approval. That is a common process. In the last government, they said that they would all be done;

probably not the best commitment to make on the floor. We never committed to that.

Why is there no new money? We have spent the last year and a bit that we have been in the government actually working on those relationships. Again, because of COVID-19, it has allowed me to actually meet more regularly with Indigenous governments. We have built relationships. We have had governments come to us that had said they were not going to work with us, and, because of the relationships that we have formed over this new government, they are coming back to the table. So I do have hope that, within this government, I am not naive enough to say that we will have them all done, but you will see progress within this government. If we need extra money because of that, then I will go back to the executive and ask for supplementary funding. However, at this point, Madam Chair, I do not see that we need it. I think that the negotiations are going fairly well, considering the detail and the difficulties with negotiations. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Look, I am happy to work with the Premier and this Cabinet on this, but I am going to narrow my question right down. Have new mandates been provided to any of the negotiators since this Cabinet came in, yes or no? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's difficult to say, and I would like to say yes or no. I hear the Member wants that, but it's difficult to say exactly what the mandates were before. I never was privy to that. What they have is there are three areas of negotiations that they have, and, like I said, in those areas, it's a trilateral negotiation. It's the federal government, the Indigenous governments, and ourselves; land quantum, royalties, and cash. When those issues come, when they are about to sign, they come back to Cabinet, and they ask what we are doing, and then we give direction with that. At this point, Madam Chair, I know I hear people saying they do not have the mandate and stuff, but I am not exactly a hundred percent sure what they are talking about. At this point, like I said, there is nothing that specifies that "thou shalt do this," but I will look further into it. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I am not going to belabour this because my time is getting

burned up here, but, if the Minister does not know whether the negotiators have actually had their mandates changed in any way since the new Cabinet has come in, we have got a real problem here, Houston. If those negotiators have not received new mandates or direction from this Cabinet and we are a third of the way through our term, I am seriously worried. I am going to leave it at that, Madam Chair, for this area, but I want to move on to my next one. That is a little bit of a warning that, if we are a third of the way through and we have not given new mandates, I do not know where we are going.

I want to turn to the line here about Aboriginal and intergovernmental meetings fund. Last year, in the main estimates, it was \$300,000, but we spent \$600,000 during COVID-19. We spent \$600,000, twice what was budgeted. Now, it's going back down to \$300,000, and, as I understand it, Cabinet continues to sign new agreements. We have seen news releases on, I think, one or two of these recently. How can the money go down when we are signing more agreements and more money was spent during COVID but we are budgeting less for the next year? It just does not compute. Can I get an explanation, very briefly? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I may ask my DM to expand on what I am saying. There is a cycle of how the MOUs are done. One year, the Indigenous governments will meet in Yellowknife, and the next year we will meet in their communities, et cetera, so that does make an impact on the budgets regarding where the travel is. Madam Chair, I would like the deputy minister to expand.

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

MR. GOLDNEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. With that particular fund, the GNWT provides that, those funds, directly to Indigenous governments to support their participation in meetings. It was recognized that this year there was an expectation, particularly given the engagement requirements during the pandemic, that Indigenous governments needed extra support, so that was why there was an increase identified for that period. If we do find that there are increases required, we can certainly revisit those needs, but that was the rationale for that increase for that period. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I guess I would like to respectfully say that, if it was increased during a year with COVID, we are probably going to need more money for the year coming up, but I am going to leave it at that.

I want to move on to federal engagement, where the positions, the support money for that office in Ottawa has been cut. I was sceptical of that work to begin with, in the last Assembly, but I guess I pushed this with the Premier, some of my colleagues on the other side several times, about the importance of not just meeting with a party that is in political power, that holds the majority in the House of Commons. We are now in a situation where it's a minority government; there is going to be an election probably within the next year, and I heard from the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment the other day that his job is not to talk to the opposition parties. I am sorry. Cabinet's job is to talk to the opposition parties when they go to Ottawa, not just the party in power, because, guess what, a year, year and a half from now, they may not be in power. If we want to have any influence on federal policy, you have got to work with the opposition parties. They are the ones who raise issues in the House of Commons and so on. I want to hear from the Premier directly: what is our position and approach in working with opposition parties in the federal House of Commons? Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. The protocol within the GNWT is that Ministers deal directly with federal ministers applicable to their portfolios; the Premier deals directly with the Prime Minister or the leaders of parties as appropriate. Yes, the Ministers have not met. We do not know who the ministers of the opposition will be, but we do know who the leaders will be, and so I have made phone calls to all of the leaders of the oppositions, and we are lining them up again. We will continue to have phone calls, making sure that each party that will be putting their name forward understands the needs of the North, and, as many commitments as I can get from that, then that is our goal. So I am meeting regularly and will continue to meet regularly with the opposition members as well as the party in power at this point. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. First off, I would just like to make a comment that I am glad to see this is one area where the travel budget has gone down for once, so perhaps there has been a little bit more of a COVID lens put on that one. As

