



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

2nd Session

Day 93

19th Assembly

HANSARD

Tuesday, February 22, 2022

Pages 3411 - 3440

The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

Speaker

Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.
(Mackenzie Delta)

Hon. Diane Archie

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

Mr. Ronald Bonnetrouge

(Deh Cho)

Ms. Caitlin Cleveland

(Kam Lake)

Hon. Paulie Chinna

(Sahtu)
Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation
Minister responsible for Homelessness
Minister responsible for the Public Utilities Board
Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission

Hon. Caroline Cochrane

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

Mr. Richard Edjericon

(Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh)

Hon. Julie Green

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

Mr. Jackie Jacobson

(Nunakput)

Mr. Rylund Johnson

(Yellowknife North)

Ms. Frieda Martselos

(Thebacha)

Ms. Katrina Nokleby

(Great Slave)

Mr. Kevin O'Reilly

(Frame Lake)

Ms. Lesa Semmler

(Inuvik Twin Lakes)

Mr. Rocky Simpson

(Hay River South)

Hon. R.J. Simpson

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

Hon. Shane Thompson

(Nahendeh)
Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs
Minister of Environment and Natural Resources
Minister of Lands
Minister responsible for Youth

Hon. Caroline Wawzonek

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

Ms. Jane Weyallon-Armstrong

(Monfwi)

Officers

Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Tim Mercer

Deputy Clerks

Mr. Glen Rutland
Ms. Kim Wickens

Committee Clerks

Mr. Michael Ball
Ms. Jennifer Franki-Smith
Ms. Cynthia James

Law Clerks

Ms. Sheila MacPherson
Mr. Toby Kruger

Box 1320

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

Tel: (867) 767-9010 Fax: (867) 920-4735 Toll-Free: 1-800-661-0784

<http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRAYER	3411
BUDGET ADDRESS	3411
MINISTERS' STATEMENTS.....	3417
Stanton Territorial Hospital Obstetrics Unit Update (Green).....	3417
MEMBERS' STATEMENTS	3418
COVID-19 Restrictions and the Economy (Rocky Simpson).....	3418
Pandemic Mental Health Resources (Jacobson).....	3419
Indigenous Hiring (Semmler).....	3419
Alberta Tar Sands Tailings (O'Reilly).....	3420
Caribou Management (Nokleby).....	3420
NICO Mine – Fortune Minerals (Martselos).....	3421
Effects of COVID-19 on Education (Cleveland).....	3422
Fort Good Hope Seniors Home (Johnson).....	3422
Municipal Funding Gaps and Aging Infrastructure (Weyallon-Armstrong).....	3423
Eulogy for Sherri Thompson (Thompson).....	3423
REPLIES TO BUDGET ADDRESS	3423
Mr. Johnson's Reply	3423
ORAL QUESTIONS.....	3472
TABLING OF DOCUMENTS.....	3438
CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS.....	3439
REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE.....	3439
ORDERS OF THE DAY	3439

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Tuesday, February 22, 2022****Members Present**

Hon. Diane Archie, Hon. Frederick Blake Jr., Mr. Bonnetrouge, Hon. Paulie Chinna, Ms. Cleveland, Hon. Caroline Cochrane, Mr. Edjericon, 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 1:31 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.): Budget address. Minister responsible for Finance.

Budget Address

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is the third budget of the 19th Assembly. It is an opportunity to restate, and reset, our vision for the economic future of the Northwest Territories.

The first budget came only months after this government was sworn in and was an occasion to describe our approach to managing the government's finances and, more important, our vision for how we would work to improve the overall fiscal outlook for the Northwest Territories. Before that first budget session was even concluded, the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Our second budget in 2021-2022 was focused on stability: Both in terms of supporting the health and well-being of residents and the economy through the pandemic but also by ensuring that government continued to do all the many and varied things that are expected and needed of us during times of uncertainty.

[Translation] I would ask you to think back to those pre-COVID days, and to the vision delivered in the first budget when we committed to being open to taking risks and promised to promote a spirit of creativity and innovation in the way we deliver government programs and services.

Finding comfort with risk, seeking and supporting innovation, and building a culture of collaboration and value-driven efficiency in the delivery of government programs and services is what we were striving for, what we have begun and what we will continue to do with this Budget. [Translation ends]

Keeping to, and delivering on, that vision has not been easy in the last two years.

We have, and will, continue to support residents and businesses through times of crisis. We have worked with the federal government to identify needs and secured flexibility in federal funding programs. Moreover, we have filled gaps not addressed by federal funding through creative and unique programming. In doing this, we have assisted residents and businesses through a pandemic that has been unprecedented in my lifetime. At the same time, we have supported communities through a devastating flood season.

Even while providing relief and recovery from a once in a generation crisis, we have also managed to maintain the vast breadth of government services across all regions and communities. As well, despite these unprecedented challenges, all departments are largely on target to advance and achieve the mandate priorities of the 19th Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT will continue to be bold when it comes to supporting our people, communities and businesses. However, bold does not necessarily always mean easy or popular. Nor does it necessarily mean immediate.

Making flashy announcements, hoping that new money will solve long-standing problems, is often the easier political path. But what sometimes most needs doing takes time. Changing an organization the size of a provincial or territorial government takes time; changing a society takes even longer. The goal is not headlines to last the next few days or the term of this government. The goal is to influence the path of the Northwest Territories for the next five or even ten years.

This budget is not flashy, but it offers stability in a time of continued uncertainty. With that stability, we will continue to deliver on our original promises of building, fostering, and supporting innovation, creativity, and efficiency both within government and the private sector.

One might say that the themes of this budget are consistency and patience, but that is only true because those values allow us to continue to pursue the core values I have spoken of in the two previous budgets: Using innovation and creativity to find efficiencies and also to build a strong economic future that benefits Northwest Territories residents.

Today's budget address will provide examples of where we continue to build on key initiatives for the future while also remaining present in the needs of today.

This budget includes operations spending of \$2.1 billion. This is an increase of 3 percent from 2021-2022. Additionally, the Legislature approved a capital plan in December that included \$502 million in capital spending for 2022-2023. Revenues are projected to be \$2.3 billion in 2022-2023. This is an increase of 2.3 percent from what is projected for 2021-2022. After including the supplementary reserve and other adjustments, the 2022-2023 Main Estimates show a projected operating surplus of \$131 million.

In addition to the budget, I am also pleased to present an Economic Review. This review shows our economy is poised to experience modest growth in the coming years as we emerge from the COVID pandemic. However, economic risks which may dampen economic success need to be managed.

Mr. Speaker, in this address I intend to outline our plan to use this government's third budget to build on the work we have already undertaken to fulfil our mandate priorities while also managing and providing relief from many unforeseen challenges. I will first provide an overview of the economic outlook, then outline how the economic indicators will affect our fiscal results and, finally, I will outline some of the specific initiatives this government will undertake in 2022-2023 to both fulfill our mandate and ensure the long-term vitality of the Northwest Territories.

Economic Outlook

Our short-term economic indicators are positive: Preliminary projections suggest that the Northwest Territories grew 7.3 percent in 2021 and we are forecasting the economy to remain close to this level in 2022-2023. Moreover, investment in the economy is increasing. New investment in the territory was 13 percent higher in 2021 than in 2020 with private investment rising 18.8 percent and public investment increasing 11.5 percent.

The employment rate also continues to trend upwards, rising 5 percent in 2021. The unemployment rate decreased from 8.5 percent in 2020 to 5 percent in 2021. Residents earned more in 2021 as well. Average weekly earnings remained high compared to the national average with Northwest Territories employees earning on average 35 percent more than other Canadians. Average household incomes continue to be higher in the Northwest Territories than in any other jurisdiction.

However, there are near-term difficulties that threaten economic growth. Although the Northwest

Territories is rebounding, the recovery has been uneven across sectors, industries, and demographics. Industries such as retail, construction, and public administration have all returned to pre-pandemic levels, while hard-hit sectors such as tourism, hospitality, mining, and wholesale trade continue to struggle.

Long-term challenges, such as maturing diamond mines, an aging population, a lack of economic diversification, and declining private sector activity will depress future growth unless there are substantial changes. Most pressing of these long-term challenges is that the diamond mining industry, which has been the engine of the private sector economy for the last two decades, may see all existing diamond mines close by 2030.

We cannot let the fact that these challenges are still in the medium to long term allow us to not begin responding to them today. Rather, the fact that there are these challenges on the horizon should motivate action and innovation. The Northwest Territories has the potential to grow and contribute to economic resilience within the rest of Canada. Indigenous governments within the territories' boundaries are poised to play expanded roles in economic diversification and infrastructure development; environmental, social and governance are already factors in the way the Northwest Territories resource industry does business; and, the fact that our territory is on the front lines of climate change makes us an obvious place for research and investments in initiatives that can help green economies.

Potential is just that; it will be realized and flourish sooner and stronger within healthy and well-educated communities. These communities support opportunities for the opening of new businesses, foster the growth of local enterprise, nurture a healthy and well-trained domestic labour force and encourage overall investor confidence.

Mr. Speaker, all of these goals are reflected in the priorities and mandate of the 19th Assembly. That is why it has been important to ensure not only relief and recovery but to also keep a steady eye on achieving our mandate priorities.

Fiscal results and outlook

Mr. Speaker, last year I said that I was cautiously optimistic about our longer-term fiscal outlook. As I just observed, there are significant challenges that we need to be prepared for but so far I believe my optimism has been justified as we saw our economy grow and employment rebound.

This positive economic outlook is reflected in our fiscal situation. We closed 2020-2021 with a \$67 million operating surplus instead of the \$31 million deficit projected last year due primarily to

improved revenues from federal supports and savings in program delivery.

For the current fiscal year, direct federal supports to businesses and individuals have greatly improved our own source revenues, which are \$86 million higher than we forecasted in the 2021-2022 budget. Although there were additional costs related to emergency support, an operating surplus of \$28 million is projected for the current fiscal year.

We are forecasting a surplus of \$131 million in 2022-2023 and continued surpluses going forward to 2025-2026. We plan to use these operational surpluses to help fund planned capital investment of \$1.34 billion between now and 2025-2026. However, the surpluses won't be sufficient to pay for all this needed infrastructure. We will continue to need to borrow. We expect to end 2021-2022 with total debt of \$1.5 billion, \$345 million under the federally-imposed borrowing limit. This debt is expected to grow to \$1.7 billion by the end of 2022-2023.

Good fiscal governance comes from deliberate actions, not ad hoc reactions to a snapshot in time. We still need careful expenditure management. In our fiscal planning for 2023-2024, we are proposing to limit forced growth to \$10 million and new initiatives to \$5 million annually. If we want to do more, we will be calling on departments to find the means from within existing resources.

I am optimistic that we can control future spending through internal savings and continuing to find more value from the \$2.1 billion that we spend without having to reduce programs and services. This has been the fiscal goal since our first year in the 19th Assembly and is the cornerstone of our government renewal work. I look forward to continuing to work with all Members of the 19th Assembly to find creative and effective solutions to the fiscal challenges we face together.

Revenue Initiatives

Mr. Speaker, we are not introducing new taxes in the 2022-2023 budget. In keeping with past practice, property tax rates will be increased with inflation. We will undertake the scheduled five-year fee review which could yield changes in fee amounts for 2022-2023.

The financial hardship faced by many residents and businesses and the ongoing economic uncertainties owing to the fallout of COVID-19 make this not a time for increasing income taxes to improve our fiscal situation. We will continue to monitor the data on who is paying taxes in the territory and on what kinds of income. At the moment, we have only a small number of individuals who could be potentially in a higher tax bracket. This will bring minimal benefit to

the government but substantial risk to our competitive position compared to other jurisdictions who also compete for skilled labour.

