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The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRAYER	3095
MINISTERS' STATEMENTS	3095
183-19(2) – GNWT COVID-19 Response and COVID Secretariat Activities (Cochrane).....	3095
184-19(2) – COVID-19 Health and Social Services Update (Green).....	3096
MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	3097
Fibre Optic Line (Cleveland)	3097
Fort Smith Airport (Martselos)	3098
Student Busing in Hay River (Rocky Simpson)	3098
Fuel Prices in Nunakput Region (Jacobson)	3099
Fibre Optic Line Redundancy (Johnson).....	3099
Staffing Shortage at Stanton Territorial Hospital (Nokleby).....	3110
Chief Jimmy Bruneau School (Weyallon-Armstrong).....	3110
Critical Minerals (O'Reilly).....	3101
Nursing Shortage (Semmler).....	3101
Eulogy for Raymond Deneyoua (Thompson)	3102
ORAL QUESTIONS	3102
TABLING OF DOCUMENTS	3113
MOTIONS	3114
Move Committee Reports 17-19(2), 18-19(2) and 19-19(2) into Committee of the Whole	3114
SECOND READING OF BILLS	3114
Bill 40, An Act to Amend the Medical Professional Act	3114
CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS	3115
REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE	3129
ORDERS OF THE DAY	3129

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Friday, November 26, 2021****Members Present**

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

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.): Ministers' statements. Honourable Premier.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 183-19(2):
GNWT COVID-19 RESPONSE AND COVID
SECRETARIAT ACTIVITIES**

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Mr. Speaker, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, the health and well-being of the Northwest Territories and residents has been our number one priority. Today, we are slowly emerging from the worst outbreak of COVID-19 our territory experienced. At one point, the NWT had the highest number of active COVID-19 infections per capita in Canada. However, through collaboration and partnership between GNWT departments and authorities, community governments, and Indigenous government partners, we have been able to support residents and communities in need.

ProtectNWT is responsible for many of the measures put in place to minimize the risks to residents, including managing 8-1-1 phone lines, self-isolation plans, and the various exemptions for employers and employees. At the start of the outbreak in August there was a backlog in self-isolation plan review and delays in getting through on the phone. Mr. Speaker, the team at ProtectNWT worked diligently to improve response times and the recent launch of a new self-isolation plan process and technology update will ensure we continue to make life easier for residents by processing and responding to submissions in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, since mid-August the secretariat has hosted those who are medically advised to self-isolate in our isolation centres in regional hub communities. There were challenges, including finding suitable isolation arrangements for people from the underhoused community. In these instances, we worked with the Northwest Territories

Health and Social Services Authorities to offer additional wraparound supports.

During other outbreaks in small communities, the efforts of communities to provide isolation supports for those requiring these arrangements is to be commended. Isolation spaces have provided a valuable service for residents that would otherwise have no other place to safely isolate. Providing this space has lowered our collective risk of ongoing community transmission of COVID-19 infections in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat continues to operate our border checkpoints providing necessary information to residents returning to the Northwest Territories, helping to ensure that residents understand and are following the self-isolation guidance.

Our compliance and enforcement officers have provided support to residents, community governments, and leadership in the response to community outbreaks. The team does more than just enforce compliance with public health orders; they have also been on the front lines educating the public on their obligations under the public health orders.

The educational approach, whether it was passing out flyers or one-on-one conversations, has helped to increase knowledge and compliance with the requirements to keep us safe.

Similar to other remote communities that experienced an outbreak, in Tuktoyaktuk, compliance and enforcement officers are on the ground supporting the public health orders. Teams are in the community to ensure public health orders are understood by community members to increase the level of safety and reduce the risk of continued spread of COVID-19. The focus on education has helped keep residents safe throughout the pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, as we look to the future, we can see a time where the pandemic winds down and risks of COVID-19 will become further minimized due to a high national vaccination rate as well as a successful immunization program here at home in the Northwest Territories. It is at that time that we will begin to shift our focus from a pandemic to an

endemic response. This response to COVID-19 will likely require a significantly scaled down version of the Secretariat to manage and respond to the virus efficiently and effectively. Functions that may continue to operate include:

- an 811 call centre to respond to COVID-related questions from the public;
- compliance and enforcement to provide support during local community outbreaks;
- continued coordination of communications in support of outbreak response and public safety;
- logistics to rapidly respond to outbreaks and provide isolation facilities; and,
- policy support to assist in the development of public health orders and other policy measures.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to providing these services, as long as is needed, to ensure our residents remain safe and we can minimize the risk of future COVID-19 infections and outbreaks.

Mr. Speaker, Northerners should be proud, proud of our collective response to the pandemic. It has not been easy. Our territory has come a long way since the first infection of COVID-19 was announced inside our borders on March 20th, 2020. It's important we all continue to do our part and continue to follow the public health orders so we can stay as healthy as possible navigating this public health emergency to its end. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Premier. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Health and Social Services.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 184-19(2):
GNWT COVID-19 HEALTH AND SOCIAL
SERVICES UPDATE

HON. JULIE GREEN: Mr. Speaker, it has been nearly two years since the first COVID-19 cases emerged in China and rapidly spread throughout the world. Throughout the course of this pandemic, we have faced many challenges yet we have been able to adapt quickly and respond when and where needed as we continue to learn about this disease.

Vaccination has been an essential part of our COVID response. In June, we released Emerging Wisely 2021, a road map with specific vaccination targets that allow for the safe and measured easing of restrictions. This plan is based on data and in the early part of summer 2021, the data allowed us to reduce or eliminate self-isolation requirements for NWT residents based on their vaccination status.

We continue to work in collaboration with Indigenous and community governments to implement vaccination campaigns at the territorial, regional, and community levels. Through this collaboration, and by providing additional community vaccine clinics, 81 percent of the NWT population 12 years and older is now fully vaccinated. We have also had good uptake on third doses or booster shots for eligible residents over 18.

This summer, Canada, and many other countries around the world, experienced a rapid rise in the Delta Variant, a more infectious variant of COVID-19. Due to increased travel in August, as well as larger gatherings taking place across the territory, the NWT began to see surges of COVID infections in some communities.

And I just want to mention, Mr. Speaker, that there is now another new variant, a South African based variant, that is on the move and we expect announcements regarding the response to this variant from the federal government today.

The Sahtu region was the first to experience large scale outbreaks with community transmission. Surges followed in Behchoko, Whati, Yellowknife, N'dilo, Dettah, Hay River and K'at'l'odeeche First Nation. To contain these outbreaks, the Chief Public Health Officer placed temporary restrictions on gatherings. By following the temporary measures and public health recommendations, case counts in these communities came down, and public health measures were lifted.

We know the measures were challenging, and I want to commend residents and local leadership for their commitment to following the orders and advice.

I also want to commend the healthcare system which was quick to mobilize increasing testing clinic hours and redeploying staff to affected communities to support contact tracing and care for those infected. Due to staff shortages, we asked for and received additional staffing support from the federal government and the Canadian Red Cross.

These outbreaks, including most recently in Tuktoyaktuk and Inuvik, combined with the fact that the seven-day average of daily new cases in Canada remains over 1000, means that Emerging Wisely 2021 is still on pause. The Chief Public Health Officer is watching case counts here and across the country to assess the risk of importing COVID to the NWT via travel.

Mr. Speaker, to improve early detection of COVID-19 and to help reduce the spread, we have implemented two new programs.

The COVID-19 at-home student screening program, which launched last month, detects early infection among asymptomatic children, that is children

without symptoms, to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools. The program is being offered in 13 schools across the territory, including schools in Yellowknife, Behchoko, Hay River, Inuvik, N'dilo, Dettah, and Tuktoyaktuk. These schools were selected because they are among the largest or most vulnerable to outbreak centres and high housing density.

Over 1000 tests have been completed by student volunteers as of November 16th. We are grateful to the families who have volunteered to take part in this program. It helped in the early identification and containment of COVID-19 cases among students at the East Three Elementary School in Inuvik. And it is our hope that additional schools may be added in the future.

The second program DetectNWT, also implemented last month, provides an option for businesses and organizations to apply for rapid antigen tests, allowing them to run their own COVID-19 screening programs. Priority is being given to those who work in high-risk settings and workplaces, essential services, sectors that support economic and social activities, and to those who work with vulnerable populations. Over 40 businesses and organizations are taking part in this program to date. And this program is available to any business in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, as we have seen over the past few months, the COVID situation can change dramatically at any time. This is why an NWT-wide Mandatory Face Mask Requirement and Gathering Order continues to be in effect this winter. Under the gathering order, for non-essential businesses and organizations, gatherings are limited to 25 people indoors and 50 people outdoors. Businesses and organizations may increase these limits by applying to vary from the public health requirements. This measure requires applicants to implement a proof of vaccination program in order to increase their gathering capacity. Residents attending the gathering or entering the business or organization's space have to be fully vaccinated. To date, over 340 requests to implement the proof of vaccination program have been approved. And once again, this is a territory-wide initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the surge in cases in communities across the territory, along with the public health orders issued to address these outbreaks, have not been easy for anyone. This is especially true for health care professionals across the NWT who have been working tirelessly as part of our COVID-19 response. Other parts of the healthcare system have felt the strain from COVID as well. As staff have been redeployed and shuffled around to assist where they are needed, everyone has had to adjust and adapt. I thank our nurses, doctors, technicians, administrators, and all the healthcare workers in the

NWT for their dedication and commitment to keeping us all healthy and safe.

To do our part, we as residents must continue to follow public health measures and get vaccinated. I encourage anyone over 18, who was vaccinated six months ago or longer, to get a COVID-19 booster shot. Booster shots give our immune system a boost and provide greater protection against COVID-19.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the federal government has recently approved the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for children over the age of five, and we are beginning our vaccination campaign for this age group today. We know that schools are high risk environments for the spread of COVID. Vaccinating school-aged children is vital to protecting them from the virus and to protecting others in their household, family, and community.

This important step in our COVID response will help to keep children safe and will help to ensure schools remain open for in-person learning in the Northwest Territories. It will also protect the capacity of our health system and ensure it remains available for everyone who needs it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FIBRE OPTIC LINE

MS. CLEVELAND: Mr. Speaker, this Assembly speaks frequently of the need for fundamental change to how our government does business, most notably in how we care for one another. This work is progressing through government renewal, pushes for holistic reviews of income security, and medical travel, and a call for a shift to client-focused trauma-informed wraparound integrated service delivery. This kind of change doesn't get your name on your bridge or a building but is necessary for a prosperous NWT that closes gaps, is equitable, and readies us for growth.

To effectively care for Northerners, we need a balanced system that sustainably supports both social programs and services and innovative business development.

During our 2019 election, over 400 businesses identified five key pillars to strengthen northern business, grow our population and contribute to long term NWT prosperity and coined it "vote growth". Fibre redundancy was one of those five pillars.

Mr. Speaker, we live in a digital age where business and care supports rely on internet access. COVID

has further expanded our broadband reliance in education, health care, and access to public health, and therefore, safety information.

Yellowknife serves over half the territory with only one fibre line and no redundancy. A one day outage in Yellowknife is said to result in an estimated GDP loss of \$4.75 million and much more in missed health appointments and educational opportunities.

2019's vote growth asked the GNWT to fund and build redundant fibre lines by December 31, 2021. While completing this project in the next 35 days is not possible, yesterday Deton Cho announced its intention to pursue public funding for an Indigenous-owned submarine fibre line under Great Slave Lake. The company signed a memorandum of understanding with Northwestel to collaborate on the fibre project and bring greater telecommunications resiliency to nine communities in the Great Slave Lake region.

The new fibre loop would provide added protection to services in nine NWT communities: Fort Smith, Fort Resolution, Hay River, Fort Providence, Behchoko, Whati, Dettah, N'dilo and Yellowknife. But while both entities committed to significant financial resources, they require public sector funding to make this work, Mr. Speaker.

This is a great news story for the whole territory, and I look forward to speaking with the Minister of Finance about achieving this milestone through an Indigenous-led partnership that results in Indigenous-owned infrastructure. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FORT SMITH AIRPORT

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to speak today about a familiar issue, which is the Fort Smith airport runway width. The last time I spoke about this I brought forward a petition that was signed by 550 people and the entire elected leadership of Fort Smith, all of whom support my position in advocating for the reinstatement of the airport's runway's former width.

Mr. Speaker, one thing that's very frustrating about this whole issue is hearing our government rationalize for making this move. I had a discussion with the parties at all levels about this issue, and something just does not add up with what I'm hearing from Northwestern Air Lease, the Department of Infrastructure, and even from our Member of Parliament.

Our government has said time and time again that it did not receive direction from the federal government

to change the width of the Fort Smith airport runway. That argument, however, is somewhat misleading because our government has repeatedly pointed to the Transport Canada TP312 Aerodrome Standards and Recommended Practices as the reason for the runway changes. These standards are part of Canada's aviation regulations which helps identify runway requirements for airports across Canada.

Mr. Speaker, Transport Canada is a department of the federal government and when they change or alter any aviation standards or regulations, it's federal law that all airports must comply with those new standards. I don't know what I'm missing, Mr. Speaker. Does that not constitute a federal directive of our government to act upon?

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, I understand that the Fort Smith airport runway surface still remains at 60 meters in width. All that changed is the placement of new lights along the runway which has created and artificially narrower airport than before. Maintenance costs remain the same.

Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Speaker, proper consultation was not done with the community of Fort Smith on this airport runway width change. The people of my community remain upset for how these changes were done. We feel that the government was not upfront with the intended changes that were to occur to the airport runway. I still believe that our government ought to reinstate the airport runway width to its former specifications. Logical, reasonable, and common sense decisions, are they possible with this department and this government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON STUDENT BUSING IN HAY RIVER

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to raise the issue of student busing. As you may be aware, student busing was suspended in Hay River for the first month of this year, school year.

Mr. Speaker, it was unfortunate how the cancellation of busing materialized. What it did was create a possibility that some students would have no means of transportation to get to school. This forced the Minister of Education to conduct an investigation as to whether or not the decision by the Hay River DEA to suspend busing was a sound one.

Mr. Speaker, the decision by the Hay River District Education Council was cited by the investigator as political. This -- the decision failed to consider the student transportation regulations and lacked community consultation.

Mr. Speaker, the Hay River DEA referenced a lack of funding for their decision, and there is no doubt in my mind that due to the drop in student enrolment over the years that the Hay River DEA is underfunded when it comes to student busing. However, we have legislation in place that provides the DEA and the DEC with authority to offer or not offer student busing, and we also have a set of criteria that must be considered when reaching such a decision.

Mr. Speaker, regardless of the funding issue, the student transportation regulations sets out specific criteria when assessing whether or not busing should be provided. These regulations appear to have been ignored otherwise the decision by the DEA would have been to -- would not have been to cancel busing.

It was fortunate that the DEA and the DEC were able to find 400,000 which allowed busing to restart.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of busing not only impacts the community of Hay River but from what I hear, also communities such as Inuvik are grappling with the issue as well. It may be time to rethink how busing is managed. It may be that the department needs to remove it from the DEA's and the DEC's authority and operate as part of the department's overall infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, busing is an integral part to student learning. Without it, many students may not make it to school - something we want to avoid. I do not want the DEA to have to go through this every year as it puts stress on students, parents, the busing contractor, and DEA members. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FUEL PRICES IN NUNAKPUT REGION

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to talk about cost of living in my riding and the cost of fuel that's going up. Everywhere across the NWT we know this means the cost of living is going to be going up when the fuel is essential. Fuel transportation is to heat our homes, to hunt.

Mr. Speaker, we need fuel. And Mr. Speaker, we need the fuel prices. When it gets bad in the southern

markets we know it's just a matter of time before it comes north.

Three out of four of my communities in my riding have fuel set by our Government of the Northwest Territories. As September 27th, 2021, gasoline prices set by the GNWT for Paulatuk, Ulukhaktok, and Sachs Harbour were \$1.94, \$1.95, \$1.93 respectively. Mr. Speaker, these prices are nearly fifty cents more than at the gas pumps here in Yellowknife. Even compared to last year, gasoline in Sachs Harbour was 17 cents cheaper. These prices are limiting the ability to my constituents to go out on the land, to hunt, to fish, to feed their family, to travel, and to keep their homes warm. Every cent in increase of the price of fuel, Mr. Speaker, has a serious, negative effects to the people of Nunakput.

Mr. Speaker, already we face the high cost of living in our communities. We have the highest cost in the Northwest Territories. We need our government to respond to the rising cost of living to the residents of Nunakput, Mr. Speaker. They need to address the cost of fuel, is a good place to start. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the appropriate Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FIBRE OPTIC LINE REDUNDANCY

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to echo some of the comments made by my colleague from Kam Lake of the importance of fibre redundancy. Even before COVID, we all know the world was quickly moving online but I think, as we have seen with any emergency, access to the internet is essential for communication and the continued efforts of essential services.

Mr. Speaker, right now if there's a forest fire or some idiot shoots the fibre line, we run out of internet. The creation of a fibre redundancy loop allows us, and the communities around the lake, to have a secondary point of access. As already noted, a single day of losing access to internet results in a \$4.7 million loss of GDP.

Mr. Speaker, many of us who have stood up in this Chamber have asked for better internet services. We know that our government owns the Mackenzie Valley fibre link, just yesterday we passed money to extend it to Tuktoyaktuk. There's lots of great work to be done by our government but more importantly now, we have Det'on Cho and Northwestel working together with a MOU to build their own Indigenous-owned fibre line.

Mr. Speaker, we have some expertise. We've created P3s. We know how to get some money out of the federal government in this area. Really all I'm asking is for a nice political win here, and I'll have questions for the Minister of Finance whether we can get all the parties together and work together to create that fibre redundancy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
STAFFING SHORTAGE AT STANTON
TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

MS. NOKLEBY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tired. It's been a very long and exhausting week with serious debates in the House that have taken a lot out of me and my colleagues. Last night, after an extended sitting in the Ledge, I was looking forward to heading home, snuggling in with my cats, and putting on some escapist TV to help myself unwind. However this is not how my evenings seem to go these days. Rather, my evenings are spent speaking with constituents and residents over the impending staffing crisis at Stanton Territorial Hospital.

This week in the House, I have tried to ask questions of the Health Minister as to how we've found ourselves in this situation, referencing questions I sent her in the spring asking what the department was doing to address the increasing burnout of nursing staff I was hearing about. Fast forward seven months, and those concerns and the warning I raised have now come to fruition.

The Minister indicated this was something that could not have been prevented, citing high wages and requests for vacation as the reason our OBS ward was being shut down, disrupting numerous families across the territory.

I ask, how could this be a surprise, or not preventable, given healthcare staffing was something we discussed over two years ago and felt was an important enough issue to include it in our priorities as an Assembly.

Healthcare workers have told me of survey fatigue and a lack of faith that any further surveys will have any effect on their working conditions. Conditions that include an increased workload due to COVID, that they no longer have the opportunity to take any breaks while on shift, or even have time to take a sip of water. An issue I may add is further compounded by the ridiculous requirement that the containers used meet a certain specification. I have to ask myself, with my knowledge of cronyism in the North, is someone's relative out there who sells these bottles and they are getting a cut? Or Otherwise I

can't see any rationale for treating our professional staff like children.

Issues at Stanton have been long in the making, transferring right along with the staff into the new building - preferential treatment of locums, a toxic workplace and management, and inadequate staffing long predate COVID which is a favourite excuse for this Cabinet when they fail to perform.

Now is the time for this government to take action and do what is right by our healthcare staff and for the people of this territory, and stop making excuses for their inaction. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of HR as I am hoping that I will actually get some answers today.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
CHIEF JIMMY BRUNEAU SCHOOL

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I am grateful to be working with the Government of the Northwest Territories on the school build in Behchoko. This project is important to the community. Chief Jimmy Bruneau is almost 50 years old and was officially opened in 1972. Many of our Elders, the past and the present, have said Chief Jimmy Bruneau asked for a school to be built in his community so children do not have to travel in the barge across Great Slave Lake to attend residential school. The school was built by the Government of Canada in Edzo. In Edzo, it is about 50 kilometers away from Behchoko. Every day, students have to be bussed during the school year. If the students miss the bus, they miss a whole day of school. Their learning is interrupted.

Mr. Speaker, Chief Jimmy Bruneau school was built in Edzo without consultation. It was built based on what they thought was good for the people.

Mr. Speaker, it is good to hear that there is a commitment between the Government of the Northwest Territories and Tlicho government to work together on this important project. It is good to know regular working group meeting will be happening. And it is important that the leadership are informed. If the new school is built in Behchoko, it will be closer to the families and this will help with attendance. The learning outcome will improve. This will also allow the Elders to share their language and culture in the school. It will support the culture and language ensuring the Tlicho children, or any students that are attending school there, are strong like two people.

Mr. Speaker, this school is a great opportunity. It will help develop skills that are greatly needed in Tlicho regions. It will help with trades and local business opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, apprenticeships are good but you need a job. Introduction to trades like program offered at Aurora College, such as carpentry, electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and many more are all important and greatly needed. I will have a question for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment on this later. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CRITICAL MINERALS

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Critical minerals are essential components of many new technologies, from low-greenhouse gas energy sources to electric vehicles to advances in sectors such as medicines, electronics, aerospace and defence. Canada and the NWT possess reserves of critical minerals.

I participated in a critical minerals workshop held by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment on November 9, 2021. This was a virtual workshop with about 60 participants, most of whom were GNWT employees or mining industry representatives. No civil society organizations appear to have been invited. The stated purpose of the workshop was to advance critical minerals.

Canada released a list of critical minerals on March 29, 2021 and the NWT has deposits of about half of those minerals. Several projects are in advanced stages of development, including Nechalacho, Prairie Creek, and the NICO deposit. The NWT has a good reputation from the ESG perspective. ESG means environment, social and governance factors that help identify material risks and growth opportunities for investors.

There was a lot of discussion around communications and public perceptions, marketing and potential partnerships. Objectives can conflict, though, as well. For example, economic development versus reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Nechalacho may serve as a good example but we also need to admit the mistakes of the past. A number of other themes were raised including:

- Whether we can mine our way out of the climate crisis;
- The need for a more inclusive process with other stakeholders and interests at the table;
- The duty to consult and free, prior and informed consent as required in the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- Issues of equity around women's participation in mining;

- Working with neighboring regions; and,
- How the NWT can better compete and attract investment.

Although it was requested, it is not clear whether there will be a workshop report. Further public engagement needs to be clarified. I'll have questions for the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Investment later today. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON NURSING SHORTAGE

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I look back into my past Members' statements and one of the things when I was campaigning and one of the things that I stand for is to assist in the hiring and practices of and increasing our healthcare providers. It actually became one of our 19 priorities in this House.

I'm going to read one of my statements from June 3rd. Mr. Speaker, the nurses are core to our NWT healthcare system. Without nurses, we would have no one in the communities, no one to care for our patients in our hospitals, no one to provide nursing care for our Elders, no one to assist our new mothers, no one to provide health education to our youth in many communities, as well as many other things they do. Unfortunately, that they are not treated the same. There is a nursing shortage in the country, and yes, it's hard to attract people to the North due to the cost of living. Nurses are essential. What does this mean, Mr. Speaker? It means that when there a pandemic and the entire territory gets to stay home, they have to continue to work. Nothing has changed for them. It means that if working in a hospital in the NWT and they wish to request time off, if there's no one to cover their shifts, they do not get time off. Mr. Speaker, we absolutely could not function in our healthcare system without them.

On May 29th, 2020, I also talked about the crisis of the healthcare hiring practices, and I directed those to the Minister of Finance with HR questions. You know, at this point we're two years into it. I've been raising the issue. I fought hard to make sure that that became a priority and here we are today, now, with this closure of the obstetrics.

We don't know -- the Minister said yesterday that there is no further closures but how do we know that? With the crisis that we're in and the nurses that are leaving, the nurses that have reached out to myself and said they're just on the edge of leaving and changing careers, this is a crisis. Our people are at

risk in the Northwest Territories if we don't deal with this issue now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON EULOGY FOR RAYMOND DENEYOUA

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Raymond Deneyoua was born on November 17th, 1955 and passed away on August 21st, 2021 after a long battle with his illness. Raymond was 65 years old.

Raymond was one of eleven children to Denise and Baptiste Deneyoua. Even though Raymond never married, he was a forever loving brother, uncle, and cousin. He was about adventure, travel and work, but he still had unconditional love for all his family and friends.

Raymond was a caring, passionate, loving, good spirited, patient, great worker, and an outstanding person.

Raymond had a great respect for the land and knew about the traditional ways to use the land and hunt. Even with his sickness, you could see him outdoors and always saying this is the best, this so great to be outside. It would help his spirit and body.

Raymond will be greatly missed and will be remembered by his family, friends, and many people who knew him. He left us with priceless memories which we will cherish in our hearts.

The family would like to express their gratitude for all the community's kindness and generosity at their time of grief. Special thanks to Father McLean for his spiritual leadership and guidance during this difficult time. As well, thank you to the Fort Simpson medical staff for all their help during this difficult time. He will be sadly missed, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and community at this time. Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member for Thebacha.

Oral Questions

ORAL QUESTION 810-19(2) FORT SMITH AIRPORT

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister tell us when the Department of Infrastructure received Transport Canada's new TP312 Aerodromes

Standards and Recommended Practices. And once received, how long did it take for the decision to be made to shorten the width of the Fort Smith airport runway? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the department regularly reviews our airport infrastructure received Transport Canada's new TP312 aerodromes standards and recommendations.

The department regularly reviews our airport infrastructure and sizes -- infrastructure to meet our current and future regulatory and operational needs. When the departments submitted the application for the lighting replacement funding, it considered the process to determine the appropriate size of the runway infrastructure along with other changes to meet current and future needs using the new standards which came out in September 2015.