well, I am really happy to see that there is an increase in funding, or more than was spent in 2019, towards the Metis organizations. I guess my question is around the NWT friendship centres and the fact that we are no longer funding money there. I know that I have been approached by friendship centres, EDs et cetera, asking for that funding to continue. I think the friendship centres in the North do really good things, and I am just curious to understand why we have gone from funding at \$250,000 in 2019-2020 to nothing. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do remember this. It was in the last Assembly, and I was part of that Assembly. The original intent of the \$250,000 was to actually build capacity for the friendship centres so that they could access other sustainable funding. The goal was that they would hire a coordinator, and that person's job would be to actually solidify funding. Sadly, Madam Chair, I am not sure if that happened as much, but what I can say is that the friendship centre has met with Cabinet, has presented to us on their needs. My worry is that that it's more than just throwing money. We need to work with these friendship centres, too. If we gave them \$250,000 to develop a position so that they could actually build the capacity for fundraising, and that didn't work, Madam Chair, then I think we need to reach out to them as well and see what other support we can give them. Perhaps it's proposal writing. Perhaps it's business. It's more than just money. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you for that. I agree that we don't want to just give people money and set them up for failure. However, to go from such a large amount to nothing, and then just from the conversation that I have had with them, it sounds like this is hurting them and their bottom line and their ability to deliver services. While maybe that \$250,000 was a one-time thing to do a certain role, they are crying out for money and funding. They provide good services, so I would like to encourage the Cabinet to think about adding a line here at least to give them some additional funds, particularly in light of COVID.

This will probably be a pretty self-explanatory question, but I'm looking at the special events funding to Indigenous organizations. We have always been at what looks like typical budget of \$50,000 a year and obviously was less in 2019-2020, and I'm guessing that has to do with the cancellation of certain events. Is the department

looking at any way to increase this past the \$50,000 or to help the communities adapt or change their events to a virtual form or to make them more social distant? We have seen adaptations to drive-thru type scenarios, although that does increase greenhouse gases, so I don't know if that's our solution. I am just curious to know if the department is looking at anything like that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are two events that we usually support. One is the Aboriginal Days, and the other one is Treaty Days. The Member is absolutely right, Madam Chair. Things are different, and it might be different this summer, but the budget is there. We need to be flexible. I will reach out to them. If they are looking at other methods, then absolutely, we need to be flexible to be able to work with them. If they are looking at virtual, we will still provide it. The funding does not say, "This is what thou shalt do." The funding is to support the event, and if they are doing the event anyway, then I don't see any reason that we would say no. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would actually even ask maybe a little bit further, if this funding is not accessed for specifically National Indigenous Peoples Day or the Treaty Days, that you do just open it up as a general pot to the communities to put on well-being events or high spirits type of events. I can't get my language right after five days of this. I really do think that the more the government can do to raise the spirits of our people by funding events in communities, that will not only put dollars into those communities, they have an effect of raising people's spirits, and I think that we are going to need to see that more and more over the next few months. I am already hearing people fatigued with winter, and we are only at February 12th, so I think it's only going to get worse. More of a comment than anything. That's all, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, COVID-19 is a time of exceptional situations. I do agree with the Member that we need to be flexible. If the organizations that don't traditionally access this don't need all of the funding, then yes, I think that we should be able to do other wellness events. Indigenous rights and treaties, et cetera, are critically important, but if they are not going to access it all, we should be looking

at other events. Cultural events, I'll call them, so that they fit within my line budget. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to talk about the funding, or lack of funding, I guess, for the NWT friendship centres. They have also reached out to me, and I expect that they have reached out to other MLAs. They were provided the money, \$250,000, for capacity building. In reality, we know the issues that they have to deal with on a daily basis with the limited amount of funds that they have, and they try and stretch those dollars. When I hear that we don't want to set them up for failure, those terms are usually used when we are talking about Aboriginal organizations or people. With COVID, I think the friendship centres have actually proved their worth. The \$250,000 that they received is minimal. One person once told me that if you want money, ask for lots, and people will probably give it to you. If you ask for too little, they won't give it to you, or they will drag it out, because a little amount, they can wrap their head around. A big amount, they can't.