We will honour our commitments under the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change and raise the carbon tax rate to \$50 per tonne of greenhouse gas emissions on July 1, 2022. Our current carbon pricing system was implemented to encourage the reduction of fossil fuel while not adding to the cost of living or providing barriers to economic development. These carbon tax rate increases also come with an increase to the cost of living benefit of \$260 per adult and \$300 per dependent under the age of 18 years effective July 1, 2022.

Further, \$5.9 million will go to rebates on heating fuel, diesel used to generate electricity for distribution, and for the large emitter program.

Expenditures

The 2022-2023 budget continues our commitment to using our resources efficiently to deliver needed programs and services in times of uncertainty while keeping an eye to ensuring that we unlock the strong future potential of the Northwest Territories.

Our \$2.1 billion operating budget includes new funding of \$95 million which will go to the key mandate priorities.

Before I provide the details of new spending, I want to talk about how the other \$2 billion in proposed spending in the 2022-2023 budget provides stability and encourages innovation. Not all things that we do, and should do, needs new money. To make this point, I want to first highlight, not the biggest expenditure items in this budget, but rather some of the changes we have been quietly making to improve without incurring significant or new expenditure lines.

We are already seeing notable progress under the Government Renewal Initiative announced in the first budget. Departments have been coordinating in their efforts to gather the information that decision-makers need to be able to effectively allocate limited resources in a way that provides more value for the dollars we spend. Largely funded internally, the Government Renewal Initiative is already producing meaningful evidence for decision-makers to make better choices about how to allocate government resources. More important, this information gathering stage is paying dividends in changing how we think about service delivery government-wide.

Movement towards greater whole-of-government thinking is perfectly exemplified by the Integrated Service Delivery initiative. Integrated Service Delivery makes government services accessible in a

timely and flexible manner, recognizes that not everyone starts from the same point, and ensures all members of the community are treated with dignity and respect. Multiple departments are advancing this work together without new resources by trying to find ways to work together differently and put Northwest Territories residents at the center of service delivery. Making it easier for people to access services allows for greater support for people and families and more effective and efficient service of GNWT programs.

How we use the half a billion in capital dollars is as important as the capital budget itself. We are working on our mandate promise to ensure that GNWT spending maximizes benefits to Northwest Territories residents and businesses by reviewing our procurement policies and practices. We are also working with Indigenous government partners to increase their opportunities for equity participation in future territorial projects so that together we can encourage the development of northern skills and trades and provide more opportunities for local contractors. This collaboration without new spending will help achieve the end goal of ensuring that more of GNWT infrastructure spending stays in the North.

The Red Tape Reduction Working Group has provided some recommendations that, again, do not require more financial resources to help reduce the regulatory barriers that cost businesses time and money. I am pleased with departments' acceptance of their recommendations and proud of the way they have embraced an examination of their program delivery from the end user's perspective. For example, one department agreed to change the way it processes different types of applications to speed up the time in which the end user gets a certificate. The GNWT has also launched an eServices portal for greater online access to government services and is working to develop the necessary policies and assess the technical solutions required to enable electronic signatures within our programs and services.

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls initiative was from the outset a truly collaborative effort and an example of what we can accomplish when we work together. We are working with Indigenous governments and organizations, communities, non-government organizations, and people with lived-experience to develop an action plan. This plan makes the Calls for Justice an integral part of how we operate as a public service and begins the necessary process of addressing colonialism and racial and gendered discrimination from all levels of government and public institutions. This will result in meaningful change, again without new funding but, rather, a change in how we approach what we do and why we do it.

Implementing the Public Lands Act involves every Department of Lands' employee and a temporary reassignment of nine staff to a dedicated project team to bring the legislation into force. The department is also reorganizing the land administration division. Both of these initiatives will be achieved without additional dollars. By the time they are done at the end of this year, they will have rolled up a lot of red tape by merging the territorial and Commissioner land administration units and establishing quality customer service standards for land authorization transactions.

I would be remiss if I neglected to state my deep appreciation for the ways departments covered additional demands for COVID supports from within budgets and while doing their regular jobs as well. For example, the Departments of Environment and Natural Resources and Health and Social Services worked together to use existing staff and facilities to conduct COVID wastewater testing in addition to their regular duties. Similarly, public servants from across departments accepted transfer assignments, voluntary redeployments, and cross appointments to help us respond to COVID-19 such as renewable resource officers stepping up to be public health officers. The Wage Top-Up Program, which provided temporary financial assistance for over 3800 low-wage workers between April 2020 and August 2021, was delivered by a few people in the Department of Finance in addition to their regular duties. The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment amended its entrepreneur and business support programs so businesses could quickly pivot to safe operations during COVID restrictions and prepare for success after the pandemic recedes. The department also increased the flexibility of the Mining Incentive Program to make it easier for exploration work to continue.

Mr. Speaker, improvements from within, and without new money, has been our approach as a first resort. This is the kind of creativity, combined with efficiency I have spoken about in previous years, that is starting to bear fruit. One benefit is that even in times of fiscal uncertainty we have the flexibility to spend money to protect our existing programs and services and to make enhancements to better serve Northerners.

For starters, we cannot deliver government programs and services without excellent and conscientious public servants. To properly compensate our public service and maintain the Government of the Northwest Territories' reputation as an employer of choice, we have included \$20 million in this budget to address wage and benefit increases under collective bargaining agreements for public service employees and increased remuneration for judges.

Using Northwest Territories land and water resources sustainably and protecting these

resources for future generations is a key priority of this government. We propose to spend over \$120 million, or 6 percent of our annual budget, next year to manage Northwest Territories' natural resources.

Adapting to climate change is woven into everything we do, from maintaining and improving existing capital assets to building new infrastructure. We are aided in our efforts by federal funding under the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Fund since 2018. In next year's budget, we propose to use \$4.7 million to further the various programs under this initiative. Some of this funding is reallocated from previous years when projects were delayed.

The drastic decline in the Bathurst and Bluenose barren-ground caribou herds since 2015 is a major concern. The GNWT is working closely with its co-management partners to support recovery of these herds using the best available scientific, local, and traditional knowledge. In this budget, we propose to add \$1 million to support recovery of these herds through actions on harvest, predator and habitat management, protection of caribou habitat, and enhanced research and monitoring.

We spent \$31 million last fiscal year and expect to spend a further \$34 million by the end of this fiscal year on our COVID response. We are pleased that the COVID Secretariat is expected to spend \$6 million less than budgeted this year but are naturally disappointed that our hopes that the pandemic would be over in 2021-2022 are unlikely to be realized. The COVID Secretariat budget for 2022-2023 is \$11.9 million. We continue to hope that this year the coronavirus will fade from pandemic to endemic and become more like an illness that we can guard against with vaccines, treatments, and improved capacity in the health care system to respond to case demand. We will assess what resources this shift to endemic may require over 2022-2023. Federal funding of \$265,000 under the Health Services Agreement will provide additional support for activities related to COVID-19 related immunization activities including increased vaccine coverage.

We are all aware of human resource and financial pressures on our health and social services system that existed before the pandemic and will continue after it ends. Excluding the COVID Secretariat and pandemic-related measures, next fiscal year we propose to spend \$569 million on health and social services to provide a stable system that can deliver programs whenever they are needed.

This dedication to our resident's health is evidenced by our proposal in this budget to include \$23 million in additional resources for our health and wellness priorities and to reduce pressures in the health care system. We have allocated an additional \$1.7 million for mental health and addictions that will enhance funding for external organizations to hire counsellors

and continue to support activities that are being designed to reflect unique community needs. New funding of \$2.9 million under the Northern Wellness Agreement, and \$1.4 million for Indigenous wellness and patient advocate services, will also help support this priority in different ways.

This budget will also advance progress on our priority to help seniors age in place. Recommended in this budget is an additional \$645,000 for increased demand for the senior citizen supplementary benefit and \$884,000 for various services for seniors in home and community care, respite and elder day programs, and chronic disease management.

This budget also proposes \$5 million to further our objective of increasing resident health care professionals by at least 20 percent, including \$1.33 million for additional physician specialists to ensure that life sustaining internal medicine, general surgery, obstetrics, and pediatric services are available in the territory.

Additionally, \$1.03 million is allocated to maintain four territorial positions and related services for cancer prevention and care; and \$1 million is committed to support additional new midwife positions in Hay River, Fort Smith and Yellowknife.

We are fortunate to have \$7.1 million in federal funding under the Territorial Health Investment Fund to help close special health care gaps and address challenges faced by the territory for medical travel, primary health care reform, and system sustainability. The fund will deliver system sustainability to transform the territorial health and social services delivery system into a well-functioning system focused on continuous improvement of quality service delivery at affordable cost.

In November 2019, the 9-1-1 system went live in all 33 Northwest Territories communities and although telephone subscribers are charged a monthly fee, we are still subsidizing the program. We propose additional one-time funding of \$507,000 to assist with cost pressures in the 9-1-1 system pending a review of long-term needs.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are key partners in supporting safe communities. We are asking for almost \$1.9 million in this budget to provide the RCMP with additional officers in Behchoko and Tuktoyaktuk. We are also directing more resources to the Internet Child Exploitation Unit and have increased funding for the Northwest Territories Guns and Gangs Strategy by \$150,000.

Recent enhancements to service delivery in Legal Aid have increased demand for services beyond the ability to provide with current resources. This budget includes \$442,000 for additional positions in Legal

Aid and Court Services to address increased workloads.

There is a request in this budget for \$478,000 to buy more winter road salt, and \$135,000 for an additional highway transport officer to help improve road safety.

Mr. Speaker, included in our mandate is the commitment to reduce the municipal funding gap by \$5 million by the end of this Assembly. We are working towards this goal by proposing to add \$922,000 to our contribution base funding to community governments in budget 2022-2023. This will bring the total community contribution funding for operations and maintenance to \$57.6 million, leaving us to find another \$744,000 during the term of this government to achieve the total \$5 million increase.

Mr. Speaker, this budget also gives us further resources to reduce poverty. We are asking for \$860,000 in additional funding to combat poverty through the Anti-Poverty Fund. We are committed to the success of our programs to support healthy families and are recommending \$984,000 more in this budget to expand the Healthy Family Program into two more communities, address increased demand for services in the office of the public guardian, and for child and family legal services.

Enhanced programs at day shelters and sobering programs pay dividends by reducing the demand for other government services. We are proposing \$1 million in enhanced funding for shelters in Yellowknife, Hay River, and Fort Simpson.

The \$260,000 requested in this budget for enhancements to the Hunters and Trappers Disaster Compensation Program will help support harvesters when natural disasters happen.

This budget includes \$11 million in capital funding to help the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation continue its work in support of the 19th Legislative Assembly priority to increase the number of affordable homes and reduce the core housing need along with other actions related to housing. We are also proposing \$947,000 in increased funding to the corporation for increased operations and maintenance costs for the new federally-funded public housing units.

Mr. Speaker, education in all its forms has always been the key ingredient in ensuring viable futures for Northwest Territories residents to fully participate in a vibrant and diversified society. Access to education is critical if residents are to take advantage of higher-paying quality employment. We need to continue to improve education attainment levels to ensure our children have every opportunity to lead fulfilling and productive lives. We propose to spend \$211 million directly on education-related programs

in next year's budget, including \$7.3 million in new funds.

We cannot educate our children for their futures without teachers. This budget includes \$4.7 million for increased teachers' salary and benefits. We are also allocating funding for training for teachers to teach multi-grade classes and for enhanced supports for principals in small schools. Furthermore, we have committed \$1.8 million for inclusive schooling and education for children with complex needs and for modernizing the K-12 curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, we know from experience that investments in affordable and quality early childhood care and education reaps multiple benefits. It helps prepare children for K-12 education, enhances equality of access to educational opportunities, and gives parents improved employment options. It also increases economic growth and productivity. For that reason, we are also proposing an additional \$500,000 to increase access to child care spaces, and \$298,000 to improve the quality of learning for our youngest children who use these child care spaces. This is part of a broader strategy to move towards universal \$10-a-day child care in the Northwest Territories within five years.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the fundamentals of the Northwest Territories economy can be made solid over the long-term by the investments we are making now. There is no doubt that an economic recovery is underway but continuing global economic uncertainty suggests that our attention now should be on supports to help the economy grow for the benefit of Northerners. Taking care of what we can do with certainty now will continue to pave the way for more strategic actions in the future.