Included in this was the engagement with Northwestern Air Lease, WestJet, First Air, NAV Canada, Department of National Defence, Northern Air Transportation. So this process required approximately ten months of review, engagement, and planning. So narrowing the width of the runway has not changed the level of service at the airport in which continue to meet federal regulations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell us if any other NWT airports were changed or altered because of Transport Canada's new Aerodrome Standards and Recommendations Practices. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, we have changed multiple airports to meet the Aerodrome Standards and Recommendation Practices when we have to undertake airport projects. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister give us an exact dollar figure as to the number of dollars saved in operation and maintenance costs because of a shorter Fort Smith airport runway width compared to its former specifications. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the current runway allows for more experienced snow clearing, including both the runway itself as well as outside the runway surfaces. So this would include approximately \$10 million in savings for paving surfaces. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, will the Minister reconsider and take ownership for a bad decision and place the lights back to its original location and fill the gaps in the runway before the new surface overlay is initiated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the decision was a good decision. Returning the runway to a width of 60 meters would require significant investment to construct and maintain as well as the additional cost to relocate the upgraded airfield lighting system. Therefore, the expenditure of public funds to return the runway to the former width specifications is unnecessary. The Department of Infrastructure has no plans to do so at this time. The improvements to this runway have positioned the department to maintain this important infrastructure effectively and efficiently while reducing operating and maintenance costs. The decision positioned the department to receive valuable funding to overlay the existing pavement surfaces. So we will be doing some work this year at the Fort Smith airport. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 811-19(2):
FIBRE OPTIC LINE REDUNDANCY

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned in my statement, the GNWT already owns and operates one fibre line with Northwestel. Just this week, we spent \$6 million to extend that fibre line. And, you know, considering this press release came out yesterday, I'm not going to ask the Minister for a few more million dollars today. I'll give her the weekend before doing that.

I have one question for the Minister of Finance here. Is the Minister of Finance willing to meet with Det'cho and Northwestel and see if there is a path forward to some public funding for fibre redundancy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister responsible for Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can do better than a 'yes', I can say that we've already done that. So, and I'm happy to continue those meetings, Mr. Speaker. I'm not totally surprised at the announcement that came yesterday. We don't necessarily always know but I certainly had a sense that that might be a direction that these parties might be going. I was thrilled to see it. I think that's a good move for the Northwest Territories. I am excited to see what will come with it and always happy to know if there's an opportunity

for the government to participate in projects such as this one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 812-19(2):
COST OF FUEL IN NUNAKPUT REGION

MR. JACOBSON: Mr. Speaker, the high cost of gasoline and diesel fuel in our communities really affecting our people. I really would like to see if our government would be committing to cap fuel prices and increases in our communities because we used to get it at Edmonton rack price so you'd be a year out and it wouldn't really affect. But now that I think they're buying their fuel somewhere else and being shipped around over the top, it might be costing a bit more, I don't know. But is it available -- or are they willing to work to cap the prices for the coastal communities of Sachs Harbour, Ulukhaktok, and Paulatuk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, indeed the cost of petroleum products has risen greatly across the country and in the Northwest Territories and remote communities are very much affected. Gasoline prices have gone up across Canada on average of 41 cents per liter over the past year. Diesel fuel prices have risen more than 42 cents per liter. And furnace oil prices for consumers have gone up more than 44 cents per liter. Canadians across this country are paying as much as 50 percent more compared to last year.

The department manages the cost of operations to try and limit the rise of prices for consumer but when the cost of fuel products we buy rises, the price of consumer goes up. Unfortunately Northwest Territories is not protected from the impact of national and global fuel price increases. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JACOBSON: Ulukhaktok's gas price is \$1.94. Sachs Harbour \$1.95. Paulatuk, \$1.93 -- or \$1.34. Mr. Speaker, this is 50 cents more than anywhere across, like you go in Yellowknife it's 50 cents more back home. People got to live, trying to survive. I mean, not everybody has government jobs back home. We need to try to protect our constituents, Mr. Speaker, in regards to that. MTS I don't think is a make-profit company because it's owned by the GNWT which I think all that contract that they did get for north warning system, they should be sharing the wealth of it. So in regards to that, I think that something like this, this small for three communities for subsidy, our fly-in/fly-out community, they should be subsidized a bit and it should be looked at. Is the Minister willing to do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The department cannot subsidize fuel prices sold to consumers through this program. The subsidization is not permitted under the rules of the program. The entire program runs on a cost-recovery basis. Each liter of fuel that is sold includes the cost to purchase the fuel from wholesalers, the cost to transport the fuel to the communities, and the cost of commission to two local contractors who sell the fuel. The reason for the rise in the price of fuel lately is because it does cost us more to buy the fuel from the suppliers. This is extremely unfortunate but it is -- it's not something that the department can affect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with MTS, I mean, with all they're buying bulk fuel. Where are they buying their bulk fuel from. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't know. I could get back to the Member on exactly where we're buying the fuel from. Thank you.

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

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I bet it's pretty cheap fuel they're buying. So in regards to, because they're buying so much. When you buy that much you get a price, you know, decrease in the price because you're buying bulk. Is it possible, like, the Minister just to look into it to find out. I want to have a breakdown of where the cost is affected in the cost that they're giving it to the communities and if it's possible to get that in writing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think I thought I heard the Member say, you know, asking the Minister if she can look into that and absolutely, that's something I can do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 813-19(2):
IMPACTS OF COVID-19 ON VACCINATION
POLICIES

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to follow up on my questions earlier this week on the impacts of COVID vaccination policies on employees and contractors who may be unvaccinated if they're working for the GNWT in areas that are under federal regulation. I have additional questions for the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell this Assembly what the impacts of federal and territorial COVID vaccination policies will be on employees, contractors, and users of the marine service ferries. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Member for his questions for further clarification and I hope that, you know, the line of questions actually provide clarification and information for his constituents.

So the GNWT ferries are federally regulated but do not meet the criteria established by Transport Canada. Current federal regulations apply only to vessels that have over 12 staff members onboard the vessel. Currently the GNWT ferry employees and contractors have to follow the GNWT COVID policy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, under the airports division, can the Minister please tell this Assembly what the impacts of federal and territorial COVID vaccination policies will be on employees and contractors at the Yellowknife gateway airport, the regional airports in the larger centres and the smaller community aerodromes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's our understanding that the federal vaccination requirement currently impacts only the Yellowknife airport. It is an evolving process and we continue to seek clarification and understanding of the regulations at our community airports and ferries. Nonetheless, all operations continue to be subject to GNWT requirements. Effective November 15th, 2021, all federally regulated employees, contractors, and other entities at the Yellowknife airport are required to be vaccinated. The federal policy does not allow for accommodations such as wearing PPE and submit to testing. It is anticipated that Transport Canada will announce rules that apply to remote airports. All airports in the Northwest Territories, other than YZF, once they complete consultation and engagements with remote communities and Indigenous governments. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, barging is very important to the economy and well-being of the NWT. Particularly in Hay River, the community that I, along with the Member for Hay River North, represent. Can the Minister tell this Assembly how the crews working on the tugs and barges will be impacted by federal and territorial COVID vaccination policies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ORC has developed an internal policy adhering to the requirements of Transport Canada. Only vaccinated employees will be hired. This covers all three unions - PSAC, SEY and Guild.

Effective November 30th, only vaccinated personnel will be hired for the next shipping season. Southern workers are required to board an airplane. Based on the information gained from the 2021 season, Mr. Speaker, over 90 percent of ORC hires are double vaccinated. Northern workers are required to be vaccinated to gain access to our facilities.

Based on information gained from the 2021 season, like I said we have 90 percent that are double vaccinated. So Mr. Speaker, that's really good news because we've got a lot of work to do in the next sailing season. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And prior to my question, I would just like to ask, you know, people in the NWT that aren't vaccinated to consider getting vaccinated as soon as possible. You know, it will save a lot of headaches for them and allow them to, you know, get on with life in some way.

So, and for the question, Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell us what the impact on employees and contractors working at the MTS shipyard yard in Hay River will be if they are not vaccinated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, based on the federal regulation requirement, unvaccinated employees will not be hired. This affects northern and southern hires equally.

I do want to add, Mr. Speaker, that COVID-19 has greatly affected our lives, our work, and our activities. Getting fully vaccinated as soon as possible is the best thing you can do to protect yourself, the people around you, and help us to get back to a life more like we remember before the pandemic began. Vaccination gives us all an added layer of protection against the virus and helps build our community immunity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 814-19(2):
NURSING SHORTAGE AT STANTON
TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister

responsible for HR. How can the Minister reassure staff at Stanton that it is worthwhile to participate in the current workplace survey being undertaken given the inaction of the government to act on them in the past. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you Member for Great Slave. Minister responsible for Finance.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Employee Engagement Satisfaction Survey is actually done roughly every two years, and it was postponed when there was collective bargaining back in 2018 and then postponed with COVID-19 so it is actually a regularly done survey.

As for what has been done with it in the past, this is the first one that's coming to me so I can't speak to what may or may not have happened to it in the past, but it's the first one that I'm going to see. And Mr. Speaker, Minister Green and myself have met already before the current crisis facing the obstetrics unit. We have met about what to do to support -- better support the morale of the healthcare profession in the Northwest Territories. This survey was raised to me as one of the tools that we're going to have so am I very keen to see what's in it. I do encourage the staff to fill it out. And I do really want to promise that we're going to do best to act on it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Minister's commitment to look at that and she knows I'll be holding her accountable if nothing comes of it, so.

My next question is what action is the Minister and her staff going to take to ensure that there is enough staffing at the hospital such that workers are free to take their earned leave without guilt, keeping in mind that payouts are not the solution as the nature of the work requires adequate time to recuperate given the trauma that is involved with the work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that any public servant right now who is tired and exhausted and stressed is not going to stop taking the leave that they need to take. The fact that we're in a crisis right now in terms of the numbers of staffing at Stanton Hospital is not the fault of the staff and I do want them to continue to take their leave. They need to take their leave. The crisis we're in started long before this month and long before last month and, frankly, probably as a result of the fact that people are burnt out and they do need their time. So this is not the fault of staff.

We do want to take responsibility here as the government for it, both myself and Minister Green

are looking at this. Again, the Department of Finance is responsible for recruitment. We've seen good success on recruitment in this fall. We've had a number of hires. They just haven't been hired, just some of the critical spots that we needed to prevent what's going on in the obstetrics unit. But there is good results coming of those hires right now. So we're going to continue doing that work continue getting ourselves out there, continue promoting the Northwest Territories as a place to come and start your career and continuing with the graduates out of Aurora College where, again, tremendous results in terms of hiring there.

But, you know, beyond that, Mr. Speaker, there is always more to do. And I have actually been asking in the last few days what other steps we could take with staffing on the human resources side to make sure we're providing the supports to the authority on looking at, you know, who's doing what roles, who's doing what positions, are there maybe other options that can be used to support the folks that are doing the frontline health work. So again, those are things being looked at actively in the moment. We're going to keep working on it until we find a solution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for her thoughtful answer. It's very important for the staff to be hearing from Cabinet that they take responsibility for what's going on and that there's action that's going to happen.

My next question is what is the department going to do to compensate workers financially for the increased hazard of their work due to COVID as other jurisdictions have? Will this financial compensation be retroactive? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I have enough responsibility but. But, Mr. Speaker, so various forms of this question have been asked I think through the week and, again, I want to ensure colleagues in the room, but particularly the public service, that we do take it very seriously -- well, two things we take very seriously is first of all the collective agreement and our relationship with the union, which means whatever we're doing in this front certainly needs to involve engagement with the union before we make any policy changes or any proposed changes that would impact on those processes which are so important to us.

We've also been doing jurisdictional scans so we are looking at what's happening in other jurisdictions. We do continue to be the second highest paid jurisdiction for a lot of our healthcare staff. Money isn't necessarily everything and sometimes the situation that we're in can certainly change what's going on in

terms of the kind of financing or financial supports people will need.

So we're doing those scans, we're looking at what where we're at, we want to be competitive, and we also want to send some positive messages to our staff. So we are, right now, in real time, looking at whether there's some alternatives but as I have said, there are few things that we need to consider Mr. Speaker, and so that's part of the process we're going through now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a little tip for Cabinet - stop saying that the highest wages are being paid in Canada when we have the highest cost of living. Thank you.

Number 4, will the Minister provide details about where the federal money was spent that was intended for frontline workers during COVID. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the COVID money that was received from the federal government wasn't necessarily allocated for employees or staffing or specific to, you know, hazard pay or anything of the sort. There was a number of different very specific pots that we received funding under. I mean, this is what helped pay for our waste water sampling program. This is what helped pay for isolation centre costs. And we've certainly reported on those costs throughout the course of the pandemic. I will commit to getting another update to the House on where the costs have been incurred and on the different funding pools that we have been able to draw from. And so we'll make sure to put that before the House. I would expect we could probably get that before this session's over or soon thereafter. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 815-19(2): CRITICAL MINERALS ACTION PLAN

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. I want to thank her for the invitation that I got to the recent critical minerals workshop. I noted that the workshop was even mentioned in the Premier's sessional statement. Can the ITI commit to producing a public report from that workshop. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for Industry, Tourism and Investment.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am more than thrilled to speak about this. It's a topic that, you know, a little over a year ago when I took over this portfolio, critical minerals, although a huge issue in the world, wasn't necessarily being talked about with the same vigor as it is now here in the territories so I am thrilled to say that we had this workshop. I am very pleased that the Member was able to attend. And most definitely there will be a "what we heard" report.