We have to look at the organization for what it is, and that's to provide services to not only Aboriginal people, but people in the community. I don't think it's incumbent upon us to tell them how to use that money. I know they have to put in a proposal, and it's government money, but it's not like they go out there and waste that money. The money that they spend and the funds they get are important to the communities and to the people. I would just ask the Premier to have the department just take a real hard look at this. It's \$250,000. We just knocked \$300,000 off of Aboriginal consultation and relations. I think the funds are there, and they will go to good use. I have no doubt about that. I think the Premier realizes that, as well, and the rest of the Members here. I would ask that the department make a commitment to providing something to them. We need some good news stories out there, especially to organizations that are doing good for the people in the North. I would just like the Premier to comment on that and say, "Yes, we'll give them some money." Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Absolutely. There is no doubt that friendship centres provide a valuable service. All of our NGOs out there are providing exceptional services and usually more cost-effective than the GNWT. No disrespect to our own GNWT. They usually don't have as many unions and cost, et cetera. We do have an exceptional funding pot. I

don't remember what it's called. Perhaps I can look within that. We are still trying to do up a policy, but I believe that there is still some funding in that. Madam Chair, I am not making a solid commitment, but I make a commitment that I will certainly look into it and see if there are areas that I can find to support the friendship centres. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's what I wanted to hear. At least make a commitment to look at the friendship centres, at the work they do, and let's recognize it. They will be happy, I will be happy, and all the MLAs here will be happy. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. If you're so happy, that means that that's your one ask for all of the MLAs? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Any further questions? Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that we have heard a couple of times, and we have even heard in the last government, that the Akaitcho agreement-in-principle was close. Do we have an expected date of when we think that will occur? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I need to clarify that it's kind of at a draft. The Akaitcho needs to go to their membership. There is a process that happens within that, and out of respect, Madam Chair, I can't give a timeline. They need to go back to their membership. They need to talk about what the offer is on the table, and then they need to come back. I want it done. I want it signed. I do believe that self-government is the right answer. I've said it many, many times that, if we support self-governments, it helps us. The more money that they have, the more jobs they can get for their own membership, the fewer people who are struggling, especially in small communities, would be in our housing programs and our income supports. So my goal is to sign it within this Assembly, but my respect is that I will not push any Indigenous government to hurry it based on my timeline. I need to respect the process that they are in right now. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just based on past experience in settling land claims, do we have an estimate of what we think it would take once we get the AIP to actually have a final modern treaty? I recognize there are multiple variables, there, but are we talking months or years? Is there an estimate of how long it takes to get from an AIP to a settled claim for Akaitcho? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, that's impossible to do, to say that. I have given direction to my department. When the Indigenous governments are at the table and ready to negotiate, ready to talk, we're there. Put everything aside and make it your priority. When the Indigenous governments say, "Back off," we back off. So, out of respect, Madam Chair, I can't give a timeline. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. In our mandate, we commit to working with a number of independent facilitators to resolve outstanding issues. Can I just get a sense of how many tables have independent facilitators? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. If you can pass that on to Deputy Minister Martin Goldney.

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

MR. GOLDNEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have had the benefit of some facilitation in the form of a court monitor process for the Denesuline, and that did, I think, lead to some success. We haven't got agreement in other tables to use facilitation yet, which I take as frankly a bit of a vote of confidence that they prefer to continue with the negotiation processes that we have for now. If it turns out the parties see value in having facilitators brought in, we're prepared to do that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. In the previous Assembly, we had I wouldn't necessarily