We are asking for \$1.1 million for the tourism 2025 Roadmap to Recovery Strategy to help the tourism sector get ready to welcome back travelers on March 1st. The tourism industry has experienced unprecedented challenges over the last two years and this strategy lays out the roadmap to assist with that sector's recovery. This investment will provide support for community tourism coordinators in four additional community governments and strengthen tourism capacity in these communities.

Along with more resources for the tourism strategy itself, we propose to add \$169,000 to the base funding for utility costs at territorial parks so that our parks continue to be a welcoming place for visitors.

The Makerspace YK in Yellowknife and the Arts, Crafts, and Technology Micro-Manufacturing Centre in Inuvik have proven their value and we propose to add \$389,000 to extend makerspace services to other communities. These funds will also support an action plan to guide building the knowledge economy

through research, entrepreneurship, connectivity, infrastructure, collaboration, and capacity building.

We are taking action on our priority to increase food security through locally produced, harvested, and affordable food by including an additional \$188,000 to increase our participation in the Canadian Agricultural Partnership Program.

We are unwavering in our commitment to support resource development in a responsible way. This support starts with attracting interest in mineral exploration. To further the Mineral Development Strategy, we are asking for \$100,000 to support Indigenous capacity building and participation in the resource sector. We also propose to expand the Mining Incentive Program with an additional \$300,000 to attract and increase support for early stage and advanced exploration projects.

Our support for resource development includes clear and transparent rules to ensure that we work together to maintain a sustainable industry. We will continue our work to develop a modern suite of regulations and systems to effectively implement the Mineral Resources Act and are including \$304,000 in this budget to respond to federal policy initiatives, including regulatory changes under the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

The budget includes the first \$12.2 million for annual services payment for the Tlicho All-Season Road public-private partnership. These annual payments will pay for the road's construction over time and annual maintenance for the next 25 years. Building the Tlicho All-Season Road was an innovative partnership and proof positive of our commitment to use our capital dollars as an opportunity to build capacity in the Northern labour force.

We intend to further strengthen our efforts to bring innovation into investments in the economy. We are advancing three critical infrastructure projects: The Taltson Hydro Expansion; Mackenzie Valley Highway; and The Slave Geological Province Corridor

The 2022-2023 Capital Plan approved last December includes \$463 million for the government's own investments and \$29 million for community infrastructure investments. When we include the \$11 million in this budget for the NWT Housing Corporation investments, our total planned infrastructure investment in the next fiscal year will be over one-half billion dollars.

The 2022-2023 Capital Plan also includes infrastructure investments that support program delivery. This includes \$47 million for long-term care facilities, health centres, and the Stanton Legacy Building renovations, and \$22 million for investments in schools.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my Cabinet colleagues, the Standing Committees, the business community, non-profit organizations, and all the other groups and budget dialogue participants for the input and advice they have provided in putting the budget together. It is with this kind of civil engagement and dialogue that we continue to define ourselves as a consensus government.

[Translation] The territorial economy is poised to emerge from the COVID pandemic different but stronger and this budget serves to help manage the uncertainty that may dampen future economic success. Rather than holding to our pledge that the investments we do not [sic] make build on the work we have already undertaken to fulfil our mandate priorities and our demonstrated commitments to provide relief from many unforeseen challenges. [Translation ends].

The Northwest Territories is, ultimately, a small community of people although spread across one of the largest geographic regions of Canada, made up of different nations, and cultures, with 11 official languages.

These times of crisis have put potential challenges faced in this territory front and center in everyone's minds. It has also shown us that it is possible to come together as communities and as a government to adapt quickly and take measured risks in the face of uncertainties. It is time to use that motivation and that confidence to work together to ensure the Northwest Territories remains a place that is dynamic, full of opportunity and committed to equity, compassion, and reconciliation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Colleagues we'll take a short recess.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Health and Social Services.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 201-19(2): STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL OBSTETRICS UNIT UPDATE

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I am happy to announce that, starting immediately, we are resuming labour and delivery services for all NWT residents.

This means that any NWT resident who is due to deliver a child can now expect their delivery to happen in the Northwest Territories starting today.

This represents a more rapid reopening than announced at the end of last month. The improved staffing outlook through March and April has made this change possible.

At this time residents from Nunavut, who are normally served by Stanton Territorial Hospital, will continue to travel to Edmonton but I am assured that the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority is working to resume services also for these individuals as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize the impact this service reduction has had on families; it hasn't been easy. I want to thank all of the individuals and families who travelled to deliver their children to create space for emergency and urgent care at Stanton during this period of low staffing. Your sacrifice helped us ensure continued care for those who needed it locally in urgent and emergency situations.

I would also like to recognize the staff at Stanton who have worked diligently throughout this reduction to continue providing services while planning to resume them. I would like to thank the casual and agency staff who have come in to fill shifts and add capacity as we move toward delivering additional services.

I want to again emphasize that the top priority for our health and social services system is safety. Current staffing levels will ensure safe care for our patients and clients; however, if there is any point in the future where staffing levels are limited and safe care is not possible, we will adjust services as necessary.

It's worth noting that the recent obstetrics unit shutdown is the first since 2002. In other words, once in 20 years. It's a rare event.

Stanton and Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority leadership will continue to do everything possible to avoid any further service reductions, but the current realities of the nationwide shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, coupled with the impacts of COVID-19, particularly isolation requirements and illness for impacted staff, are a reality we must manage within.

As we proceed with resuming services, Stanton will continue to recruit staff through a variety of means, and is committed to addressing the concerns raised by current staff. We know that retaining the great staff we have is even more critical than attracting new talent.

Leadership will continue to work to ensure adequate staffing in this area by exhausting all possible avenues for recruitment, including pursuing indeterminate staff, casual and agency nurses, and training and development of local staff to gain the skills needed to work in this specialized area.

In closing, I would like to recognize and sincerely thank our permanent local staff who continue to be the backbone of the obstetrics unit and who have worked incredibly hard to orient newcomers and continue to deliver the high-quality services residents have come to expect and deserve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 915-19(2): COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS AND THE ECONOMY

MR. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to speak about restrictions and a post-pandemic economic strategy for the Northwest Territories.

More than ever, we need a working plan beyond the budget address.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is now safe to say that many, not all people, both vaccinated and unvaccinated, are tired of living within those restrictions currently in place. They want to know what is being done to move past them. We currently have existing orders in place but orders without effective monitoring and enforcement are only recommendations at best. This is where I see us at this point.

Business owners and their staff are tired of trying to monitor and enforce restrictions this government put in place. Business owners and their workers, who have no training around monitoring or enforcement, are being harassed and threatened by customers. It is having an impact on their mental wellbeing, which is transferred to their home life.

Mr. Speaker, as we transition out of this pandemic, it is imperative that this government increase its focus on the economy. Access to goods, supplies and labour is limited, all which impact the cost of living and doing business in the NWT. Our communities, residents, and businesses know what is needed. We must listen to them and follow up on the promises we make.

Mr. Speaker, needs throughout the NWT vary, so our focus on the economy must be multi-faceted and consider the artisan in the community that cannot sell goods as there are no tourists; the small motel owner in a community without customers; contractors struggling to find work and the security needed to take it on; the resource sector which contributes to our GDP. Jobs, training and businesses was in decline prior to the pandemic and we must find ways to turn that around.

Mr. Speaker, we need to focus on what we can control, and that is physical and social infrastructure. As well, our current legislation and policies limit not only small businesses but severely impact those larger projects that go through rigorous regulatory review.

Mr. Speaker, as current COVID business supports come to an end and the Government of Canada turns off the tap, it is important that this government revisit the Emerging Stronger document and revise as necessary. We have heard little of it since it was first made public. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Mr. Speaker, if we expect to strengthen our economy, we must first start with ending the public health emergency and restrictions which have been a barrier to some sectors over the last two years. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Premier at the appropriate time.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 916-19(2):
PANDEMIC MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Supportive mental health post-COVID-19.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a long two years in the Delta. Public health orders limit social gatherings, the activities in the Nunakput riding across the territory. My constituents are the most isolated communities in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, following the health orders after the shutdown of bingos and down of sports activities for the kids shut down, you know, the six weeks of darkness that we put up with, it's been really tough on the communities. At the end of the day, the community hamlets have lost revenues in regards to the only way they get a chance to fundraise is through bingos and they stretch all their monies to host different gatherings and stuff like that, but we're putting them in a catch-22 now.

We're the ones that -- with COVID-19, we shut down everything. Now we have to try to reallocate money where there's no money there. We're shutting down community ice rinks. We're looking at community halls in my riding. Mr. Speaker, that's not right.

We have to look at more important and the shutdown of the people who stayed home with each other under COVID-19, we're now important to building back relationships we rely on and life as a whole, keep our children safe, our families, our elders, our youth, and the social circles that we keep using in the community.

It's been a tough two years. You know, in the Beaufort Delta, we have the highest rates of teen births, highest level of heavy drinkers in the NWT, highest number of people hospitalized in self-injury, highest rates of suicide in the NWT in the Beaufort Delta, Mr. Speaker.

We need help. Our people need help, our constituents. You know, we're all in a tough position. We live it every day because I know when I was in the pandemic, I was at home in Tuk. I see people suffering every day.

You know, and another big one was the stresses of people and the youth and everybody like that, and then it got to, you know, to become social media, the means of, you know, it ended up sometimes people being bullied. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Mr. Speaker, again, social media has become the means of lateral violence in our communities. That's got to stop. And that's right across the whole territory. Mr. Speaker, people are not mentally healthy. We need to help them. We have to provide, getting the health care system to bring people in to help people to get through it because the epidemic time is coming now. And, you know, our government is talking about the public health emergency pandemic to an endemic, the great deal of healing that needs to happen in our communities, Mr. Speaker. We can't just -- it's not just going to stop. We got to heal together as a whole, and that's our nine communities in the Beaufort Delta have to do that together. And we need help from this government and our Health Minister to not just give a 1-800 number to call. We have to have boots on the ground in the communities. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Health Minister at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 917-19(2):
INDIGENOUS HIRING

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to let you know how frustrated I am. I can't even keep track of how many times the Members in this house have talked about the vital importance to increase Indigenous hiring and the concerns that hiring managers are not even using the programs that have been created to increase Indigenous recruitment and retention.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Government Operation has set the following priority: Identify the systemic barriers to increasing the

prepresentation of Indigenous people in the public service and review GNWT's human resource practices and policies.

It's 2022, Mr. Speaker. This is a territory of over the half the population is Indigenous. Why are we still having to do this.

This government makes statements, writes reports, offers recommendation to guide hiring personnel to do this, yet we are worse off than ever. The most recent public service annual report shows that in 2020 Indigenous representation in the GNWT reached an all time low of 29.3 percent. Mr. Speaker, how can we be going backwards? It is because of the barrier of systemic racism.

Mr. Speaker, this is a huge problem across the whole GNWT. But I want to focus on the problems at the Department of Justice.

While Indigenous people are over-represented in the justice system, they are vastly under-represented in the department staff. In fact, statistics from the public service annual report show that Indigenous representation has dropped significantly at the department. In 2013, there were 155 Indigenous employees making up 30 percent. In 2021, there were only 132 Indigenous employees making up 24 percent. In eight years, Mr. Speaker, Indigenous employment dropped by 23 while non-Indigenous employment increased by 61.

There are a lot of things that should be done but aren't and aren't being done but should.