I am happy we got to the place of having a workshop with such a variety of attendees. But that's just -- that's really just the first step. So there's definitely going to be a "what we heard" report and it's most certainly going to be public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The Minister's kind of anticipated my next question which although I specifically asked about a workshop report, not a "what we heard" report but I'll leave that to her. I can confirm that it was an interesting event but the participants came from a fairly narrow range of interests and perspectives. Can the Minister tell us what the next steps are in developing a Northwest Territories critical minerals action plan and how the public will be engaged. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, this -- whether it's a 'what we heard' or a workshop report, I sometimes don't like to get stuck in the semantics. We're going to have a report of the workshop. We're going to get it out to the public. It's going to outline some of the ideas that we heard from NRCan, Canada, the Government of Alberta, CanNor, the Tlicho government, Det'on Cho, the University of Alberta, Lakehead University, so very much looking forward to getting that out. And, yeah, most certainly. Again, whatever type of title we give this report, that's meant to be a guide so we ultimately have an action plan so that we are positioned in the Northwest Territories to take advantage of the critical minerals ups -- you know, rising that's happening across the world because we have a lot of those critical minerals here in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that but I was hoping for a few more steps in the public engagement. There's probably no doubt that critical minerals could play a positive contribution to greener energy technology to assist with the climate crisis but more work is needed on whether these minerals are the only or best solution. One of the questions at the workshop was whether we could mine our way out of the climate

crisis. So I want to ask the Minister, can the Minister tell us what work has been done by this government as to whether we can mine our way out of the climate crisis. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has not suggested that we're going to mine our way out of the climate crisis. In fact the responsibility for climate change, that the climate change action plan sits with my colleague behind me but all of the departments, the LNR department, Lands and Natural Resources and ITI, we are working together collectively to see what opportunities we have to be part of adapting to climate change, responding to climate change, and that's really where the critical minerals part fits in for us, is that it's an opportunity for the Northwest Territories to not only be on the front lines of the impacts of climate change, we can be on the front lines of helping the entire world see change in terms of how we are responding to the climate crisis. The production of minerals - graphite, cobalt, lithium - these are minerals that are going to be seriously needed in order to meet a lot of the demand for the technologies and that's really the thrust of where we're at now, Mr. Speaker.

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. I think that the analysis of what contribution critical minerals can play in the climate crisis is essential before we head down a path of providing incentives, subsidies, or concessions. Can the Minister tell us whether there's been a thorough analysis of any subsidies or concessions for critical mineral development now or when and how that work will be carried out? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I mean, one of the major first steps of course of having that workshop, bringing folks together, and now developing and working through the creation of a form of an action plan with public engagement throughout that process. It's certainly been my practice to ask that we continue to go back out to public, to stakeholders, to interested parties throughout many and most -- if not most or all of the files I'm certainly responsible for. This will be no different.

When we're doing that, that's the time to be asking what analyses are necessary, what steps can be taken, and frankly hopefully to be leveraging the work that's happening in academics, leveraging the work that's happening in the private sector. Maybe not everything has to be done and paid for by the government but maybe we're there to help enable

that work and to take average of the work that's already happening. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 816-19(2):
CHIEF JIMMY BRUNEAU SCHOOL PROJECT

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize that a regular working group has been established to move forward with the Chief Jimmy Bruneau school project. Can the Minister commit to keeping myself, Tlicho leaders, informed on the status and the results of regular working group meetings. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, Mr. Speaker, absolutely, I will commit to that, thank you.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Mahsi. Mahsi, thank you. Okay, Mr. Speaker, the development of the community around the school is important. We need to ensure the families and elders is close to school so children learn and develop pride in their language and culture. Can the Minister commit to work with Municipal and Community Affairs for planning and development of lands in Behchoko. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The exact process that's involved with building a school in a community, I can't say that I am overly familiar with how ECE works with Infrastructure who works with MACA who works with Lands, it's very operational. But whatever we need to do to ensure a successful project, I am committed to doing that. Thank you.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, white collar jobs are not for everyone. In Tlicho region and across the NWT, we need people trained in trades. If residents have trade skills, we can take care of ourselves. We can build homes, build infrastructure, fix machinery, keep the lights on and water running. Therefore, can the Minister commit to ensure introductory to trades program are central focus for Education, Culture and Employment? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I agree with the Member, skilled tradespeople are key to the economic success and prosperity in the Northwest Territories. So I've heard a lot about the need for additional trades programming and giving high school students and younger students even more access to the trades, more opportunities. And so our curriculum review and our Education Act

modernization have, through the engagements we've heard a lot about that, and so going forward that will be a focus. I can't commit to offering certain programs in certain schools. Of course the education bodies definitely have a say in what's offered and how it's offered, but I can assure the Member that there is a keen interest at all levels from everyone who is involved with the education system to enhance access to trades and gives students more opportunities to get into trades. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Okay. Can the Minister commit to working with local businesses and schools to develop skills for employment and for employment opportunities for youth after high school. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, that's one of the things that ECE does. We do have the number of programs that try to connect employers with student so students can actually gain experience while they're in school. We are rolling out career and education counsellors to help connect employers with students and figure out -- and help students figure out what they need to get to the careers they want. So that's exactly the type of work that we are undertaking at this moment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 817-19(2):
HAY RIVER STUDENT BUSING

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I have questions for the Minister of Education. Mr. Speaker, Hay River was fortunate to have busing restored this school year. We can go back and forth pointing fingers but it's best to learn from what went wrong and how to avoid those mistakes in the future. Our decisions must not take away from what works but to make what works better.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister confirm if the \$400,000 the DEA received from the DEC can be used for busing in future years or does that \$400,000 have to be spent this fiscal year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Minister responsible for ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Member is speaking about one of the issues we spoke about in the summer when we were in this House, whether or not there would be money for bussing. And at that time, I was of the mind that there would be more than enough money for bussing

because I knew what was in the bank. And as it turns out, the projected deficit of nearly a million dollars was actually a surplus of nearly a million dollars, so there was more than enough money for busing. And the DEA's share of that is somewhere around \$400,000. We do have a surplus retention policy. We do want schools to actually spend money on education and not squirrel it away in the bank, but I do, as Minister, have the opportunity to allow DEAs to put money aside if they want to save up for future expenditures such as busing. So yes, those funds I would allow the DEA to put aside and use in future years.

I just want to point out as well, Mr. Speaker, that this has been a longstanding issue, bus funding in Hay River. A few years back there was a review of student transportation that was done. As a result of that, in the year -- in the fiscal 2018-2019, there was an increase to student transportation funding of \$800,000 in the territory. That's around the same time that this surplus retention policy came into effect. And since then, every year since then there has been more than enough money for busing. The problem is that the money comes after the budgets are set. The DEAs are not allocated those funds until they already have their budget and they've made decisions about busing and then, you know, come September, October, November, they find out there's actually a few hundred thousand dollars they can use for busing, so. That's really the heart of the issue. It's not the lack of funding. It's just the process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one request I hear raised by many who cannot afford the busing fees put in place by the DEA is can this government do away with the busing fees for students. If we ever expect NWT students to be at par with their southern counterparts, then we must do everything we can to give them a leg up. Additional fees is not one of them.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister confirm if his department is willing to consider doing away with student busing fees, not only in Hay River but throughout the NWT, by taking that option out of the Education Act and regulations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everything's on the table right now when we're looking at modernizing the Education Act. Any changes we make to the regulations have to be done in consultation with the education bodies. So it's not something that I can just do on my own. That being said, I think it's important to get rid of as many barriers as we can to students getting education. And so ensuring that students can access transportation when they need to is one of my priorities and whether that is an elimination of fees or whether that is a system where income is taken into

consideration, I'm looking at those options for this government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister, in order to resolve the issue of whether there would be busing in Hay River, had to take the unordinary step of conducting an investigation where it was stated that the Hay River DEA made a difficult decision on student transportation on the premise that it had no other option. And the report went on to say in doing so, the Hay River DEA failed to meet its legal and procedural obligations in making policy under the transportation of students regulations and delivered a decision that fails to meet the standard of reasonableness.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Minister, in light of the overall report and conclusions by the investigator on whether or not the Hay River DEA fulfilled its duties under the Education Act and regulations as it pertains to student busing, what changes, if any, will be made so this does not happen again. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the fact that it came to this investigation is a symptom of some of the issues we have in the education system. The ambiguity in the Education Act, the massive responsibilities that local DEAs have without the appropriate, I guess, clerical and administrative support to carry out those responsibilities. And so I knew there were these issues coming in to this Assembly and that's why I said, since day one, that this busing issues is one of my priorities and I want to address it before we are done here.

So I am going to take steps to ensure that this doesn't happen again. And that includes working in collaboration with the DEA. I've spoken with the chair and I've let him know that nearly \$400,000 that the DEA received can in fact, I'm willing to let them use that in future years in order to ensure that busing services are available. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this government talks about reconciliation. Our communities talk about reconciliation. However, when I review the legislation concerning the makeup of Hay River District Educational Council, there is no requirement to ensure diversity. Hay River has a number of Indigenous governments but these governments have no seats allocated to them on the education board while our neighbors in Fort Smith have seats set aside for Members appointed by the town, by Salt River First Nation, and the Fort Smith Metis Council. I believe if we would have some diversity, this busing issue would have been addressed in accordance

with the student busing regulations and we probably would have found money a lot sooner.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister consider exploring the option, in consultation with the First Nations-Metis Government Council and the Town of Hay River, an arrangement similar to Fort Smith to ensure diversity on the Hay River District Education Authority. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And with all things education, we're governed by the Education Act and I believe it is section 86 that allows for petition to the Minister to make those types of changes. The petition would require either 50 percent of the adult population in a community, or 50 adults in that community, whichever is less. So it's a relatively low bar for somewhere like Hay River. If there's a petition with 50 signatures to make these types of changes, then that can be considered, and I'm sure the clerk's office would help the Member put together a petition in no time. I'm sure that he could get those signatures probably before the end of this sitting, because I know that there's a lot appetites to make those types of changes. But that being said, we all have to get along and we all have to work together so we would ensure that the DEA, as well as those organizations that the Member mentioned, that we're all on the same page. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 818-19(2):
FORT SMITH AIRPORT

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, further to my statement today, could the Minister of Infrastructure announce to this House which other community airports, by name, that were affected by the similar actions experienced by the community of Fort Smith. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have the names in front of me right now but I can, in the House perhaps next week, get those -- the communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the Infrastructure budget that we looked at yesterday, Fort Simpson is also replacing lighting on the runway. Has the width or length been altered on this particular airport. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't know that in front of me right now. If I were perhaps given a heads up, I could prepare something. I can commit to the Member when I give

her the names to provide that information as well. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member for Frame Lake.

ORAL QUESTION 819-19(2):
SLAVE GEOLOGICAL PROVINCE REGIONAL
STUDY AND BATHURST CARIBOU HERD

MR. O'REILLY: Merci Monsieur le President. My question's for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. I want to follow up on some important facets for the proposed regional study for the Slave Geological Province.

In June of this year, his department carried out extensive aerial surveys of caribou herds including the Bathurst herd, and of course those surveys were delayed by a year. Can the Minister describe results of those surveys and, more specifically, the results for the Bathurst herd. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for ENR.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Member for the question. This summer ENR completed surveys to obtain updated population estimates for the five barren-ground caribou herds: the Tuk Peninsula herd, Cape Bathurst herd, the Bluenose-East herd, and the Bluenose-West herd, and the Bathurst herd. Calving ground photo surveys were successfully completed in June for the Bathurst and the Bluenose-East herd, and a composition survey was done in October. The 2021 estimates for these two herds will be released shortly to all co-management partners and committee. In December, we are planning to meet with the Bathurst Caribou Advisory Committee and all interested Indigenous governments and organizations to discuss the new establishments and moving forwards.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I can't share it. We needed to follow our process and in the process work with our Indigenous partners first then -- and committee and then make it public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I don't fault the Minister in wanting to follow due process, but of course the Bathurst caribou herd is at a critically low point but our government continues to steamroll ahead with plans for an all-weather road that would inevitably cause irreversible harm to the Bathurst herd.

So can the Minister tell us whether or government is prepared to stop or pause the work on the Slave Geological Corridor until a regional study is completed. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yesterday I explained in this House the GNWT can't try to influence decisions. Regional studies unfortunately fall under the federal government's authority under the MVRMA, I believe that's what it is -- too many acronyms some days. The GNWT has not developed a position on the regional study. Cabinet will seek input from regular Members on potential positions once input has been received from Indigenous governments. So we're more than willing to work together collaboratively with our Indigenous partners to come up with a position. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. I'll try to give him a real gift here, all he has to say is yes.

So with regard, though, to the Slave Geological Province regional study, you know, participant funding is going to be a central issue. And in the last Assembly, my friend, the Honourable R. C. McLeod said, on March 2nd, 2016, We recognize the value of having our NWT residents participate in a lot of these processes and will continue to the Member that I will continue to raise these issues with our federal counterparts.