call them facilitators. There were people who essentially reviewed the land claims. I think most notably, the Thomas Isaac report. Do we have any tables where we have asked for some sort of third-party review of the process to provide suggestions? Is that a strategy that this government is employing again? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, at this point, I've been focusing on building relationships and, so far, Madam Chair, it's working quite well. Like I said, governments that said, "We don't want anything to do with you," are coming back to the table. Trust is critically important, and the belief in the leader is critically important. We don't have any specific work groups or anything that are working on that, except, Madam Chair, we have the Indigenous reconciliation committee that, Madam Chair, you are the chair of, and part of that goal is to, within the term of this government, give us recommendations on how we can move forward, is my understanding of that focus. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. One of the other mandate things is that we will review, update, and publish territorial principles and interests to reflect the GNWT's new priorities and mandate, and then, in spring 2021, we are expecting principles and interests to be updated and published. Can I just get clarification on what principles and interests are? Is there an existing document that sets out our principles and interests? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to turn that to the deputy minister, Martin Goldney.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Deputy Minister Goldney.

MR. GOLDNEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. We very much look forward to sharing those. There is no publicly available collection of interests. What guides negotiations are the mandates that are subject to Cabinet confidence. The goal with that broader GNWT mandate commitment was to try and do a better job of explaining publicly just some of the issues and interests that come into play when we're trying to resolve these negotiations. The expectation is that it will actually be helpful for all parties and residents to see what the interests are

when negotiations are under way. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I think that's helpful work, to kind of have an overarching vision and, hopefully, it can trickle down into the mandates. Can I just get clarification of whether we are on track to publish principles and interests in this spring 2021, and whether they will actually be made public? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, absolutely, Madam Chair. We are on track, and we will be able to publish that on the timeline. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Another one of the issues that I hear from Indigenous governments and negotiating tables is the NWT development of core principles and objectives. I think often, at the self-government table, Indigenous governments want to simply draw down power and not have service standards by GNWT for how they would then exercise that jurisdiction. I don't believe this government has updated the core principles and objectives since the last one. Is there any intention to do that or to let governments draw down powers and then, maybe after we have an agreement, work on what we believe the core principles and objectives they should adhere to are? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm trying to think back to when I first started. It was one of the first documents I actually looked at, and I had concerns with it, as well, Madam Chair. I brought it to my staff and I asked them what this was about. I recognize in those conversations that it's about basic standards of care. There are things about children having rights to, I can't remember, basic rights that children should have. I felt at that point that they were pretty basic and standard across, but I also respect that Indigenous governments might have taken offense to it and said, "How dare you even assume that?" Madam Chair, I've heard that there have been issues with that, but I haven't heard it personally from the Indigenous governments. I've heard it from staff. What we are doing is a multilateral table outside of the intergovernmental council tables. There are two different tables, one with all of the

Indigenous governments and one that has the land claims and self-governments. I think, in fairness, Madam Chair, what I will commit to, and I will put it forward as an agenda topic, is that perhaps it's time we need to have those discussions. I can't say when. Again, at that table, I'm one of many partners, but I will put it forward as an agenda item. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't think there are necessarily too many highly objectionable things in the core principles and objectives. They're pretty high-level, but I do think there are program models that necessarily wouldn't fit into them. I guess the problem I see is that this is a discussion to me that should come after you have self-government and after the Indigenous government has funding and is setting up the programs. We should be working with them and providing assistance. I don't think it's appropriate. I think the order is out of place, where it is conditional that these be imputed to in order to draw down power. I guess my question is: outside of bringing it to the Cabinet table and having a discussion about changing these, are we willing to presently give Indigenous governments self-government powers without having them agree to the core principles and objectives first? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, I'd like to be able to say yes or no, but I think, in that situation, it does deserve a discussion with the Indigenous governments before I make that. There are reasons on both sides why I think that these were put in place. I think Canada has a place in that, as well. I do commit, Madam Chair, that I will revisit that, not on my own, but with the Indigenous governments around the table, and that shall be a discussion we'll have in the term of this government. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Deh Cho.

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Madam Chair. I just wanted to support comments made by a couple of the Members regarding NWT friendship centres. I know, in my community, they provide a lot of services to lots of folks who aren't working at this time. There would be sewing centres, awareness of COVID, of different issues, family violence and whatnot. I see a real need for that, because it can create employment in a small community, too, whereas now they don't have a whole lot of funding to be able to do that. Anything that they can get for

the friendship centres can really help in that regard. I just wanted to make that comment there.