One big issue I keep seeing is that entry level positions are posted while programs to train and provide Indigenous applications are not being used. For example, in the job ads today, court worker 1 position posted currently for -- meanwhile, Indigenous applications just sitting in casual pools and in the Indigenous career gateway pool with the department failing to reach out with opportunities for training that could lead to a career at the Justice department. Mr. Speaker, I request consent for unanimous consent.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, colleagues. Mr. Speaker, it is time we quit talking about it and start doing something.

As my colleague from Nunakput likes to say, the Minister should use his power and write down in his little notepad for ministerial directive so that hiring managers have to use these programs before advertising. There must be clear direction for hiring managers if we are going to achieve the vision of a public service that is truly representative of the population it services. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister of Justice.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 918-19(2):
ALBERTA TAR SANDS TAILINGS

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le Président. I raised the issue of discharges from the Alberta tar sands tailings in our last sitting. I was very pleased to hear the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources say in the House, on December 7th, "we're not supportive of this presently or even in the future." By the way, I am still waiting for the research on the impacts of potential discharges that the Minister promised back then.

It is hard to get a sense of the scale of these tailings ponds. They cover 220 square kilometres and the volume would be the equivalent of Olympic swimming pools that would stretch from Edmonton to Melbourne, Australia. These tailings are a mix of sand, salt, clay, and residual oils and solvents and toxic compounds known to cause cancer and other health effects. If released untreated, the tailings would kill fish and other aquatic life, and probably people too.

The federal government has announced it is going to develop regulations under the Fisheries Act to allow discharges from these tailings ponds. Discharges, whether controlled or not, are inevitable so I am not opposed in-principle but these wastes must be treated first to an acceptable standard. However, there are no known cost-effective treatment options that are commercially available or that have even been field tested yet. Even if technology was available, there are also the issues of cost, what to do with any sludge or by-products, and the impact on water, aquatic life, and people. We are downstream of this mess, Mr. Speaker.

GNWT has been strangely quiet about all of this until I raised it in the House. I have no idea what resources have been dedicated to this effort, whether we have the necessary expertise and what work has been done to engage Indigenous peoples and the public. This government owes it to our residents and the environment to tell us what it is doing with regard to the development of tar sands discharge regulations. I will have questions later today for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources about GNWT's involvement and position on discharges from the tar sands. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 919-19(2):
CARIBOU MANAGEMENT

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the GNWT's 2011 Caribou Management Strategy for 2011 to 2015 reports that in 2006, caribou tags for resident hunters in the North Slave region were reduced from five of any sex to two males only. In the following year, 2007, tags for outfitters to hunt in the North Slave region were reduced from approximately 1600 to 750. And by January of 2010, all hunting closed on the winter range of the Bathurst herd. A limited Indigenous harvest of 300, plus or minus 10 percent caribou, was established in December of 2010.

As a result, there is currently no commercial source of caribou meat in the NWT, which is concerning given the importance it plays in the diet of Indigenous people. With the rising cost of food, subsistence hunting has never been more important. For example, the cost of ground beef in 2020 ranged from \$11 per pound to \$21 in the Northwest Territories, which can only be higher now as COVID continues to impact the supply chain. Never has it been more important to establish stable access to country food than it is currently, particularly as rates of nutrition-related disease like diabetes continue to rise.

In the NWT, country food can be difficult for residents to access. If a hunter's harvest is confiscated, elders, children, and vulnerable people from their community may not have any traditional food for that season and could be at risk for going hungry.

Mr. Speaker, just look at yesterday's paper from News North with its large headline "Hunger, a Growing Concern in Hay River." And I know from listening to residents this is not just Hay River's problem but is widespread across the territory.

In addition to the issue of hunger, the hunting restrictions placed on Indigenous peoples creates a loss of culture. As less Indigenous people are able to hunt, the skills associated with the butchering, cleaning and scraping of hides, and the preparation of meat are lost. Raw materials for crafts and clothing become less available, and traditional knowledge is at risk. We only have to look at the legacy of the residential schools to see how quickly in one generation so much can be lost.

It is imperative that the GNWT continue to work with Indigenous hunters and organizations, that we utilize GPS technology and other modern methods to ensure that there remains access to this vital life source for our residents. Access to country foods will ensure the maintenance of good health and the continuation of traditional knowledge for generations to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 920-19(2):
NICO MINE – FORTUNE MINERALS

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for my statement topic today, I want to talk about a new mining project in the NWT, which is the NICO project in the Tlicho region produced by the company Fortune Minerals. This project will be built near Whati connected to the new Tlicho All-Season Road and will be extracting important minerals such as cobalt, gold, bismuth, and copper. These minerals have a huge and increasing demand within the modern industrial economy. Cobalt is particularly a key mineral in the production of lithium ion batteries which is used to power many common consumer goods such as cell phones, tablets, laptops, wireless headphones, and electric vehicles, among others.

Mr. Speaker, the NICO project will provide the NWT with a much needed economic boost within a sector that has weakened greatly in the recent years - the mining sector.

However, there are two aspects to Fortune Minerals' plans regarding this mining project. The first is the extraction of the minerals, which is happening near Whati, and the second is the refining of those minerals which will be done in Lamont County, Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I find it very curious and see a lost opportunity that Fortune Minerals decided to build a refinery for this project in a different province of where the minerals are being extracted, which hasn't been finalized yet, so it can still be renegotiated. Why didn't Fortune Minerals consider the NWT as the location to refine the minerals from the NICO project?

Fortune Minerals stated early on that their either was to build the refinery either in Saskatchewan or Alberta but no mention publicly whether the NWT was considered.

Mr. Speaker, given the state of the NWT economy and the overall decline of mining that the territory will be facing in the coming years, I think this overall project was a missed opportunity for the NWT.

The same can also be said about the Nechalacho Rare Earth Mine project at Thor Lake in Akaitcho Territory, which is extracting rare earth ore and shipping those rare earth concentrates to a production facility in Saskatoon.

In addition, it was announced recently that a new rare earth processing facility will open in Alaska which will separate the rare earth concentrates from the Saskatoon plant into rare earth oxides which are the valued items in consumer goods. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we are looking for new ways to diversify, expand, and maximize the economic opportunities for the NWT, yet we fail to provide more desirable economic conditions to attract and secure greater investments. We must do better to have a stronger long-term economy, especially within the recovery of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge two concerned individuals who sent me information on this topic - Darryl Clarkson, a former principal at JBT School in Fort Smith, as well as Robert Beaulieu, a Salt River First Nation member who worked as a liaison officer for Indigenous hires at one of the mines. Both these men still care about what goes on here. I will have questions for the Minister of ITI later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 921-19(2):
EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION

MS. CLEVELAND: Mr. Speaker, our children have such a small amount of time to be children. As a parent, politician, and community member, I have found it difficult at times to balance childhood and public health measures, especially with teenagers.

Worldwide, more than 1.6 billion students missed school during lockdowns. Some countries have found that over 70 percent of 10-year-olds are unable to read or understand simple text. Education is a worldwide concern in Yellowknife and Yellowknife school representatives share concerns about the impact of COVID-19 on the social and educational developments of our children.

Three school years have been interrupted with inequitable access to education, unequal capacities to pivot to online learning, and public health measures whose footprints, good and bad, will be studied for decades to come.

American educators have already started publishing snapshots of the effects of COVID-19 on student learning outcomes and potential solutions. To catch students up to where they are expected to be, the American school system determined that accelerated learning with additional school days in small groups of 8 to 12 students would carry a \$42 billion price tag, or \$66 billion for intensive daily tutoring with a two-to-one student-teacher ratio with increased study time packed in to each day.

But Mr. Speaker, after considering what this means for NWT students, I reflected on the 19th Assembly priority to increase education outcomes of NWT

students. The mandate of this government identifies that NWT education system will require modernization and fundamental changes to focus resources and system-wide efforts on student learning and wellbeing.

Cabinet committed to lead work to ensure distance learning opportunities are available in all NWT communities, implement a pilot program to support training for classroom assistants, and implement new programming to help schools and parents make decisions on student placement and retention.

Before COVID, teachers were already identifying solutions for improved student outcomes: Smaller class sizes, increases to inclusive schooling resources and supports, and as we heard yesterday from my colleague from Frame Lake, internet capacity.

Since March 2020, Yellowknife schools have been closed 105 days, 77 of which were remote learning days with varying participation and instruction.

Mr. Speaker, we don't have the luxury of hindsight or experience with pandemic recovery yet, but we do have the ability to listen to what northern educators have consistently already asked for to improve student outcomes here in the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 922-19(2):
FORT GOOD HOPE SENIORS HOME

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to take this opportunity on our second day of session to congratulate the Minister of Housing and Minister responsible for Seniors on the one year anniversary of the grand opening and ribbon cutting of the seniors home in Fort Good Hope that they both were at on February 16th, 2021, Mr. Speaker.

The opening of this seniors home addressed one of the priorities set out by the 19th Assembly of seniors aging in place. I was happy to hear of its opening, and I am sure many of the seniors in the region were happy to have a facility built for them to reside in and continue to be cared by with facilities nearby. And Mr. Speaker, not only was this facility built to house seniors, it was going to be housing for a new community home caretaker fulfilling another priority of this Assembly by creating new employment in small communities.

However, Mr. Speaker, at this one-year anniversary of the opening of the Fort Good Hope seniors centre, it has not, in fact, opened, Mr. Speaker. It was supposed to open in summer and then the new year

and here we are one year later, and it is not open. Despite asking many questions of multiple Ministers, I'm not really sure what is going on here.

There is some dispute between the contractor, the Housing Corp., and the office of the fire marshal. It's a very technical dispute about the building code. It's not at all a problem I understand or know the solution to, but I'm not at all convinced that this is a one-time problem that the GNWT has solved, and I'm not convinced this is the last building we are going to open that is actually not opened. I will have questions for the Minister of Housing about when this building is going to open. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 923-19(2):
MUNICIPAL FUNDING GAPS AND AGING
INFRASTRUCTURE

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay, I'm going to be addressing on the lack of funding in the communities.

Mr. Speaker, the lack of funding for communities is well known. It is mandate priority for this Assembly to address the municipal funding gaps. The current state of water services in Behchoko is exactly what happens when government chronically underfunds communities. They end up in a state of crisis.

In 2014, the community of Behchoko was known to be underfunded by \$1.9 million. Mr. Speaker, seven years ago, the community was shortfall nearly \$2 million annually to provide basic services. How much of a funding deficit does Behchoko and other 23 communities face today? How is the GNWT going to address the municipal funding gaps if we are not tracking funding deficits by community-based needs.

For example, every year the community of Behchoko has had to absorb \$1.9 million growing deficit. It has prevented the community from improving infrastructure and services.

Mr. Speaker, since 2007, the capital budget allocation for all communities -- for all community government across the NWT has not kept up with requirements. This is not sustainable.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that when people are stressed financially, they are forced to make sacrifices and to make choices they would not make if they had the money. This result, as a result, community members leave, move to other communities due to lack of program and services. This threatens the very basis of communities' existence.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs expect our communities to be

developed, operate, and maintain all required services to manage healthy communities when they are facing chronic funding shortages.

Mr. Speaker, community cannot run an operational deficit. They have to balance their book at the end of every year. There is little finances available to communities to address major infrastructure challenges when there is little to no surplus funds. I will have questions for the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs at appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 924-19(2):
EULOGY FOR SHERRI THOMPSON

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, demonstrating her strength of will, independence, and sass right to the end of her well-lived 48 years, Sherri Lynn Thomson passed away Monday, December 6th.

Born in Yorkton September 15th, 1973, the third child of Graham and Linda's four children, Sherri spent her earliest years in southern Saskatchewan with her family before settling in 1977 on the PFRM farm.

Sherri developed a passion for hockey, participated in minor hockey programs, and from grade 10 to 12, played for the Fort Saskatchewan First Team culminating with a trip to the Canada Winter Games in Prince Edward Island in the spring of 1999. Her involvement did not end there. After playing, she transitioned to coaching the Select Midget Female Hockey Program.