So my question to this Minister is does government actually support the concept of participant funding and is it prepared to push for participant funding as part of a regional study. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I can tell you that the GNWT is talking to our Indigenous governments, to the Nunavut government and the federal government, in order to understand relevant views and interests about the GNWT's -- or the government's request, the Tlicho's governments request. Any GNWT position will take in account the views of all parties and stakeholders, including MLAs. The GNWT has encouraged the federal government to consider federal funding opportunities recognizing there should be a regional study moved forward with significant federal finance support would be required, including participants funding. And you heard me yesterday, this area should be the federal government's responsibility because they are responsible for this very act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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. I guess I will take it one step back. Does this government actually support the concept of participant funding in general for environmental assessment, and I'm hoping the Minister's actually going to say, yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The only person that can speak for the Government of the Northwest Territories is the Premier. What I can say, though, from ENR's perspective, yes, we want to work with our Indigenous governments. We need their input to move forward. It's very much about engaging and consultation with our Indigenous governments. So if he wants an government overall approach, he needs to ask that question to the Premier. But from ENR's perspective, we think participants need to work together -- we need to get money to work for it to address our issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORAL QUESTION 820-19(2):
STAFFING AT STANTON TERRITORIAL
HOSPITAL

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. I appreciate her informing this House previously that we have a 26.3 percent vacancy rate in nursing positions and this is a 10 percent increase since 2020. However I was hoping the Minister could help me quantify what that means at Stanton specifically where the OBS unit has closed. Can the Minister tell us currently how many positions are funded at Stanton Territorial Hospital, and how many of them are not actually filled. Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. The staff component at Stanton Territorial Hospital is 466 and the vacancy rate was 13.1 percent as of June 30th. And there are 61 positions that were actively being recruited for as of June 30th. Those are the most recent statistics I have. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know there is a lot of efforts being done to make sure we fill those 61 positions, and I know that it's costly not to fill them. And I was hoping the Minister could inform us with this latest closure of obstetrics, what is the estimated cost of sending all those patients to Edmonton to give birth as opposed to, if they were able to, here in Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have an answer for the Member, but I want to say at the beginning that any recruiting efforts we are successful with right now will likely take a few weeks to implement, especially if the person needs to relocate to Yellowknife from another place.

To the costs of sending the patients to Edmonton, it's our estimate that it will be approximately \$12,500 for the patient and her escort to go to Edmonton and stay there for 28 days, or four weeks. This cost includes flights, accommodation, transportation, and meals for the traveler and her escort. And those services may be augmented by the pregnant person's own employee benefit plans if the person has those available to them by the NIHB or by other employer benefits, depending on who they work for. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just doing some on-the-fly math, I believe there was 90 Yellowknife residents. I know there was some Nunavut residents who were also affected. But 90 times \$12,500 is \$1,125,000. Can I just get a clarification on that \$12,500 statistic? Is that the cost of all the medical travel and the accommodations, and does it include I believe if we send someone to birth in Edmonton, Alberta Health Services is going to bill us back for those services. Does it include that number and if not, what would that be? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that this number includes the cost of service from Alberta Health Services. This is the medical travel cost. But I can find out what the billing would be, or at least a range. You know, some deliveries are very straightforward and others aren't, as we all know, and so that may also impact the amount of money that is spent with Alberta Health Services for their support. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would appreciate the Minister following up with what we expect Alberta to bill us back. I know that they bill us back millions of dollars a year, and I expect that births, even one complicated birth, can get very expensive really quickly. And I guess my point here is that this closure is becoming a million dollar cost to us. I think that's quite clear. We're in that range. And I know it's been reported that the OBS nurses for years have been asking for an additional staff person and there's some debate about, you know, about whether that is needed. But I think this is proven that, you know, one closure is easily more than the cost of funding that staff position. So my question for the Minister is there is a political win here where we can fund an additional OBS nurse and hope that this closure never happens again? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to say I hope this is a one-off that I never have to stand here and talk about the obstetrics unit being closed again.

In terms of adding an additional staff, I don't know where those discussions are at within the hospital. I do know that the number of births that Stanton has

been declining over the last three or four years. I also know that they have a large number of vacancies at this point so I'm not sure that adding another position is actually going to bring them another body, because we are, you know, in the midst of recruiting for those vacancies. So I think that this is a conversation that we need to have. Maybe the value of the fourth position over the long term is that people are more able to take their time off. So it's certainly something I'm interested in. Thank you.

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

ORAL QUESTION 821-19(2):
STAFF SATISFACTION SURVEY AND
ACCREDITATION SURVEY

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, understandably, Members from this side of the House have been holding the Department of Health and Social Services to task this week in this House, but I just wanted to start off with a thank you today during question period.

My two youngest children were vaccinated against COVID-19, and I'm incredibly grateful to the Department of Health and Social Services for that.

One of my jokesters asked me if this was his Christmas present and it's probably not his, but it was definitely mine. So thank you very much for that.

Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. It is my understanding that staff surveys are done through the accreditation process for hospitals. What were the outcomes of the 2019 hospital -- or Stanton accreditation surveys at -- or in Yellowknife while they were going through that process. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm just going to say at the outset, there are quite a large number of surveys that involve the nursing staff. There are these accreditation surveys my colleague has mentioned. I have also mentioned the exit surveys for people who have resigned this year as healthcare professionals, nurses in particular, and that the nurses professional association is doing a survey as well about issues that are leading to people's job dissatisfaction.

So to narrow this down to the accreditation survey, there were two of them conducted in connection with the accreditation. One is the Canadian Patient Safety Culture Survey and the other is Worklife Pulse Survey.

So for the Canadian Patient Safety Survey, the results show that the NTHSSA reported higher than

the Canadian average in three of eight survey dimensions, and three dimensions scored within five percent of the Canadian average under the dimensions that the NTHSSA scored lower than the Canadian average. So this is not easy to understand as I read it out here. But what I think it says is that the Canadian Patient Safety Culture Survey gave us a reasonable rating where we were either above or on par in most areas.

The Worklife Pulse Survey reported higher than Canadian average results in four of seven survey dimensions. Having said that, the lowest score, compared to Canadian averages, was received for the health and safety of the work environment. So clearly, there was a flag in that survey that work needed to be done in that area. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate that information. I think that there are, you know, a lot of discussions of surveys and collecting information.

And so my next question for the Minister is what were the outcomes that relate to staff morale and staffing issues at Stanton that came out of the surveys and were there any changes from the previous surveys or the exit interviews that were done that were able to be implemented at Stanton. Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that they took the information and made a communications plan to address the areas of weakness that were identified. As a result of that, they have biweekly all-staff updates; they have improved the use of internal communication platforms; they have promoted the use of internal feedback tools to receive questions and information from staff. I know there is sort of a suggestion box function now that people can use anonymously to point out issues and concerns. And it's my understanding that in fact these tools are heavily used, and that's been particularly the case during the COVID pandemic period. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. It's my understanding that some of the issues that we're hearing about are definitely persistent issues in a lot of our high stress shift work type environments within the GNWT. And so I guess I'm wondering what -- what information is management within Stanton expecting to hear from the current nursing survey that is different from the one that they've previously heard and how is this time going to be different. Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have any information about the results of the surveys now underway. But I will say that they are being conducted almost three years later than the surveys I spoke about at the beginning

of my answers. And so I think the operating environment has changed because of COVID and that the results will be different. I'm looking forward to seeing the results of these exit surveys. And we understand that there are ways that we can improve the work life of nurses at Stanton and on the obstetrics unit, we're hearing a lot about at the moment. And, you know, somebody has already said this today, and I've said it here as well, it is preferable to retain a nurse than recruit a nurse. It works better for all of us if we have someone who's already here, enjoys working in the North, has a family and life established here, to stay here, rather than feel that the working conditions are such that their preference is to move on, particularly because of the working conditions. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Given this Assembly's interest in not only recruiting but also, as the Minister states, retaining our healthcare workers in the Northwest Territories, I'm wondering if the Minister is willing to commit to sharing the results of that survey and also the responses from the Department of Health and Social Services to address them with this House. Thank you.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I understand that there's a health system human resources plan that's being finalized and my colleague, the Minister responsible for Human Resources has spoken about this, and the results of the surveys that I've spoken of will inform actions to improve the recruitment and retention of health care staff. I will in fact, share with the Standing Committee on Social Development the plan when it's complete and the summaries of the surveys when they're available. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Colleagues, our time for oral questions has expired. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees under review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Health and Social Services.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 488-19(2):
PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY OF BILL 40: AN
ACT TO AMEND THE MEDICAL PROFESSION
ACT

HON. JULIE GREEN: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document entitled Plain Language Summary for Bill 40: An Act to Amend the Medical Profession Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of Documents. Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources.

TABLED DOCUMENT 489-19(2):
INUUVIALUIT WATER BOARD ANNUAL REPORT
APRIL 1, 2020 - MARCH 31ST, 2021

TABLED DOCUMENT 490-19(2):
THE NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION
TRUST FUND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR
THE YEAR ENDED MARCH 31, 2021

TABLED DOCUMENT 491-19(2):
NWT 9-1-1 ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following three documents: Inuvialuit Water Board Annual Report April 1, 2020 - March 31st, 2021; The Natural Resources Conservation Trust Fund Financial Statements for the Year Ended March 31, 2021; and, NWT 9-1-1 Annual Report 2020-2021

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Justice.

TABLED DOCUMENT 492-19(2):
LEGAL AID COMMISSION OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

TABLED DOCUMENT 493-19(2):
ANNUAL REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE
RENTAL OFFICER APRIL 1, 2020 TO MARCH 31,
2021

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents entitled Legal Aid Commission of the Northwest Territories Annual Report 2020-2021; and, Annual Report on the Activities of the Rental Officer April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Member for Nunakput.

Motions

MOTION 43-19(2):
MOVE COMMITTEE REPORTS 17-19(2), 18-
19(2), AND 19-19(2) INTO COMMITTEE OF THE
WHOLE,
CARRIED

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I MOVE, seconded by the Honourable Member for Thebacha, that Committee Report 17-19(2), Standing Committee on Government Operations Report of Review of Bills of Bill 23, an Act to Amend

the Public Utilities Act; Committee Report 18-19(2) Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment Report Review of Bill 24, an Act to Amend the Revolving Funds Act; Committee Report 19-19(2) Standing Committee on Economic Development Environment Report on Review of Bill 29, Resource Royalty Information Disclosure Statute Amendment Act be received by the Assembly and moved into the Committee of the Whole for your consideration. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nunakput. 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. These reports will be moved into Committee of the Whole for consideration.

---Carried

MR. SPEAKER: Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills, Minister responsible for Health and Social Services.

Second Reading of Bills

BILL 40:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE MEDICAL
PROFESSIONAL ACT

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Honourable Member for Range Lake, that Bill 40, an Act to Amend the Medical Profession Act, be read for the second time.

This bill amends the Medical Profession Act to allow a medical practitioner regulated in another province or territory to provide virtual care to patients in the Northwest Territories from a location outside the Northwest Territories. This may happen in the following ways:

- An out-of-territory practitioner may apply for registration in the virtual care register and be issued a virtual care permit;
- An out-of-territory practitioner may practice under a limited exception where they have received a referral from the NWT;
- An out-of-territory practitioner may practice under an agreement between the Minister and either the government or the regulatory of their home jurisdiction.

The bill makes the associated necessary changes to the act to facilitate these new methods of practice. The bill also adds a regulation-making authority to

authorize the establishment or adoption of standards, practice, code of ethics, continuing competency programs, and scope of practice frameworks and guidelines. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Motion is in order. To the principle of the bill. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe this is a number of things the department is doing to provide further virtual care to our residents. I just want to thank the Minister for bringing this forward.

During COVID, we made many steps in this direction, and now there seems to be a bit of a catch-up to change some of the regulations, adopt the software, and really be a leader in this area. So I will gladly support this bill on second reading.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. To the principle of the bill.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour. All those opposed. Any abstentions. The motion is carried. Bill 40 has had second reading and is referred to a committee.

---Carried

Colleagues, before I put you into Committee of the Whole, I'd like to wish the Member for Thebacha a Happy Birthday for tomorrow and invite you all to join me in the Great Hall for a small celebration. Happy birthday.

MR. SPEAKER: Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Bill 23, 24, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 36, Tabled Document 437-19(2), Tabled Document 438-19(2), Tabled Document 439-19(2), Tabled Document 466-19(2) with 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? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 437-19(2), Capital Estimates 2022-2023, and we'd like to consider the Department of Health and Social Services and Municipal and Community Affairs. Thanks, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Does committee agree? Thank you, committee. We will

take a short break, and then we'll resume with the first item. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I'll call committee back to order. Committee, we've agreed to consider Tabled Document 437-19(1) Capital Estimates 2020 -- or, sorry, 2022-2023. Committee, we will now consider the Department of Health and Social Services. Does the Minister of Health and Social Services wish to bring witnesses into the Chamber?

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, please.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes. On my left is Derek Elkin, the assistant deputy minister for corporate services. And on my right is Perry Heath, the director of infrastructure and planning.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, welcome. The committee has agreed to forego general comments. Does committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Committee, the Department of Health and Social Services begins on page 33. We'll defer the departmental totals and review the estimates by activity summary beginning on page 34 with administrative and support services with information items on page 35. Questions. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm looking at about three and a half million dollars of various medical-- I really have no concern with what's presented here. My question is it was my understanding that we were looking to replace our electronic medical records system, and I believe that was quite a costly endeavor, and I don't see that here. Can the Minister just give an update as to what is going on with that process. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. The Member is correct. The current electronic medical records system has an end date, and it is necessary to replace it. And I believe that Mr. Elkin has been participating in that process and could give you an update.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. Elkin.

MR. ELKIN: Thank you. Yes, so we've been doing those by Telus, who is the current provider of the

EMR that will be sunset at the end of 2023. So we are currently doing the planning phase to what that would look like. They also indicated that they would support it beyond 2023 so we have a little extra time to plan on it. It's an opportunity to actually look at our current EMR and our other systems too, so maybe there's an opportunity to see what else we can roll on to another solution. So we have a project team underway that's currently looking at it. Thanks.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I'm glad I know there's a kind of a couple different systems operating and they don't always speak to each other the best, so I think this is a good opportunity, although it will probably be a very, very expensive one, to look at all of our systems.