The other one is the special events for National Indigenous Peoples Day. That's what it's being called now, I guess. \$50,000, I don't know how much that stretches out to all of the communities, because not too many bands are in good financial situations. It's very low. They aren't able to host large celebrations where they can offer more, because, in this day and age now, even to host a drum dance, all of the drummers want to be paid well. What I notice is we don't get the good drummers because we aren't paying them well. It's funny how that works. Not only that, for all of the other events that we like to host, the prize monies are just not enough. I am just wondering if we could increase that funding a little bit there just to help out the small communities. That's more of a comment.

The other one I noticed is that, I don't know where devolution funding comes in under this heading or whether you've dealt with it already, but I know that the two governments, the Akaitcho and Deh Cho, don't receive any type of funding in that regard. I'm just wondering if there would be consideration for something like good faith funding since you're on First Nations land and you recognize the First Nations as the true owners of the lands. Now you're pulling leases, taxes, from the people. Maybe something like this would go a long ways in soothing the fractured relations within the parties. I'm just wondering if something like that could be considered, since there is no other funding coming to those governments who are left out of the devolution agreement. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Respectfully, I beg to differ with the honourable Member in that every young drummer is an excellent drummer. In my opinion, every person who picks up any kind of traditional instrument, or begins to sew, or begins to fish or hunt, is excellent in my opinion. I don't want to quash people. They need to be brought up because they learn as they grow; all of us, even as we're old.

With the money for the special events funding, like I said already, if this money is not needed by the organizations that currently have it, we would be willing to look at using it for other issues. I have already made that commitment.

The devolution money is the intergovernmental council. Madam Chair, I made a commitment, and I'm not sure what session it was when I was asked that by Members, that I would bring it back to the intergovernmental council table, and I fulfilled that commitment. Madam Chair, I have said many times

at that table that I am not the boss. I am one member of all of us as equal governments around that table. When I did bring it back again, I never gave them yes or no, because for me, it's about sharing the money.

I heard strongly around that table that the governments that were there have signed onto devolution, have made sacrifices, and are part of that table. Any Indigenous government that is not at that table is more than welcome to join that table, to sign onto devolution, but until that happens, the Indigenous governments around that table told me strongly that they did not want this to go further. Madam Chair, I carried the message that I committed to, and I carry it back and relay the message that was given to me by all of the Indigenous governments around that table. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Madam Premier. Member for Deh Cho.

MR. BONNETROUGE: No further comments. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any further questions? I don't think we have any more. No further questions. Please turn to page 126. Executive and Indigenous Affairs, Indigenous and intergovernmental affairs, operations expenditure summary, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$7,491,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Members. Please return now to the departmental summary found on page 109. Executive and Indigenous Affairs, operations expenditures, total department, 2021-2022 Main Estimates, \$22,428,000. Does committee agree? Mr. O'Reilly.

COMMITTEE MOTION 77-19(2):
TABLED DOCUMENT 286-19(2): MAIN
ESTIMATES 2021-2022 – EXECUTIVE AND
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS - DEFERRAL OF
DEPARTMENT (PAGE 109),
CARRIED

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I move that committee defer further consideration of the Executive and Indigenous Affairs main estimates. Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? Abstentions?

---Carried

The motion is carried. Consideration of the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs 2021-2022 Main Estimates total department is deferred. Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing before us. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the Chamber. What is the wish of committee? Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I move that the chair rise and report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. 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?

---Carried

The motion is carried. I will now rise and report progress.

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

Report of Committee of the Whole

MS. SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering 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 and would like to report progress with one motion adopted, and, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Do we have a seconder? Member for Range Lake. All those in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Item 23, third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the day for Tuesday, February 23, 2021, 1:30 p.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
5. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
6. Reports of Special and Standing Committees
7. Returns to Oral Questions
8. Acknowledgements
9. Oral Questions
10. Written Questions
11. Returns to Written Questions
12. Replies to Commissioner's Address
13. Petitions
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notices of Motion
16. Motions
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. First Reading of Bills
19. Second Reading of Bills
20. 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

21. Report of Committee of the Whole

22. Third Reading of Bills

23. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Colleagues, before we break, I would just like to wish you a good week that we have off from session. I hope you spend time with your families, much needed. This House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 23, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 1:16 p.m.