Sherri had her sights set on teaching and pursued her dream immediately after high school, attending the University of Saskatchewan and completing her education degree in 1996. Starting her career close to home, demonstrating the streak of independence, she worked a total of 19 years in the Northwest Territories with the Dehcho Divisional Educational Council teaching in Fort Providence, Fort Simpson as a teacher, principal, and later on as literacy consultant.

In those two decades living in Canada's North, Sherri truly embraced the lifestyle and people, as did they. This is where I got to meet her and appreciate her commitment to the North.

Sherri enjoyed travelling and was able to do major trips during her time in the North. She took time away from her work to do a European tour and a trip to New Zealand, Australia, and Tonga.

Her initial diagnosis of ovarian cancer came in 2014. A second diagnosis in 2017 led her to retire from her career and move back home in 2018.

Not one to sit still, Sherri fulfilled another dream. After some wrangling with her dad, she bought land from Graham's immediately east of her childhood home and proceeded to oversee the construction of a beautiful home, perfectly placed to capture the prairie sunrise and sunset.

With her mom passing away in 2010, that was Sherri's biggest loss in her family's life. An indication of her strength, the kind of strengths they needed and held, would also draw upon with Sherri's third diagnosis later on 2020.

Thanks to tremendous support from her family, friends and neighbours, she was able to stay home until late November. Sherri passed away as she lived, letting her feelings and emotions, options known, and facing her challenges without fear or complaint. It would only be appropriate that Sherri gets the last word and final blessing.

Taken from a recent Facebook post featuring a splendid sunset behind a row of her lovely horses, "I was reminded today of the blessings and simple pleasures of time spent with family and friends. No commitments, no plans, just the joy of each others' company. When the crisis has passed, we will remember to do those simple things or get caught up in the web of busy that we have been forced to live without. Please let it be the former." Mr. Speaker, she will be sadly missed.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and community at this time.

Members' statements. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to the budget address, day 1 of 7. Member for Yellowknife North.

Replies to Budget Address

MR. JOHNSON'S REPLY

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, what do we have to do around here to get some more housing money? Mr. Speaker, I have never seen real consensus on any issue amongst this group except for housing. It is clear in this Assembly that housing is a priority. We are committed to improving housing for our residents. Yet despite that, the actual core budget for the Housing Corporation just won't increase in any meaningful way, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for this budget, what I would propose is that we add \$20 million to the Housing Corp. budget, and not one-time money. Long-term, real, permanent funding so we can stop talking about 2038 when CMHC funding expires and talk about now. That is what the housing crisis demands. I think with partnerships, proper mobilization, and lobbying, we, in this House, could end chronic homelessness

and end our housing crisis. You know, we could stop having citizens literally freeze to death because they have a lack of shelter. That seems a noble goal to me.

So with that in mind, Mr. Speaker, I am going to say some things that I believe this House should have heard today in the budget address.

The first step to me in the budget reply is the narrative we are trying to sell. We need a hook. We need to sell the legacy of this government. To the Minister's credit, we grabbed an easy first narrative, the narrative that we mobilized for COVID; we took action, and the light at the end of the tunnel is here. This gives people hope. However, Mr. Speaker, we didn't finish that narrative. We didn't say that we learned from this pandemic that bold political vision is needed to bring us forward, to keep up the pace and demand that we address our housing crisis.

Mr. Speaker, this budget may as well have been a surrender flag that we've given up on bold political vision with the Minister stating flashy announcements hoping that new money will solve long-standing problems is often the easier political path.

Mr. Speaker, we all know our housing crisis is a long-standing problem. And do you know what solves it? A flashy announcement about new money, Mr. Speaker. And finding new money is not an easy political path. If it was, we would all march down it. There's not some other solution where houses appear without money, Mr. Speaker.

Continuing on this thread, the Minister went on to say, The goal is not headlines to last the next few days or the term of this government.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, we need some headlines. The complete lack of politicking occurring here is embarrassing. We have been losing the communications battle in this Assembly from day one. To somehow dismiss that governments need to belittle political capital in the media is to remove an entire check on political power and how politics work, Mr. Speaker. We need to sneak in some flashy ways. It's the opportunity for this government to build the political capital to make those tough decisions.

Mr. Speaker, here are some suggestions that I would suggest as flashy headlines.

Coming up in this fiscal year, the GNWT will introduce five paid sick days for workers. Mr. Speaker, our pandemic has taught us that forcing people to choose between missing pay, where they struggle to buy groceries, or going in to work sick and putting their coworkers at risk is a decision that no one should have to make. Look at that flashy headline, Mr. Speaker.

Another suggestion, Mr. Speaker, we have decided to tie minimum wage to inflation. Mr. Speaker, during the pandemic, we called those frontline responders heroes. We topped all of their wages up to \$18 an hour, and then we removed it. But now we have the second highest minimum wage in Canada, and let's make sure it keeps that way. An easy solution is to tie it to inflation, to make sure that those currently nonliving wages keep up somewhat with the cost of living. Another great flashy headline I would support.

There's lots of options, Mr. Speaker. We could create a holiday. We could remove Walmart from BIP. I don't know. We could rename some things. The Mackenzie River or the mountains, does anyone even know that both are named after men named Alexander Mackenzie, one the explorer, one the prime minister? I don't know. Does it matter? Let's name some things in an interest of reconciliation. Perhaps we can merge ENR, MACA, and Lands to save us a few million dollars. They all have one minister. It seems like a great thing to throw into the budget reply.

If none of these are acceptable to Cabinet, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure they could find something.

Mr. Speaker, the next the Minister said, The goal is to influence the path of the Northwest Territories for the next five or even ten years. And I agree, Mr. Speaker. But the way you influence the long-term path is by changing the core budget.

This entire budget is simply a continuation of the last budget. And we passed Bob McLeod's capital budget in the fall, and we're continuing to pass his operating budget, Mr. Speaker.

If we truly want a long-term, five to ten year plan that influences the future, let's add \$20 million to the Housing Corp's budget.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister also stated that they are optimistic we can control future spending through internal savings and continuing to find more value from the \$2.1 billion that we spend without having to reduce programs and services. This has been the fiscal goal our first year in the 19th Assembly and is the cornerstone of our government renewal work. End quote.

Mr. Speaker, this is a noble goal. I know that we don't want to talk about reducing programs and services, but I think that is the wrong frame. It is not a reduction in programs and services. It is a shifting of priorities. We look at one pot of money we are already spending and say a better priority would be housing. And I have not seen the evidence to date that government renewal is truly going to get to the level of spending we need to be talking about. We need to be talking about 10s of millions of dollars, and I'm not convinced there are easy, magical efficiencies or

pots of money to be found by scrutinizing government budgets. If they were, I think we would have found them by already, Mr. Speaker. We need to be talking about hard tough choices that we need to make.

Mr. Speaker, I believe where we have landed is, in fact, the most valid and true criticism of consensus government. We have landed in a budget that is designed by committee. It is compromised until the status quo budget is reserved again and again.

I've said this before, Mr. Speaker, that the Cabinet plus three is a problematic view of consensus government. But even worse is to never have a single close vote in this House. Even worse is to never propose things that we will be divided on and ultimately might just pass with a slim margin. Those are the kind of proposals we need to see to end homelessness and get our fiscal house in order. Anything that we all agree on is not meaningful action, Mr. Speaker.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to speak to some ways I believe we could find \$20 million to add to housing and end homelessness in this territory. They are not easy decisions. I know all of my colleagues won't agree with them necessarily but I believe they have the majority of support of these Members, and that is the budget we need to put forward to show the people we can mobilize.

Firstly, we need to put a freeze on public sector hiring. Perhaps with the exception of Health, but every single year the budget adds a few more positions here and there and the demand for more staff is endless. We know this. And it's hard to remove three or four or five or six positions at a time. But it adds up. And the way I view it is every one of those GNWT workers is six people we could house. That's using a metric of \$25,000 operating cost per housing unit, with a bit of an exception, that housing unit can house multiple people, Mr. Speaker. That's the way we need to look at this. Do we want one finance officer or six more housing units, Mr. Speaker?

Next, Mr. Speaker, Yellowknife gets everything. Yellowknife gets everything. It's like a broken record at the side of my head whenever I speak in this House. Well, let's do something about it, Mr. Speaker. Let's do what the majority of MLAs clearly want and put forward a plan for decentralization. I suggest we start with an email. Let's email headquarters staff and ask if any of them want to relocate to the communities. If they do, we have a remote work policy, we can find a way to make it work. I would say a great target in this area is a hundred jobs. And if we can't find a hundred people, I'm sure we can relocate some units. Lawyers are flexible, Mr. Speaker. Let's just move the Department of Justice to Fort Smith.

Mr. Speaker, at some point we Yellowknife MLAs have to ask ourselves does Yellowknife really need more GNWT workers? We're half a step away from renaming the town Yellowknife or GNWT town. I'm asking my constituents, do we need more GNWT workers in Yellowknife? I see a majority of MLAs in this House who want decentralization and let's put a path forward so we can end that fight and find consensus on our true priority which is housing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, some other ideas I have, which you don't have to take all of them, but I'll throw a few out.

As I said, merging ENR, MACA, and Lands. Corporate restructuring comes with removing some duplicate positions. It saves some money.

Mr. Speaker, I think we need to just end the COVID Secretariat. Perhaps we have to give a few more positions to Public Health to manage the pandemic going forward, but there's \$14 million for the COVID Secretariat in this budget, and I don't believe we need that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, next, I believe we need to create a high income tax bracket. If we are truly committed to ending homelessness, I think we can ask those who make over \$180,000 a year to pay a little extra in tax, Mr. Speaker. I'll note that many of those people are, in fact, GNWT workers.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I believe we need to increase corporate tax by one percent. We in this House, rightfully so, lowered our small business corporate tax rate. However, Mr. Speaker, we could raise our corporate tax rate for those companies that make over \$500,000 a year by one percent and still be below Yukon and competitive across Canada.

Next, Mr. Speaker, we have a collective agreement. I am not proposing anything like legislating pay cuts or not bargaining in good faith but we know we have to go into the next round of collective bargaining with a very tough position. And here I am speaking directly to the UNW, Mr. Speaker. At some point, the UNW has to reflect that if we keep giving raises to the public service, which is majority southern and majority based in Yellowknife, the public trust will be eroded, Mr. Speaker. We need to drive that bargain with the union. And every time we get a \$10 million forced growth for collective bargaining, that is significant money that is not housing people in the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker.

At some point, \$430 million we are currently spending on compensation and benefits for a majority southern workforce is just not a good idea.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is not necessarily a cost savings, but I believe the Department of Finance budgets a few percent based on what they anticipate collective bargaining will be. So a hard bargain frees

up some room in our debt ceiling that we are very quickly approaching.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I believe we need to reduce our contract services budget by two percent for about \$4 million savings.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have seen contract services increase over the years. Some of these are completely warranted contract services; other, I believe, are departments contracting out key government functions such as consultation, engagement and policy work, work that should be done by public servants. Additionally, I believe we are increasingly turning to contractors and consultants, a lot of them ex-GNWT workers, because we have created too burdensome processes. We all know the process, Mr. Speaker, because what we heard report strategy, action plan, implementation plan, oh and finally, sorry department, we don't have any money.

Mr. Speaker, we need to stop talking to people if we're not actually going to fund the 25 point plan. Stop reviewing things when the to-do list we already have is a mile long. I believe in reviewing our government processes, we can end a lot of bureaucracy and find a 2 percent cost savings in contract services.

Next, a pet project of mine. I don't know if this will actually save us any money but I believe we need to end the contracts for all the fax machines in the GNWT, Mr. Speaker.