As part of that project team looking at this, is it on their agenda a patient online portal. COVID has really pushed this to the forefront, and in many jurisdictions you can log in and you can just see all of your vaccination statuses. You can see outstanding lab test. And you know if we had something like that during COVID, it probably would have saved us a lot of headache in creating the vaccine passports and that data entry. Do we expect -- or is it one of the priorities of buying a new EMR system that that would be a function. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, indeed, it is a priority of a new system. It's not possible with our current system, and so it would be a great upgrade to be able to offer people direct access to their own records.

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

MR. JOHNSON: I'm going to sneak in one more; that may be pushing the limits here. I know we have a number of software operating but we still tend to fax records. This has caused a lot of problems. Are we going to end faxing? Do we anticipate any of the software we're buying or planning to buy will end that practice. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Personally, I would like to recycle every fax machine in the NWT. But that may not be what the department has in mind. So I'll look again to Mr. Elkin to ask him about that.

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

MR. ELKIN: Thank you. Yes, so we're currently over the last year doing an inventory of all -- of where all the faxes are used because our ultimate goal is, yes, to move away from faxes. And, however, it's a matter of understanding how faxes are used and where we interact, particularly with the private sector, to make sure that we don't disrupt the patient care in doing that. So, yeah, we are doing an inventory to understand how and when they use and how -- a transition plan to move away from faxes.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Elkin. Are there any further question, comments under the administrative and supportive service section. Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am just looking at the MediPharm replacement, and I guess I don't know too much about that. So I'd just like to -- an explanation of exactly what that is and does that tie into, say, pharmacies as well, private organizations like that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I'd again like to direct this question to Mr. Elkin.

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

MR. ELKIN: Thank you. So MediPharm is the in-hospital pharmacy system used in -- was used in Stanton, Hay River, and Inuvik. It was aged out and no longer supported. So when Stanton came on, we moved to a new system called the BDM, and then the eventual plan was to move Hay River and Inuvik on as well. So Stanton's been completed, Inuvik's been completed last July, and Hay River's scheduled for next year. And that's really within the hospital itself. To answer your question, I don't know if it connects with the private pharmacies. But it's really around pharmacy management and distribution within the hospital and the inventory control to better make use of the staff's time and to be more efficient of mapping pharmaceutical use in the hospital.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. So if somebody in Stanton wants information from Hay River or Inuvik, they can pick up that information and that information in those other two communities would be able to them. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you. Please address the question to Mr. Elkin.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. Elkin.

MR. ELKIN: At this point, I don't know what the inoperability would be between the three sites. I assume since they're on the same system, that's one of the ultimate goals. But right now, they won't be communicating at this point but I think that's the ultimate goal is to be on the same system. I would have to confirm that.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, that's all the questions I have.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any other further questions on administrative and support services. Seeing none. Health and Social Services administrative and support services infrastructure investment 3,641,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Committee, please turn to page 36, Health and Social Services health and social programs with information on page 37. Questions. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I see there's the continued funding for the wellness and recovery centre in Yellowknife. This has been in the capital budget a couple years now. But can I just get an update on that project and when we expect construction to start. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you for the question. I'll start, and then I'll turn to Perry; he's to fill in some of the details.

So a design firm has been contracted to provide a design for the facility, and I think they're moving towards having a draft available to share with the department and the people who are going to be most intimately involved in the wellness and recovery centre. The schedule now is for the RFP for construction to go out next year. And I think that the centre itself won't be ready until the end of 2023, the beginning of 2024. But if I don't have those right, Mr. Heath will correct me. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Okay. Thank you. Mr. Heath.

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister is correct. We're targeting the end of 2023,

early 2024 for operationalization of the facility. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

---Laughter.

Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Not planning to move to Hay River any time soon, Madam Chair.

I know there is endless debates about day shelters. Can I just get clarification that the site has been selected, the one beside -- I'm going to call it beside St. John Ambulance, across from True Value. Is that the site that has been selected. Is that a finalized decision. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: It's -- I haven't heard that it's -- that it's finalized, but we're going to have to finalize it soon if we haven't already because we have to apply for a permit to the city. So we can't do that on the basis without having an affirmed location. I'll ask Mr. Heath to confirm where we're at with the site selection.

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

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is our intention to submit a development permit application in the upcoming months for the site that the Member referenced. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I want to ask, can the Minister speak to work being done to make that process easier. I am afraid that we are likely to lose this route with the current council, given their track record, and perhaps there's a way to pull some ropes. I just would welcome the political insights that's happening to make sure that that application development permit is a little smoother. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. There is a plan to engage people and businesses and residents who live in proximity to the site of the new wellness and recovery centre. We are not under the same kind of time crunch we were with the day shelter. We have time to go through the process and to go through an appeal process if necessary. I can't predict what council's going to do with that. I mean, obviously, we will present all the information we have about the

centre and what it's for and who will use it, and we'll just have to wait and see what council makes of all of that. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Lastly, Madam Chair, I know we have either purchased or rented or using the Tlicho all-season construction room as a temporary day shelter, which my understanding is intended to run until this one is complete. Can I just get clarification whether that money is found in the capital budget or the O and M budget or whether that's coming forward through a sup. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I actually haven't heard which budget this is coming out of so I will ask Mr. Heath for that. Thank you.

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

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. So in anticipation that we were going to have to provide a temporary facility, we actually made a scout change to the wellness recovery centre and reduced the budget by a small amount, enough to cover the cost of the temporary wellness centre. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just -- I notice there is two body holding rooms here. Can I just get a bit of an explanation of what -- why we're building body holding rooms. Are they required in all communities now? Is there some sort of standard that's kind of spurring us. I just would like a little bit of clarification there. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. "Body holding room" is the 2021 terminology for morgue. And health centres built prior to 2012 did not have any kind of refrigeration room for handling deceased, for the community to do the preparations or for the deceased to be -- have the remains stored until going out for autopsy or burial elsewhere or whatever. So this is an effort to upgrade those older health care facilities by providing them with these modular units that they can use as a morgue in their communities.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Any further questions, comments under the health and social programs? Member for Monfwi.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: This supply of medical equipment evergreen, it says here territory-wide. Which communities are identified? Like, which community are getting some of these services.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): That section we've already passed that section and agreed to move on.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Minister.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. The biomedical ever-greening is things like mammography and x-ray machines, ventilators, anesthesia machines, patient monitoring machines, the ones that you see in hospital rooms, lab analyzers, and those -- whenever you think of machinery in a health context, that's what -- that's the equipment we're talking about ever-greening. And so I don't have a breakdown by community. The equipment exists in different communities to different extents depending on whether they have hospital, they have a health centre, or whether they have a health cabin. But if you want a specific breakdown for your region of which equipment is being ever-greened, I can request the department to provide that.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member for Monfwi, did you have any further questions? Thank you. Committee, we'll turn back to page 34, Health and Social Services, administrative and support services, infrastructure investment, \$3,641,000. Does committee agree.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Okay. I will go back to Health and Social Services, health and social programs. Any questions, comments? Okay, so health -- Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to get back to the body holding rooms, I don't think these are the first ones that we've seen the department build. I just want some idea of are we looking at additional communities that are going to have that requirement. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. As I said, the body holding rooms are required in communities that have health centres that were built prior to 2012. And you're right, there have been body holding rooms installed at other points. We've seen them in the budget before. And now we see that there's going to be one for Deline and another for Fort McPherson. And I don't know how many more places are on the list so I'll ask Mr. Heath to fill in that. Thank you.

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

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. There's ten in total that we're planning on doing and, as the Minister said, all the facilities that fit within that window. Essentially, the health centres that are in relatively good shape that won't be replaced in the near future, we'll say within a ten-year timeframe, we've initiated a program to install body holding in all of them. So currently, we have them in Aklavik, Fort Liard, Tuktoyaktuk, Deline. And it is the intention that Paulatuk and then the higher Arctic ones will be covered as well. They will come in a series. It will be done over multiple years, and ten in total. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And can you give me an idea I guess of a range of cost for those, because I know that they're probably in, you know, from Liard all the way up north so, just some kind of idea. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. The projected total for the one in Deline, for example, is \$600,000.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I'm not sure if this is the right place to ask this, but I think my colleague from Yellowknife North mentioned day shelters. So I just wonder if -- like, you know, we have an issue with day shelters and night shelters, and I guess I'm concerned about the cost, that the amount of money we're spending on them in smaller communities when we have an opportunities to actually maybe sit down, take a look at it, and make something more permanent, because you know, we go year after year, you know, scrambling, looking for money. So I'd just like to get a sense of if the department is maybe going to take a look at that, a longer term look for day shelters and night shelters outside of Yellowknife. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Hay River. I'll let the Minister entertain that.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is really more of an O and M expense at this point because we're contracting other service providers to provide the day shelters and Housing is contracting them for the night shelters.

I understand what you're saying about whether there is some point at which building a facility would make more sense. And I -- I'm certainly happy to have those conversations. But I would just say that within the scope of our existing budget, I would say that we have more urgent priorities, such as the long term care units, for example, where, you know, there is no plan B that is owned by somebody else that we can use. So, you know, it's not a firm no, but it's not very high up the list from my point of view. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Any further questions in relates to the capital? Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. No further questions, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Members, any questions under the health and social programs? Seeing none. Health and Social Services, health and social programs, infrastructure investment, \$7,434,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, committee. We will now turn to Health and Social Services long term and continuing care on page 38 with information items on page 39. Questions. Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can the Minister of the department tell us where the Stanton legacy building renovations are at and is this the last time that we'll be seeing this item in the budget. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. Renovations at the Stanton Legacy project are going to be wrapping up next year. There will still be a need to staff the legacy project for the long-term care -- additional long-term care beds. So it's not going to disappear from the budget altogether, but I think this will be the last year of renovation costs for that project. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can the Minister or the department commit to providing us with sort of their lessons learned, where the budget when, etc, with the Stanton Legacy building and see are we on track with that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: I'm going to take "on track" to mean on time, on budget. And to the best of my knowledge, it is on time and on budget. And in terms of the lessons learned, I think that's standard practice, but we're not at that stage yet.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. If we could see that information. I did ask for a commitment for it to be shared. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: I can send the Member notification that it's on budget and on time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. That was more about asking for the lessons learned, which now stands to be a bit of a standard thing going forward.

Moving on, I just wanted to ask for an update on the Avens pavilion and kitchen and laundry. I know that it's slated to be completed in 2023 but does have a significant component of fundraising from the actual centre itself. So is it on track to be constructed as needed and if not, will the department be looking to provide additional funding if the community fundraising does not meet expectation. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you. This is a project of the Avens Society itself and it's not a project of ours. Our contribution to the project is for the laundry and kitchen upgrades.

In terms of the timing of the project and their fundraising goals, I have no information on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Any further questions under long-term care and continuing care? Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I -- you know, committee has reviewed the long-term care strategy and the work, and there's been some various needs assessments. But I guess there's 136 beds here in the capital budget. Do we have a rough estimate of what that then costs to operate in the O and M budget, or can the Minister just speak to some of the O and M costing that each of these beds puts on the budget. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I don't have that information with me, but I'm going to look at Mr. Elkin to see if he can give us an estimate.

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

MR. ELKIN: Thank you. As the Minister mentioned, we'll be coming back to the 2023-2024 main estimates process for the operating costs to staff, for example, the Stanton Legacy. But we do have projected very rough estimates of what the cost of operating per bed would be for each of the facilities based on current staffing models. So those will change as we fine tune. And obviously, for the larger facilities, the per bed cost would be lower based on just because of the fixed costs. So, for example, we're projecting roughly for the 74 beds in Yellowknife about 219,000 per bed whereas if you look at the Inuvik, which is a smaller facility, 16, it's about \$349,000 per bed. So ...

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I'm -- I'm doing some quick math. I think this is well over \$20 million a year in O and M, and I think that's even a very conservative estimate based on what I just heard.

Can the Minister just speak to, I know that Health and Social Services Authority is in deficit. We're trying to find money always for health. The costs are ballooning. Is there -- can the Minister speak to kind of whether we are confident that we will have the fiscal room to operate these beds. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, I find that a difficult question to answer. The Legacy project was planned before I came into this role. But, you know, always there was going to be O and M for all these extra beds and so I'm assuming -- and I hope I'm right about this -- that it's on someone's radar that, you know, once we finish paying for the cost of the renovation then we need to staff up the facility.

In terms of, you know, the total ask and where it's going to come from and so on, that's going to be a future budget discussion.

I will just say about the Legacy project that the beds are going to be phased in. So I don't believe we'll be looking for that total amount of money right off the top but rather in a staged process. And if you look at the other long-term care projects that we've got on the books at this point, they're also being staged so that, you know, the costs for both the capital and the O and M is spread out over a number of years. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know the territory spends -- I believe it's upwards of \$20 million on out-of-territory services, and we have many residents with kinds of very complex needs and long-term care in Alberta. Can the Minister just speak to whether any of these long-term care beds would be able to repatriate those people. I know some have complex needs and services beyond what we're planning to build here, but I'm just wondering if any of these additional beds will bring people home from Alberta. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. That's not our intention. The intention is that we are going to use an international needs assessment tool to assess people for the long-term care bed needs, and there will be a threshold of nursing and support services required before people are offered beds in long-term care. I am aware that in some cases now, people with special needs are in long-term care, and think that's a default because there hasn't been accommodation for them elsewhere. But you might know that we're doing a supported living review at this point, where we're trying to develop an in-territory model for support for people who are currently living in facilities outside of the NWT. So we are interested in finding a solution to that, but we're pursuing it separately from the long-term care beds.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Yes, thank you. Long-term care facility, I know in my regions we have one. But we have residents from other communities in the region that are in my community. And not everybody, you know -- not all of them are happy to leave, but there's no facility, no program and services in their community.

So I'm just wondering if we can have an increase in service for home care and for housing support that allows for elders to stay home and for more -- what I mean there too is that to have more staff. And because I know it's going to cost lots to build a home care facility in the community, and then, you know, provide more services with the staff and services, like, to accommodate the elders that do not want to leave their home. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for that question. Yes, at the same time that we're doing this planning for

long-term care, we've also been doing planning for changes to home and community care. Just before this Assembly began, there was a comprehensive review of home and community care and some recommendations about how the program could be strengthened.

One easy example I'll give you is that the hours needed to be more flexible, that home care was primarily being offered only during work hours, 9 to 5, and that there was a need for home care in other hours. There's also a need for more home care if we're going to accommodate people to stay in their homes rather than move into regional centres to long-term care homes. And not only is that what we hear people want to happen, that they want to stay in their own homes as long as possible, it's also the most cost effective way to support them.

We just heard how much it costs to operate a long-term care bed. So if we were able to, you know, spend a fraction of that money on home care, a personal support worker and nursing care for people in their homes, that would obviously be better -- be better all around. And so that is something that we're actively working on now. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Knowing that the long-term care facility -- one's going into Hay River, and it was initially supposed to be a 48-bed facility, and it got decreased to 24 beds. And there was lots of discussion about that and -- back and forth. I guess what I'd like to ask is, you know, has there been any more analysis done on whether that 24-bed is acceptable or should we be looking at a 48-bed facility. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I thought for a small moment I might go through long-term care without Hay River, but no. Okay, happy to talk about that.

It's important for the Member to know that the planning work and design work has already started on the Hay River long-term care unit, and it's based on the 24-bed model. And I think that the Member knows that it's going to be located adjacent to Woodland Manor once H.H. Williams Hospital is demolished. And I understand that in the future, should there be a need for a much greater number of beds, there's room on that campus to add another pod or wing of long-term care.

But as things stand now, we're confident in our population projections. We appreciate all the questions we got to sharpen our projections and

make sure that 24 beds was the right number. And I feel confident that it is.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I appreciate the work that's being done. And I understand that, you know, the projections you came up with was actually based on -- on, you know, the number of beds required and also the decrease was partly due to providing more support to home care. Is that still the case? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, the two things that drove the change in the Hay River bed count was, first of all, an understanding that Fort Smith needed more beds than they had and were projected to need more into the future. And so instead of having people come in to Hay River from Fort Smith, it made more sense to look at building a long-term care facility in Fort Smith to meet that priority of helping people to age in place, although they might not be in their own homes, they would be in their own communities. So that was definitely a factor.

The other is what I just mentioned about the international assessment tool to try and understand who needs to be in long-term care and at what point. So that is one of the drivers in looking at how many beds we think we're going to need into the future in all locations, not just in Hay River.

And then, finally, those people who may be screened out of long-term care because their needs are not acute enough to be in long-term care, then that's where we need to bump up our home care so that those people are given the assistance they need to stay in their homes. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I see the estimated completion date is 2024-2025. I'd like to know if we're still on track for that as we have not started taking down the old H.H. Williams Memorial Hospital. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you for that question. I'll ask Mr. Heath to confirm what the project schedule is.

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

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Member noted, the H.H. William building -- H.H. Williams building hasn't come down yet, but the tender was issued a couple of weeks ago so that work is going forward.

I will note that the -- based on that, and the potential curve balls of COVID, this is an optimistic schedule, and we will have to be very focused in order to meet this target. And if we get new surprises with the construction industry and the supply chain, that may be at risk, and we acknowledge that it is an optimistic schedule. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. One other I guess point I'd like to bring up -- or issue as well is that on that -- on the land where the new -- where the extended care will be going and the hospital's coming down, there is also an old medical clinic on there. And my understanding that it's only used for storage of medical files right now. And will that in any part, I guess, you know be part of this, taken down and constructed a new facility, new extended care facility? Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the question. I don't think there are any plans to demolish that building. I think it's called the Commissioner's building. There are no plans to demolish that. It is holding files that go back to the founding of Hay River, medical files that go back to that point.

We, in the department, have a significant storage issue with old medical files, and what we need is the budget to have a dedicated team to start sorting through these files and deciding what to do with them. Some of them may be disposed of, some of them may be digitized. Some of them may be held back for other reasons. I understand there's a group of records being held back for a potential tobacco lawsuit, so. So the business of storing the records is really problematic. And so for the time being, since we have a place in Hay River to store records, we're going to continue using that place. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I guess with respect to the old clinic and the storage of files there and, you know, I know it's problematic, you know, where to store these, and knowing that the government is looking -- the department is looking at ways to digitize or another way to store, you know, to keep them, I feel that I guess that's going to be quite a few years down the

road, whereas that building could be repurposed, in my mind, probably for a permanent day/night shelter, and what would have to be looked at is another facility or to store these files, which I understand is a combination of cold and heated storage, which would be sea cans possibly and then just a small heated one. Such a building would probably be better located near the health centre. Can the Minister just comment on that. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. Yes, I understand what the Member is saying, that could we find alternatives. You might not use a sea can for another storage, but you might use the Commissioner's building for another -- for another reason.

And so I don't know if there has been any effort to find an alternative location by the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority. But that's something that we can inquire about and look at the relative costs, what would it cost us to obtain and secure and heat a sea can or heat a portion of a sea can or a smaller one versus the cost of keeping the records where they are right now. So that's something to follow up. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I guess I would just urge the Minister to maybe to reach out to the Hay River Health Authority because as far as I know they put together a discussion paper or some numbers down on what it would cost to find a place or build a place to store those files closer to the health centre. Thank you. That's all the questions I have.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Did you want to respond, Minister? No. For anybody who hasn't spoken to long-term and continuing care. Member for Nunakut.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just in regards to -- I bring this up every year, and -- in regards to long-term care for my riding. We have home support. Thank them for, the staff for what they do and the home care support workers in the community. I want to thank you for all what you've done for our people and our elders. But I really think it's time to build a -- like I've been bringing up working on bringing up in Sachs, or Ulukhaktok, trying to work with the Minister to get that done with a private company that's able to build it. They will come, you know, so to say. But I'm really hoping that we could get into an agreement within the next year. You know, we got two years left in our -- our terms, and hopefully we can see that because my elders in the

community of Ulu and Paulatuk and Sachs, they're all not wanting to go to Inuvik. Travel there is too costly. Only time you'll get to see them if you're travelling on a medical, most likely. Or for work. I really think it's time to take that step to -- there's a design and -- that we could do to work with the community corporation, their business arms, and partnership, in trying to make a committee for the community with local leadership and people from the community to try to work together to find a way through this. So I'm wanting to know from the Minister if she's willing to work with us to try to get long-term facility in Paulatuk and Ulukhaktok. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the Member for inviting myself and others to tour his riding in July. And one morning I walked down the main street in Sachs Harbour and visited a couple of elders in their homes, and they were very clear with me that they had no interest in leaving their community, and they had no interest in leaving their homes. And so then the issue is how to support them in their homes, and home care is the way to do that.

It seems to me that what was needed there more than anything was housing for seniors as opposed to long-term care. So last spring -- feels about nine years ago -- but I think it was February, the Minister of Housing and I went to Fort Good Hope, and I saw an NWT Housing Corporation project of seniors housing, a 9-plex that had a common kitchen and a common recreation area, and I thought that that really was a great prototype for small communities that don't have the need for 24 beds, which is our standard, is to do it in increments of eight. But I thought that having this purpose built facility which has no barriers, roll in shower, you know, ramp to get into the building, that this was really a great way to help seniors be comfortable and stay in their communities at the same time. So I'm looking forward to engaging with you and with the Housing Corporation to see what we can do in those High Arctic communities where people want to stay, and should stay, to be in touch with their families, their language, and their culture. And so if we can make that happen, I'm certainly very interested in doing that. Thank you.

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

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Minister for that. I'll take two.

---Laughter.

Even a six bed. Even six -- six and six. But the best thing, though, that's really good to hear because it's going to help alleviate the pressure on my elders and families, because you know it as well as I do, our elders are so important to us and they're the ones that made the way, and that's why we're here today, and we're trying to leave them home so they could -- because once they go out the community, that's -- you know, it's not good. But I want to just comment, thank the Minister for that, and I look forward to working with her and the Housing Minister to get to Tuk. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Nunakput. Okay. So I have Member for Kam Lake and Member for Monfwi left, and then any other Members to ask questions of this? Okay. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, it looks like I ended up on your list at the perfect spot because it leads right into my question.

A lot of the information that we are seeing about long-term care facilities coming out, especially post-COVID, are saying just what exactly what the Minister is saying, is that the way to go is home care for care for our Elders and our seniors and prolonged quality of life, especially when you get to stay around family. And in addition to long-term care facilities, which we absolutely need, we -- some people just need a place to live and some people just need the ability of family to help them out. And so one of the things that comes up quite often is multigenerational housing. And I think this feeds in quite lovely as well to what the Member for Nunakput was talking about, is the ability to stay in your community, to live close to family, and to have the support of family. And so I'm wondering what work is being done on the part of Health and Social Services to coordinate with the Housing Corporation on multigenerational housing for Infrastructure, because I have noted that while that doesn't appear here, it also does not appear in the section for Housing Corporation. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I'm not aware that we're doing any work on multigenerational housing. Our role there is to make sure that the people are in those houses are receiving appropriate home care so that their needs are being met to age in place safely and happily. But I'll just ask Mr. Heath if he knows of any work that's going in this area. Thank you.

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

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. We're not actively working on that file.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'm sure that this will come up when we talk about main estimates as far as home care supports.

In order for people to be supported by home care policies and to be supported by home care workers, they need to have a home that is suitable to live in and so I guess this is more of a housing question, but I'm just wondering if Health and Social Services is actively working on housing for seniors then with the Housing Corporation, and I guess that that was addressed more specifically with Nunakput than in terms of elders facilities. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Well, we -- as mentioned earlier, we have made a \$5 million contribution to the Avens pavilion in the form of constructing -- providing money to construct their new kitchen and laundry facilities. So we're involved in that way. I don't think that we have other housing projects that -- that we're directly involved with as the housing provider but more, as I say, what we're -- what we're doing is -- is helping people to stay in their homes with personal support worker and nursing services. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. This is reference to the long-term care facility. But -- so at this time, I would like to say we are fortunate in Tlicho region that Wekweeti is going to be getting a nurse for the first time. So I think this is a good time to accommodate the long-term care program Ms. Green just mentioned, talked about. So what Wekweeti needs is that in order to promote the long-term care program, Wekweeti needs a health care facility of its own to accommodate a live-in quarter for the nurse, which Gameti has that facility already. Because right now, the health care centre or the office space is in the community government of Wekweeti's building, and it's in the public area. So I think if we can look into that further and put it, you know, to accommodate Wekweeti people so Elders don't have to go far from their home communities. So I think this a best time -- this is a good time now that we have a nurse coming in to accommodate Wekweeti for the new health centre. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I don't have the 20-year plan for infrastructure acquisition with me. But I'm sure that Mr. Heath does, and he can tell you whether there is a plan coming forward for Wekweeti. Thank you.

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

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. Wekweeti is obviously one of our smaller communities. We classify it as a Level A facility. The population's around approximately 250. It's our understanding the facility is in a reasonably good technical condition. It is on our needs assessment but it's quite a few years out. It's not planned for in the current five year capital plan. It's beyond that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Heath. Member for Monfwi, did you have any further questions?

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: I think I believe I heard him say population has to be 250. Did he say that? Or what did -- I didn't hear. I think that's what he said, hey?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. Heath, clarify.

MR. HEATH: I said in and around, there's not exactly 250, but communities of that size, not exactly 250. Thank you, Madam.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Yeah, I know there are other communities with less than that population they have that facility. So I don't think Wekweeti -- it's about over an hour with the flight. So I think it is time now that because they've been -- you know, we've been leaving them out -- the system has been leaving them out for so long. And for the first time, they're getting a nurse in their community so -- which is good, you know. And they are happy about it. But they would like to see more program and services being offered to their communities. And especially with the health care system, especially, you know, get a new health centre and that will promote jobs for the community as well and maybe have a local trained as a nurse. And there's going to be a lot of good opportunities that's going to be coming along with it too. So that's why I'm saying that, you know, it will be nice to put it in the capital plan. I know he said it's not in the -- within the five years but it should be noted it should be in the plan. And I'm not too sure if -- when was the last time they did a stats for Tlicho region for statistics on populations. Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you. I'm not sure, and I would be interested to know how often the plans are reviewed and updated. So that's a question I'll ask Mr. Heath.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. Heath.