Second, Mr. Speaker, a few years ago when I worked at the GNWT, there was a proposal to adopt a completely paperless GNWT with cost savings. The GNWT has moved in this direction but there is still far too much paper flying around, and we are not a digital government we should be. Additional cost savings.

Next, Mr. Speaker, we have three men's correctional institutes. We have one in Fort Smith, Hay River, and Yellowknife. We do not need three prisons. What I would rather see than cost on prisons and money spent imprisoning people is housing them, Mr. Speaker. I don't care which one of these facilities we close or how we do it or how we move them around, but we do not need three prisons, some of which only have a dozen people in them, Mr. Speaker. They are simply there to create jobs in communities. We could probably take that budget and turn them into treatment centres, Mr. Speaker.

Next, Mr. Speaker, I believe that we can have a 10 percent reduction in office space and reduce for a savings of \$3 million. I have long time talked about the way leasing is spread out across all departments, there's no centralization, and the vast majority of that money goes to one company Northview. We have

remote work standards. We need to conduct a serious review led by one person about how to reduce office space. A 10 percent reduction in leasing costs would be \$3 million a year, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, there's a couple other proposals presented. We have a health efficiency group where staff are going to find some efficiencies in our health care system. I'm not convinced that this is worth it. I believe we'd be better off cutting those positions and simply governing the money to our health care system.

There's probably some other smaller cuts related to the proposals in the budget but if I was giving a budget reply, Mr. Speaker, I perhaps would not focus on them too much. I would propose the spending on housing, in combination with our Indigenous governments, to end chronic homelessness in the NWT, ending homelessness. That is what this budget should be doing. And by not doing that, we are saying it is not something we are willing to do and it is not a priority. Housing people saves lives, and it saves the government money in the long run but we have once again decided to present a status quo budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Colleagues, we will call a short recess. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Replies to budget address, day 1 of 7. Reports of committees on review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Returns to oral questions. Acknowledgements.

Colleagues, before we get into oral questions, I just want to remind everyone to please be mindful of how you're presenting yourselves. I know sometimes we have a lot of heated discussions in here. I know when we first start, we're told we can say anything we want in this House, but it's just on how we say it. So please respect one another, and let's have some fun here.

---Laughter

Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 904-19(2): EMERGING STRONGER AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, these questions will be for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, this government has been talking about post-pandemic recovery since early last year. Then we finally saw the Emerging Stronger document. A

lot has changed in a year, and I'm hoping those sitting across from me have revisited that document to make sure it is relevant and includes all areas of the economy and social systems with emphasis on those that were hit the hardest.

Can the Premier please tell the businesses and residents what, if anything, has changed in our Emerging Stronger document, which I understand to be a living document and will see revisions. When or will we see something new based on lessons learned? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Honourable Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Emerging Stronger document was tabled on May 31st, 2021, and we made a commitment then to update and review it annually. We are going to meet this commitment and will be tabling a revised document in the spring.

When we tabled our first document, we invited the public to provide feedback and input. While we did receive a fair amount of feedback, a lot has changed since then as we shift from a pandemic to an endemic.

This is a subject that will remain a shared interest with the Indigenous and community governments, the business, and the NGO community, and a continued focus with our federal government as well. So I'm looking forward to a new tabling as we go forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our GDP fell approximately 6.6 percent in 2020, mostly due to lower production with resource development. We saw losses in the tourism industry which impacted tourism operators, regional airlines, accommodation establishments, restaurants, and others. On the flip side, we saw an increase in retail sales, such as food, building supplies, and liquor while government and government contracts sustained much of our work force through this pandemic. Can the Premier explain what the real financial impact of the pandemic has been on our economy so far? Should residents and businesses be worried going forward? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the full financial impacts of this pandemic aren't known at this time. What we do know, as the Member stated, that there's been some sectors that have been particularly hit hard, such as the tourism and the hospitality sectors. But there's reason to be optimistic.

We do expect that there's a pent-up demand from Canadians and international travellers to come see the North. So as restrictions are eased, we're

expecting our tourism industry to pick up again. And one area of financial impact that we don't really know, and we're seeing lately, is the extension and duration of the inflationary pressures caused by disrupted supply chains and high demands, particularly for the construction industry. Many jurisdictions around the world are trying to stimulate their own economies through infrastructure investments. So this is going to impact us. So we'll be making our best assessments on these pressures and adjusting our own plans accordingly as we go forward.

But should residents be worried? That's what I think the Speaker wants to hear.

I'm really optimistic that no, I'm optimistic that we'll continue to work with our partners and engage the industry in ways that will further promote our economic recovery. There's encouraging signs that people want to travel again. They want to spend money in hotels and restaurants again, and they want to get back to a new sense of normalcy with residents where they can mingle, and they can invest, and businesses can once again thrive. So I am optimistic, Mr. Speaker, that things will improve. Thank you.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Emerging Stronger document talks about lessons learned. Now a year later, can the Premier tell this House what lessons were learned, what gaps have been identified, and how are they being addressed? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I said earlier we're still assessing. We don't know the full extent of how the pandemic has impacted us. However, we're able to draw some initial lessons from the actions that we took initially to support individuals and businesses.

Emerging Stronger, for example, includes commitments to review the NWT Housing Corporation policies, and we made a commitment to do that with Indigenous governments, which is really exciting work during this term of the government. We're going to be accelerating the work on the alcohol strategy because of the pandemic and increasing support for addictions. And we'll be revisiting efforts to promote and diversify our economy because of the pandemic as well. So more lessons learned will be identified as we work through the updating of this recovery plan, as I noted, and it will be tabled in this spring coming up. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, knowing that another severe variant

may rear its ugly head, from lessons learned does this government have a plan in place or that addresses business relief and support and social supports if we find ourselves taking a step backwards in this pandemic? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Mr. Speaker, we're not waiting. Changes have already been made to address how we coordinate internally, how we partner with Indigenous governments and community governments. And work has been undertaken to better prepare ourselves and our communities for future outbreaks. This work, I believe, will support better emergency planning generally, not just if there's a pandemic or COVID.

Based on our experience over the past two years and the supports that we've implemented, we'll be better prepared to respond accordingly should the pandemic move in the wrong direction.

I want to stress also, though, we're not going to be starting in the same place. While we remain diligent, there's a lot of reason to be optimistic, including the vaccines that we have now and the antivirals that weren't available at the beginning of this pandemic two years ago. So it'll be a different starting place, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 905-19(2):
COVID-19 COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH
RESOURCES

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I brought up the issues that we've been having with the communities in regards to just needing help for our youth, our elders, for the community gatherings, and once, you know, the restrictions are lifted, you know, if the budget's passed, I see a lot of monies that are available for us, for the Beaufort Delta, potentially for getting people into the community and doing like sharing circles and stuff like that to help the people that we represent and who we work for.

Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Health willing to assist us in doing that and not just giving us a 1-800 number to call, because that doesn't work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, thank you to the Member for that question. There's no question that the pandemic has been very hard on the mental health of the whole population. People at different times have been stressed; they've been lonely; they've been anxious;

they've been worried. And we have tried to respond by providing counselling in a virtual setting if COVID restrictions are in place, or face-to-face if not. I realize that Tuktoyaktuk is short a couple of counsellors. And the primary reason for that is because there's no housing for them, and so people have been offered jobs but have been, in the end, unable to take them because they have nowhere to live. So I want to acknowledge that their counselling workforce is not up to speed. But that said, there are other ways of obtaining services from the people who are there through the community counselling program as well as through online and telephone services. Thank you.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Minister for that. I'd really like to see how we used to do it four or five years ago, when you're travelling in with three or four people, a team that comes in for three or four days, able to work with the community that are certified to listen to people's concerns and they know how to deal with the stresses in life and, you know, suicide prevention workshops and stuff like that. We really need that. We can't just -- endemic is coming right now. We're going into that next phase of the endemic now, they're saying. So now we need help. And like I said, are we able to bring people into the Beaufort Delta, into each community, to help them? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that the Member is talking about some issues that pre-existed COVID and for which we have specialized support funds, such as the suicide prevention fund. And so I hope that the community has applied for those funds and considered how to use them. They are to address that particular problem.

In the time that I've been Health Minister, there was a travelling team that went to Tuktoyaktuk and spent a few days there. And I think it was around about January of last year. And so I'm certainly happy to inquire whether that kind of a response is possible again. So what I understand that the Member is asking for is a one-week intensive visit to his community to provide face-to-face counselling services, and that's the request that I will make. Thank you.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for that. The thing is, like, you know, it's us as leaders that we have to bring forward stuff like this for the people that we represent because we see it, and we live it every day, the hurt and the pain that our constituents go through, you know. Sometimes I'm on calls, you know, for an hour trying to help people. It always come down, you know, and, you know, for the alcoholism, for short of food, for just everything, and then they're being turned away by our government's different departments. Mr.

Speaker, it's us as leadership that have to make a difference. Us in this House that don't have to have the community supply for this monies. We should be providing that. It's my job to provide service for the communities I represent. Not only Tuk; I got Sachs Harbour, Ulukhaktok, and Paulatuk, the most northerly communities in the Northwest Territories, Mr. Speaker, that need help. My constituents need help. And I know this Minister wants to work with me. So just say yes, and we'll bring people up as soon as the endemic time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is right. I certainly would like to help his communities to gain or regain their mental health. I said that I would inquire about sending a travelling team to Tuktoyaktuk. I'm not sure about the staffing levels off the top of my head in his other communities and whether they are as short-staffed as they are in Tuk. But that's something that I will inquire about.

At the end of the day, we want people to be living their best lives, and we're prepared to support that in whatever way we can. And if that's a travelling team while there aren't people in the positions permanently, then we'll certainly look at that. Thank you.

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

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I again thank the Minister for that. I'll bring, you know, everybody healthy living and for the communities to try to provide best service we can, and I'm really happy to hear that. We are short. And it's not only Nunakput as a whole but the Beaufort Delta. We have nine communities up there that really need help for post-stress, everything, anxiety. There's so much stuff that came out of this last two years. We can't even grieve for our families at funerals, Mr. Speaker. You know, having ten people going to a funeral and stuff like that, it's tough on everybody. It drains everybody so bad. And we're in a real tough situation. I'm happy the sun's coming back now, you know, and brighter days, longer days, that people are able to get out. But working with the Minister to get to all the communities with this travelling team, it doesn't have to be out of Yellowknife; we could contract people out. Is that an option? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate again what a difficult time this has been for people across the NWT in all the age groups. There is nobody who has been unaffected by the stress and the strain of the

pandemic and now trying to rebound in the light coming back; it's still very cold.

Before committing to helping the entire Beaufort Delta, I want to take a look at the differing service levels in different communities, because I don't think all of them have the same needs. It is possible for us to contract services. We do that for child and youth community counsellors. We do that where there are fewer than 75 students in the school. If that's the case, there isn't a resident school counsellor. And so we can certainly look at all the possibilities there.

I also invite, I've realized this isn't the answer to the problem in and of itself, but the Help Line is there 24/7 to deal with people who are in crisis now; they can't wait for the travelling team or an appointment. And so I would really encourage the Member to post that number on his Facebook page for people who are in crisis imminently. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 906-19(2):
ALBERTA OIL SANDS TAILINGS

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources about the development of regulations for discharges from the Alberta tar sands. Can the Minister tell us what resources have been dedicated to this effort and whether we have the necessary expertise to fully engage the development of these regulations? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to be clear, there's no releases of oil sand process. Water is currently allowed under the Alberta Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act or the Federal Fisheries Act. The Alberta government has said its regulations will not be in place until at least 2023, and the federal government regulations will not be in place until at least 2025.

At ENR, we have employed sciences and experts as part of the GNWT water management and monitoring team who are reviewing the proposals to authorize each release, including those with regulatory expertise. We are also looking at hiring, or seeking external scientists' expertise to review the documents Alberta provided to fill six knowledge gaps identified to inform the development of the regulations. The team regularly engages with our counterparts in Alberta. So we are in constant

contact with the Alberta government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. Clearly, we're downstream of this mess, and there's a lot at stake with regard to potential impacts in water equality, aquatic life, and human health.

Can the Minister tell us what engagement this government has undertaken with Indigenous peoples and the public with regard to the development of a GNWT position and these regulations themselves? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question. The department has been engaging with Indigenous governments and organizations for many years as part of the development and implementation of the Trans-Monitoring Water Agreement and the Water Stewardship Strategy. I've met with Indigenous leadership about the transboundary water agreement implementation and I've heard concerns from communities and residents about the proposed development regulations authorizing and the release of treated tailing water. ENR provides regular updates and seeks input from the NWT strategy Indigenous steering committee whose members appointed represented to the bilateral management committee. There are representatives for implementation of our bilateral agreement, including the agreement with Alberta.

ENR will continue to provide input and ensure that Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations and NWT residents are able to share their perspective. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. Maybe he can share some of that information with this side of the House. Although I can appreciate the Minister's enthusiasm in saying GNWT is not supportive of discharges, I don't think that that's a tenable position for much longer. A more appropriate standard might be something like that the premier of Alberta can drink the discharged water directly.

Can the Minister tell us what the GNWT position is on discharges from the tar sands tailings ponds? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is not supportive of the plan to release treated tailing water from the oil sands to Athabasca River until we have all the information, data, and science to assess whether this can be done safely.

In this House, I've stated this publicly and make this clear to Alberta and the federal government. We will keep our Indigenous governments and Indigenous

organizations, committee, and other water partners, informed of our work on this matter which we know is a great importance. 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 again for that, and I really do encourage him to share some information with this side of the House, because I haven't seen anything, and that's why I'm asking these questions today.

Clearly, there are issues with regard to notice and adequate engagement of GNWT when it came to unilateral decisions that were made to stop upstream water monitoring last year. The transboundary agreement, I'm not sure it's actually strong enough to protect us.

Can the Minister tell us what progress, if any, has been made on increasing and strengthening our role in the transboundary water agreement and how this agreement is going to protect us if the federal government, or Alberta government, goes ahead with regulations without us on board? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this transboundary agreement's one of the best ones in the world. We were very lucky in how we were able to do it. And it is our standard moving forward with our transboundary agreements.

To ensure NWT interests are considered in decision-making on the oil sands monitoring, ENR made a request to the federal government and provincial governments for a seat on their joint oil sands oversight committee. We were waiting for a formal response from the federal government. The department has asked for it and received the work plans and requests for proposals to understand how Alberta's working to fill the identified knowledge gaps. The GNWT and the Government of Alberta have also agreed to regular updates at the senior management level.

Through our Alberta-NWT bilateral management committee, ENR is receiving regular updates from the Alberta's oil sand mine water science team and the last one was just, it was held this January 2022. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 907-19(2):
INDIGENOUS HIRING

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. The statistics from the public service annual report show

that, again from my statement, from 2013 to 2021 Indigenous employment went down by 23 while non-Indigenous employees went up by 61 staff. The declining trend has continued during this Assembly.

Can the Minister explain the main reasons for declining Indigenous representation at the Department of Justice when we have had programs in place like the Indigenous Career Gateway, the Indigenous Management Development Program since 2018? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Minister responsible for Justice.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to report that we have reversed that trend, and the numbers are on their way up. We hit an all time low about two years ago, or actually last year, and then we have reversed and we've made up ground by a couple years. So there's a long way to go, but the work is underway and there's a number of initiatives. I won't pre-empt any of the Member's questions by talking about them, but I just wanted to let everyone know. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of our committee's government operations has had presentations from human resources on the Indigenous recruitment and retention framework, and each department must create a plan. So what is the plan specifically at Justice to reverse these trends? And I know he says that we're going up, but we should have a plan to make sure that number stays where it's going up and continues so that we have a representative government in Justice. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been a priority of this Assembly and of this Cabinet, and it is taken seriously at all levels, so. And I had many conversations with senior managers at the Department of Justice, and this is something that they are regularly discussing. Procedures have been put in place within the department to ensure that, where possible, Indigenous candidates were hired, and if not, why not. There's checks and balances.

We are running a CNRTP program, which is the corrections training program, strictly for Indigenous trainees. So generally this is open to the public, but there's currently an application process for Indigenous persons only. And that deadline closes, I believe March 4th. So I'd recommend everyone who wants to apply get their name in. We are constantly looking at the job descriptions and how we can improve those to ensure that we're not unintentionally excluding people. So there's a number of initiatives, and it's something that is really being driven from the top down, and we want to ensure that we instill this culture across the department. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I go to my next question, I'm going to go back to this since the Minister has talked about the CNRTP program; I've brought this up in the past with the department. Will the Minister commit to having the hiring staff, the recruiting staff for this program, to go through some of those pools that we currently have in our HR department for any Indigenous applicants to see if they're interested. You know, they've put their resume in once already. You know, we should be utilizing those areas to see if we can bring these people into, like I said, a career in Justice. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say yes, but I can't commit to something that's already happening. I don't want to take credit for it. That is what's happening. And if the Member knows of specific instances where it appears that it's not happening, please let me know. We want to find out. No system is perfect. And if there are some gaps in the system, we want to figure out how to address those. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister, and I hope it is happening. And, you know, I just wanted to say, like, to Mr. Speaker, when you and I toured the correctional facility here, one of the comments that I did make when we were there was that other than the warden at the time, there was not one other Indigenous employee that we saw while we did the tour. Every employee that we did see was -- and the counsellor. Just the two. And the warden is no longer there. So I just wanted to make that comment.

Can the Minister be bold and commit to issuing a ministerial directive to instruct hiring managers to use programs like the Indigenous Career Gateway and Indigenous management development and training programs as well as searching the pools, casual pools, and job before posting, at least until the end of his term? Be bold, Minister. Be bold.

--Laughter

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So that's what happens. That's what's supposed to happen. We have HR processes in place. The Department of Finance, the human resources division, is the lead on ensuring that the work is done. So that is what happens. And I can't make a directive to -- you know, that is beyond my scope because we have government-wide policies in place. Again, if the Member, or anyone, is aware of instances where things aren't happening the way they should be, I want to hear about it because we do want to make changes where needed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 908-19(2):
NICO MINE – FORTUNE MINERALS

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, does the Minister of ITI consider it a lost opportunity that Fortune Minerals decided not to build a refinery in the NWT for the minerals extracted from the NICO project? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is an exciting opportunity for the Northwest Territories, not a lost opportunity. I appreciate the Member's interest in the area. Building the refinery is a massive undertaking and requires access to affordable energy, clean energy. It wouldn't have been feasible in the Northwest Territories.

That said, the fact that there is now going to be a mine operating here -- hopefully going to be a mine operating here, but we're tied into another Canadian jurisdiction, in my view is a reason to go back to the federal government and speak to them about the need for the green energy that I'm talking about, the need for transportation corridors, a need for the kind of investments that will, in fact, bring a project like that to light. So I see it as an opportunity, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell us if our government had any discussions with Fortune Minerals about refining the minerals extracted from the NICO project inside the NWT rather than a different province? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, apparently there were some early discussions with respect to this as a possibility. It didn't go very far, and it was before my time. It's not a conversation I've had despite having opportunities to meet with this company during the virtual roundup week. So, again, not something that occurred in great depth here. But, again, I do think the conversation can advance where, you know, we can now be part of the Canadian critical minerals and metals approach that's happening -- a strategy that's happening across Canada, and we can be an important part of that value chain. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, this project has not been finalized yet. So there is still time to negotiate a deal for this project to be built exclusively in the NWT. Can the Minister tell us if our government

would welcome the economic opportunity of a mineral refinery such as that being built in Lamont County, Alberta, to instead be built in the NWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think any Minister of ITI can ever say they don't want an opportunity to build any sort of new opportunities in the Northwest Territories. But realistically, Mr. Speaker, the Member makes an important point. This is not an operating mine yet. It still has some way to go. There still are some gaps to be bridged. And the conversation where I want to be having is, you know, what are any remaining barriers or challenges that they might face before becoming a successful operation here in the Northwest Territories and putting us on the map for critical minerals and metals.

Again, and the concern I would have with a refinery is the same concern you hear from so many industries - high cost of doing business, high cost of power, lack of transportation corridors. So Mr. Speaker, those are all issues that attach to really any investment, and that is where I do want to take that opportunity that I see here to be able to speak to colleagues, federal colleagues about ways to invest and grow the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell us what type of economic or other conditions would need to be met in the future to enable a refinery of this nature to be constructed in the NWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can speak to that a bit. One of the interesting elements would be actually access to more ore, to more minerals and metals. And fortunately, there are quite a large number of projects that are looking into those possibilities across the Northwest Territories. Although at the moment, that would be one barrier, is just simply not having access to enough. Another big one again, as I already mentioned today, Mr. Speaker, is more green energy opportunities which, again, is something that is a priority for this government. Another one, Mr. Speaker, being access to skilled labour, which again, similarly, is a theme we hear a lot here and one that I know the Minister of ECE is certainly live to and keen to see some advancement on. And last, Mr. Speaker, I'd suggest is generally looking at investor confidence, that individuals and businesses and investors are looking at the Northwest Territories and seeing the opportunities here to being on the critical minerals and metals value chain. We know that that opportunity's there. We know that they should have that confidence. But

the more there is that buzz out there, the more likely we're going to see projects like this, whether a refinery or simply advanced mining, succeed. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 909-19(2):
CARIBOU

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of ENR. In doing research for my Member's statement today, I was unable to determine the date of the closure of the commercial caribou hunt. What was the actual date of the closure and what was the value of caribou meat at that time? For example, the Wild Cat Cafe and other restaurants used to sell caribou burgers. How much were they paying price per pound for that meat? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, and I thank the Member for her questions. As we all are aware, the Bathurst caribou herd is facing serious conservation concerns and is currently at record low numbers. The government has worked closely with our wildlife co-management partners to put a range of management actions in place to support the recovery of this herd. It is important to note that the Wildlife Act and the regulations differentiate between commercial hunts and outfitting hunting.

In 2006, ENR began to reduce the number of tags issued to outfitting numbers given the conservation concerns for the Bathurst herd.

All residents, outfitters, and commercial harvesting of the Bathurst herd was suspended in 2010 when the herd fell from 470,000 to an estimated 3200. Commercial tags allow the tag holders to sell the game harvested. In the past, it was RWED, which was renewable -- Wildlife and Environment -- Economic Development -- sorry. So that was our former department. It was not involved in setting the price. So we weren't involved in setting it up, so yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was a very long answer for my question. So I appreciate that you explained what RWED is because that has to do with my next question. And the reason for my statement, Mr. Speaker, was that I've had a lot of conversation with Indigenous hunters that have had meat seizures and they've raised concerns with me. So those same hunters have mentioned to me that when they've had their meat seized, the RWED officer was telling them which herd that the meat was

from. So my next question is how does the RWED officer distinguish that in the field? Is there a field test or an inspection checklist that officers need to follow? Really, can an officer tell someone in the field what herd that caribou is from? Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, and I apologize to the Member for the longwinded answer but it's very important we get this information out there.

So it's not what the herd is, it's the mobile zone. So the mobile zone is the area where the caribou are. Last year we had the overlap of the Beverly and the Bathurst and the Bluenose. And again, it's where we have our collared animals and that's where we know where our herds are. It's important to note that it's illegal to harvest any caribou in that mobile zone and regardless of the herd. And I think every Tuesday it's updated. So we make sure that information, so people know where it is. We work closely with our co-management partners to make sure hunters are aware of where the zone is. I think in your Member's statement, you talked about GPS. We give them the coordinates. If you go to the camp, you can get that information so you know where the coordinates are.