MR. HEATH: Thank you, Madam Chair. So we wouldn't do the population projections. That would be done by the bureau of stats. I actually don't know offhand the last time that the bureau of stats updated it. I don't think it was that long ago. But we look at our 20-year needs assessment on an annual basis, and we do basically what they call a VFA report which is a technical assessment of our conditions of our facilities and we rank them on the basis of priority which is laid out in our capital plan.

This project is on our needs assessment but like I said previously, it's not within the five years. We will absolutely take a closer look at that facility in the future and have an update. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Mr. Heath. Any further questions? All right. So Health and Social Services, long-term and continuing care services, infrastructure investment, \$38,538,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Members, please turn now to the departmental summary on page 33, Health and Social Services ,2022-2023 Capital Estimates, \$49,614,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Does committee agree that consideration of the Department of Health and Social Services is now complete?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. And thank you, committee. Thank you to the Minister and her witnesses. And Sergeant-at-Arms, you may escort the witnesses from the Chamber.

Committee, we will now consider the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs. Does the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs wish to bring witnesses into the Chamber?

Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witness into the Chamber. Minister, please introduce your witness.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. On my right is Deputy Minister Laura Gareau. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Sorry, what was her last name?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: You want me to do it again? Deputy Minister Laura Gareau.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Welcome. The committee has agreed to forego general comments. Is the committee agreed to proceed to the detail in the tabled document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Committee, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs begins on page 64. We'll defer the departmental totals and review the estimates by activity, beginning on page 65 with regional operations with information items on page 66. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess the first question is can I confirm that this is 100 percent flow-through money that goes directly to communities.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: There's my yes for the year.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker -- Madam Chair. I appreciate -- I don't get a lot of yeses out of MACA so I'll cherish them.

I guess I'm a little frustrated that this number is actually going down. We added two and a half million dollars to the municipal funding gap last capital budget, and now it's not here. Can I get an updated figure of what, according to our own policy, the municipal funding gap for capital is at.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Come again, sorry, Madam Chair?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Member, can you repeat your question.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can I get an updated figure of what the municipal funding gap for capital is presently at. I see we're giving communities \$29 million here. If we were following the formula as we have set it, what should this number be. Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Members have asked us to work with NWTHC to look at what that gap is and we're working with them on that presently. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. I recognize there's some work being done to revisit the formula, which will then give us a new number, but I'm wondering right now what we quantify the gap being. I know we have a mandate commitment to reduce it by \$5 million. I know we've made a lot of progress on the operations side and some on the environmental. I believe this is the largest part of the municipal funding gap according to the current formula we've agreed to. Can I just get a numerical figure of how short it is right now?

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For the detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MS. GAREAU: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, the current municipal funding gap related to Cabinet is approximately \$20 million. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I guess I'll lead into what the Minister said there. I recognize that there's some disagreement about portions of the gap. You know, if a community pulls in a bunch of federal infrastructure money, that doesn't get factored into the formula. There's different ways to calculate needs and I'll note some communities have probably built far too much water and sewer lines for the size of them and some are on trucked water, and there's obviously a lot of engineering analysis that goes into assessing that. But can the Minister speak to when we expect to have a new formula agreed with NWTHC. The timeline for that work. Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. We may not agree with what the numbers are, but we are working with NWTHC. We've reached out. We're having conversations. And that's the extent of what I can tell you right now. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I'm wondering if the Minister can provide a little bit more on the needs assessment. I get some of the point of conflict is based on these kind of arguments of well, you can go get, you know, federal money for that, or perhaps you don't need a brand new pool, or you know, things like that. Can the Minister just speak to work we're doing to kind of re-evaluate what proper infrastructure looks like for a community.

I guess in the larger context, this is a very big conversation happening across Canada. Most of our municipalities are in just terrible fiscal situations and have out-built themselves in regards to infrastructure and can't afford to maintain it. Ours are obviously in a similar position.

I'm actually curious what the department's philosophy is. Are we telling, you know, certain communities not to build a certain way; are we providing direction like that? Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. No. The new deal, no. Real simple, no, we're not telling the communities what to do. We're giving them the budget. They're building what they see. In my previous experience in the department, I would tell people not to build a pool. Costs a whole bunch of money to operate a pool, whether it's staffing, water, chemicals, and that. Don't build an arena either. Sometimes the needs are there.

So I can tell you that I have had questions asked on this floor why I've said no in previous years, but now with the new deal, the communities have been -- we've given them the opportunity to do their direction. They understand their -- what they want to do, what they -- they're making choices. And so there's consequences when choices are being made. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. I guess just a comment. I think there's probably -- I recognize we have to let communities make their decisions on their infrastructure. There's some complication there in that a lot of that infrastructure we sometimes become ultimately responsible for. I also think that -- I mean, it's not -- the GNWT's not really in a position to tell people not to build a bunch of infrastructure you can't afford to maintain. But I think there's probably some very large policy work to be done to assess all of the community infrastructure, all of the GNWT infrastructure, and have a better picture of the needs assessment. I recognize the scale of such a project, but I just really

don't think our smaller communities have a handle on it, and I don't really believe our GNWT has a handle on it.

Can the Minister speak to the extent that we're doing work to really get a picture of how bad our infrastructure deficit is. I know we all just say we have a billion dollar infrastructure deficit. But I'll note the vast majority of infrastructure in the territory, in any province or territory is municipal. So what is the extent we're tracking that and what work is being done there? Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: First of all, I disagree with the Member that the communities know what they want. Communities understand what their needs are. They make some choices. So we need to be very respectful of that. I have a problem when somebody says, well, we need to tell them what to do. No, we need to work with them, we need to educate them, we need to also make them understand what the challenges are out there. So we work with the municipalities. I know the Member represents Yellowknife North. I represent small communities and they tell me what they need, whether it's a pool, whether it's an arena, whether it's a community hall, whether it's a new sewer lagoon. So we work with the communities to do it. So that's our job, not to tell them what to do. So I would have to disagree with the Member on that. But we're more than willing to work with the municipalities, and we have amazing staff that are able to be reached out to and we're able to work with them on that. So as far the infrastructure deficit, depending on who you talk to, we would see what the deficits are. So that's one of our challenges moving forward is -- that's why we're willing to work with NWTAC to see these challenges moving forward. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just trying to understand how the gap works. So say, I'm going to use Yellowknife as an example because then I'm not getting into a debate about communities.

If Yellowknife builds a new pool, that increases the needs for their capital. So does that then mean we adjust the formula and they are then required to new money, or is it just based on a per capita kind of design, or does it actually depend on what has been built in the community? Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. GAREAU: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the MLA is correct in some respects. We know that there's a direct link between the capital that community governments construct and the O and M required to operate that capital. The MLA's example of a new pool is a good one. There's a lot of new infrastructure in many community governments.

We do take into account the capital that's on the ground in terms of our O and M, in doing our O and M calculations. We have a budget for operations and maintenance for water and sewer, and we do come forward during the annual main estimates process, business planning process. As communities build more capital or they change their capital, it does have a corresponding impact on our O and M as well as the water-sewer funding policy. So we do those calculations internally in the department, consult with NWTAC if required, and then come forward during the annual capital planning process if there is any adjustments required. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yeah, I too just wanted to echo my colleague's disappointment to not see the extra two and a half million dollars here again this year. I know that the communities can really use that money.

I guess my question is of that money that was added to the MACA budgets, how many of that flowed through to the communities themselves and how much of that was taken up in either administrative or other MACA work and didn't actually get into the coffers of the community? Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: It went all to the communities. Thank you. Based on our formula.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay, that's good. I appreciate that. I guess just the question is with the ongoing cost of operations, etcetera, and maybe it's just me not being knowledgeable of how this works, but I can't see that the O and M is going to escalate over the next couple years particularly due to the supply chain issues etcetera with COVID. So are we expecting -- is there a formula that then adds money every year to this

number, or will it be a re-calculation coming. Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: For that detail, I'll turn to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MS. GAREAU: Thank you, Madam Chair. So on the capital budget, the \$29 million that you see in the draft capital estimates, that has previously -- that was increased just a couple years ago. Previously, it was \$28 million. We do not apply a forced growth factor or any sort of calculations. That's a standard figure that appears in the main estimates every year. And it's on the O and M and the operations and maintenance and the water and sewage side where we recognize the costs to community governments of operating their capital. And that's where we do any forced growth changes, things like, you know, increased cost of fuel or power or, you know, higher costs to hire staff and other operating costs experienced by community governments. That's where those are captured. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Okay, yeah, that makes sense to me. But I guess then my question would be as communities, you know, they're not deciding one year to the next to create infrastructure or build infrastructure, so will there not be an increased infrastructure cost or capital cost due to what's happened with COVID, say, for ongoing projects and how will communities deal with that increased cost if they -- you know, if this budget is stagnant for this year, or these COVID years. Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. First and foremost, you know, we focus on what the government does, but there's also own community-sourced funding that they be able to allocate, or generate. We also have gas tax. We also reach out every time the federal government comes to us with additional programs out there, we try to tap into that. Unfortunately, you don't see it into the capital plan but there's been lots and lots of money from the federal government that's come into the communities, but because it's only a one-time opportunity, it doesn't show up and it doesn't also show up in a deficit. So for further detail -- if I missed anything, I'll actually turn to the -- with your permission, to the deputy minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. GAREAU: Thank you, Madam Chair. MACA staff work with community governments to help them develop five-year capital plans. So annually, we sit down with community governments, help them review their plans, look at their infrastructure needs, look at what the cost impact is going to be.

We try to assist them with doing projections around, you know, supply chain issues, rising costs of materials, and what impact that may have on their ability to fund what capital.

Community governments also -- many of them have really good relationships with each other. You know, they get information from each other. They also frequently will hire technical expertise to help them, you know, develop their capital plan and to better understand what kind of costs they may face in the future so they do that planning ability annually to help recognize that costs may rise, and many community governments also have capital reserves to be able to draw on if they are experiencing cost overruns in their capital projects.

And as Minister Thompson stated, there is federal funding available as well for all community governments to assist with some priority projects. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I appreciate that. I think that the Minister and deputy minister are able to explain it more eloquently than I can ask about it and so I appreciate that they understood what I was trying to get at there. And I'm glad to hear that there are some capital reserves, but I would assume that's very community specific and not necessarily all communities would have that ability.

I guess more of a comment here too is just that this does seem like another area then, if we are -- have communities relying on federal funding, and we've talked about it lots with the housing situation, then we need those grant writers and people within those communities in that capacity there for them to be applying on all this federal funding, and I think again it crosses all the departments in the GNWT, and we've spoke to that. We had hoped there was going to be that position with the housing money. We don't think it was quite what we wanted it to be. So I would also say that MACA could very much be looking to increase grant writing capacity or funding capacity writers within the communities. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member. Minister, did you want to respond?

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Yeah, thank you. So the department actually works hand-in-hand with the communities. We have regional staff out there that will work with communities. So when federal funding comes out that fits into -- well, sometimes they may not fit in to what we're looking at, but we try to work with the communities to see how we can make it fit in to what they're trying to achieve. So it might be a different project that they may have to do later on instead of what they're trying to do. So we will look at it through that way. So we very much have staff that work together from headquarters in regions to work with them on it. So we agree that we need to be able to do that, but we do tap into it. And soon as the federal government starts providing opportunities for new programs, our headquarter staff is reaching out to them to have those conversations, what's the parameters, what the direction is and what we need to do. So we're very capable of doing that, but, again, it's about working with the communities and meeting their needs as they ask us to help. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Any further questions on this section? Seeing none. Municipal and Community Affairs -- oh, okay. Well, we're going to run out of time so then I'll just -- I'll have to carry it over until Monday, we're going to run out of time. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: I was scrambling looking for the motion about how to finish off the item we are on, but I think I have to move that the chair rise and report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. There's a motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour. Opposed. Motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

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

Report of Committee of the Whole

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 437-19(2) and would like to report progress. Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Do we have a seconder? Member for Sahtu. All those in favour. All those opposed. Motion is carried.

--Carried

MR. SPEAKER: Third reading of bills. Third reading of bills. Madam Clerk, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Ms. Franki-Smith): [Translation]

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' statements
3. Members' statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of visitors in the gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral questions
8. Written questions
9. Return to written questions
10. Replies to Commissioner's address
11. Petitions
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
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
 - Bill 23, an Act to Amend the Public Utilities Act
 - Bill 24, An Act to Amend the Revolving Funds Act
 - Bill 29, Resource Royalty Information Disclosure Statute Amendment Act
 - Bill 30, An Act to Amend the Aurora College Act
 - Bill 31, An Act to Amend the Pharmacy Act

- Bill 32, An Act to Amend the Northern Employees Benefits Services Pension Plan Act
- Bill 33, National Indigenous Peoples Day Act
- Bill 36, An Act to Amend the Territorial Court Act
- Tabled Document 437-19(2), Capital Estimates 2022-2023
- Tabled Document 438-19(2), Supplementary Estimates (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 2, 2021-2022
- Tabled Document 439-19(2), Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 2, 2021-2022
- Tabled Document 466-19(2), Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures and Borrowing Authorization), No. 4, 2020-2021

21. Report of Committee of the Whole

22. Third Reading of Bills

23. Orders of the Day

[Translation Ends]

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Madam Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Monday, November 29th, 2021, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 2:02 p.m.