In regards to I think it was -- yeah, I think that answers your question. Thank you.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't ask about the mobile zone but I did want to -- I think that my point being is that it sounds like to hunters that they're actually saying this is this kind of caribou rather than explaining it's based on geographical location and that's likely the type of caribou that they're killing, not that it is. So that's just more of a comment, Mr. Speaker.

My next question is what happens to the seized meat? What measures are in place to ensure that it's not wasted and that it's being distributed to people that need it? Because it's not going to the hunters' families so I'd like to know where it ends up. Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: I thank the Member for her comment, and we'll make sure we get that messaging out there about the mobile zone.

So ENR becomes involved -- or notified of a potential infraction under the Wildlife Act. A renewable officer will initiate the investigation. If they believe that the animal was harvested illegally, they may then seize the caribou and start a legal process. While the investigation's underway, seized caribou are stored securely in a frozen state for evidence. As you are aware in the last budget, we are actually building another storage -- or building a place where we can store the seized caribou and that.

We're in a challenging state of trying to deal with the caribou, and it's getting -- the weather's getting warm

right now. We then go to the justice of the peace, and then we work with them, who then gives us the ability to distribute the meat. So we give it to Indigenous governments out there. So the meat doesn't get spoiled. We do give it out as -- well, we need permission from the justice of peace to do that. We need the legal authorization to do that moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just going to come quickly back to the Minister's comment around the GPS. I do just want to state that there has been some concerns that wrong GPS units have been entered into machines for hunters therefore forcing them into the mobile zone versus out. So I just wanted to make a comment on that. The Minister does not need to respond but perhaps being aware.

My last question is that in 1986, the Bathurst herd caribou numbers were recorded at 450,000. By 2021, the Bathurst herd numbers declined to 6,240. The Bluenose-East herd and the Ahiak herd numbers have grown in comparison to the Bathurst decline. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's going to be a long answer on this one because I want to make sure we get the information out there.

In recent years, we have seen a decline in many caribou herds across the NWT and northern Canada. As you noted, the Bathurst herd declined from an estimated 47,000 in 1986 to 6,240 in 2021. At the time, we also saw a major decline in the Bluenose-East herd, declining from 120,000 in 2010 to 19,300 in 2018. The Beverly herd declined -- located to the east of the Bathurst herd was established at 103 in 2018. That's 103,000. And has been undergoing a slow decline in recent years. While the historical range of the Ahiak herd has extended in the NWT, they currently don't occur in the NWT but only in Nunavut.

Given the declines and the size of the barren land caribou herds, the GNWT has been working closely with wildlife co-management partners in the NWT to implement measures to support conservation recovery of these herds.

So we are working very much with our Indigenous hunters. And one of the questions the Member talked about -- or not -- said or heard about wildlife and that, we do have the opportunity to do community hunts, that we work with the Indigenous governments, but there's also caribou, moose, muskox out there as well, that opportunity to get wild meat out there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 910-19(2):
FORT GOOD HOPE SENIORS HOME

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Housing who, I'm sure no one more in the territory, wants the Fort Good Hope seniors complex to open. So my first question is when is that going to occur?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister responsible for Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member. I appreciate this question because it has been -- we did, you know, have a grand opening last year but once that we did receive the reports for the project, we did end up with some issues in completing the project that were identified by the office of the fire marshal. And one of the key issues was the fire separation. And right now, the corporation is addressing those issues, and we are now underway with the remediation work.

The work will involve electrical, structural, architectural, and mechanical repairs. The electrical contractor is scheduled to travel into Fort Good Hope, and this scheduled travel was for November 8th. And also the structural engineer is scheduled to travel -- was scheduled to travel as well too, November 8th. A mechanical review is underway by the private engineers and are in an architectural firm for these remaining components. The Housing Corporation is pressing the contractor for a completed remediation plan to confirm the expected occupancy date as soon as possible. And once those reports are received, it would be able to announce an opening date.

Sorry for the longwinded answer as well, too, but there's just a lot of issues that were identified once the project was completed, and we are working very closely with the contractor at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to just try and understand how this happened. You know, we cut the ribbon on the building. We completely thought it was complete and open. And then after the inspector, it turns out the contractor, that there was electrical problems, structural problems, fire break problems. Can the Minister just highlight what happened here? How did we build a building with this many aspects of the code that were not compliant and not catch them until an inspection? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I just, you know, really thank the Member for

these questions as well because it was sooner, like I was able to receive a briefing on this project and we had actually put this out for tender in two components. So once the project was completed, the deficiencies were identified. And it's unfortunate, and you know, I'm hoping to have that complex opened this year. We did have a commitment last year of March 2022. So I will follow up with the Member and let him know if we're still going to be having that building opened this year. But also the other thing that we ran into complications with as well was COVID, the restrictions, and also finding contractors to get in and being able to repair and address those specific issues for the opening of the complex and the occupancy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm hoping the Minister can explain what the costs are here. You know, we thought this building was complete, and I assume there is some sort of -- there was new tenders for different contractors to come in and remedy this. It's been closed for a year. I don't know how much of this falls on GNWT or some poor contractor. Can the Minister just give us a sense of how much this delay has cost the GNWT? Thank you.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have those numbers with me at this time. I will follow up with the Member as well. But the corporation is working very strategically to try to minimize those costs as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 911-19(2):
AGING INFRASTRUCTURE

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Okay, before I begin, I would like to -- for the record, I would like to say that three of four Tlicho communities - Behchoko, Whati and Wekweeti - are underfunded. They are underfunded communities, so I just wanted to say that for the record.

So Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister referred to an agreement in 2007. It is now year 2022, and we have a community without access to clean water as identified in United Nation Declaration on Human Rights. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister focus on what can be done now, not on what was done in the past? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Minister responsible for Municipal and Community Affairs.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're already focusing on the

future and the present. We are working with the municipal government on this very issue. So the Member, I've given her emails showing what was going on. Yesterday I provided an update that was very current as of yesterday morning, that they met with the community and were working on trying to address that issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Well, I don't think -- I did not receive the email that he is referring to. And I know that I keep checking my email. I didn't get anything from him. But I keep getting email from his assistant. So if he sent that email yesterday, I would like to see it today, if he can resend it.

Mr. Speaker, does the formula for funding received by the community government, especially in Behchoko into consideration that there are two distinct geographic communities? Each community has its own water plants, sewer facilities, water, and sewer distribution centre systems, fire halls, fire fighting mobile equipment, and recreation facilities. Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. So the Member should be aware that my EAC is sending out emails that I get, and I send it to the Member right away. Whether we get them from the community, who are asking questions and that, when I send this stuff out there, the latest one was an issue about freeze up. We get that sent to the Member right away so she is aware of what's going on.

As for the formula, yes, it encompasses everything. Again, when we talk about the municipal funding formula, it was developed with NWTAC for the betterment of the territories, the 33 communities. So it's a formula that's used, and it counts all those things that the Member's talked about.

Just so the Member's aware, we are looking at those funding policies, and we're trying to fix them presently. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay, well, I would like to see the email again. But what I would like for the Minister to do is that to meet with me and the community leaders to discuss these important issues.

So another question is that, Mr. Speaker, I know that we are coming to a fiscal year end, okay. So there may be some operational budgets that have not been fully spent. Can the Minister commit to work with the Department of Finance to identify where there is any unused funding across the entire GNWT and redirect these unused funds for a one-time payment to the community, especially those -- just like Behchoko for damage repair. Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've already met with the TG

government, and we're more than willing -- just recently, with Cabinet, and I'm more than willing to meet with them. Our staff are meeting with the TG governments as we move forward.

In regards to surpluses and that from the Government of the Northwest Territories, we don't have surpluses. We don't. We're \$1.5 billion in debt. We have a budget that we're using. So there is no surplus out there. If there was, we have 33 communities with 33 issues that each community has that we need to move forward on. So I can't promise the Member that there. There's no surplus, and there's no money available. And if there was a surplus, we have to compete against needs of the Northwest Territories, just not one community. It's departments; it's other communities as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Well, we just did the Finance budget today. So Mr. Speaker, with reference to the 2014 study that identified the shortfall in funding many community governments, will the Minister agree to update the 2014 study to identify the current shortfall in funding for NWT community government and commit to correct the inequalities in a timely manner? Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my understanding of the 2014 report that the Member's talking about was jointly done with NWTAC. We're more than willing to work with them to go on there.

As for the inadequacies that the Member talks about, it's a budget process. We need to compete with other priorities for the Government of the Northwest Territories. The Member from Yellowknife North talked about \$20 million for housing. Bam, let's give me \$20 million for housing. Well, how do we take that compared to other issues? Housing is a priority. We've heard it in this House. But we have other priorities and other commitments that this government needs to be recognizing. I'm more than willing to work with committee and work with the government, Cabinet, and our colleagues from AOC to come up with a process. I need to stress that it was a priority of the NWT of our moving forward. We had \$25 million for initiating initiatives for the four years. \$5 million is going to the municipal funding gap. We are also working from lands and doing some work on that as well to help municipal governments move forward. So we're trying, using all the tools in our toolbox, to help shrink this funding gap. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 912-19(2):
REOPENING OF STANTON OBSTETRICS UNIT

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my first set of questions, if I can get in a second set, is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. I'd like to start off by thanking the Minister, staff, Stanton, and especially OBS staff for working hard to get labour and delivery open and running again at full service. So thank you for that.

My first question, though, is some people are already in Edmonton waiting to deliver, and they'd like the opportunity to come home and deliver in their home territory of the Northwest Territories. So how can people, or can they come home from Edmonton? Thank you.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the question. The thing that the families who are now in Edmonton should do is talk to their health care provider in Edmonton about the possibility of travelling back to Yellowknife in order to give birth at Stanton, and that health care provider can evaluate the stage of their pregnancy, potential complications and so on, and give them an answer. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much for that, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure health care providers in Edmonton will be getting a lot of phone calls so people can come home. Can I go back on your list, please?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Take that as a comment. Oral questions. Member for Kam Lake.

QUESTION 913-19(2):
SCHOOL FUNDING

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my second set of questions are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Mr. Speaker, schools have struggled with staggered and delayed enrolment for the 2020 and 2021 school year as well as the 2021 and 2022 school years. A lot of parents didn't send their kids back to school right away. They held the kids at home if they were able to, just to see what the pandemic was going to do and to reevaluate how families wanted to reintegrate their kids back to school. Schools, unfortunately, have a cutoff for funding enrolment for September 30th, and a lot of kids, because of school closures, went back into the school setting following the September 30th cutoff date. As such, schools have found that their funding has been quite a lot less compared to the 2019-2020 school year. So will

the Minister base school funding on 2019 enrolment numbers for 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years to provide increased funding stability to Northwest Territories schools? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to make that commitment. But, fortunately, there are mechanisms in place where schools are in situations where they have extraordinary enrolment compared to what they are funded for. And the school, if it meets certain criteria, if there's a certain increase in their student population, they can apply to ECE to receive additional funding to cover that, recognizing that there are extraordinary circumstances. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So then if schools are coming back to their MLAs and saying that they've seen significant differences in enrolments, would those schools not then qualify for that and so can we not make that commitment that schools will see stability in their funding so that they're not expected to educate students without the funding for those students? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If schools meet the criteria, then there shouldn't be an issue. But there is a criteria. It is not just anecdotal evidence that there's changes in student population. And in places like Yellowknife, there are a number of different schools, a number of different school boards so there is movement between those schools as well. Some might see increases, some might see decreases. But it's not a change perhaps in the net population of students. Overall, we've seen about a .4 percent decrease in the numbers across the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I'm going to have to have a conversation, I guess, with the Minister offline to compare information from school boards to ECE as well just to make sure that schools are supported.

I'm wondering if -- so teachers have long indicated that students to teacher ratio includes teachers who are also not present in the classrooms and therefore it does not allow for the number of teachers needed to meet the students where they are at. Students have a lot greater needs in the territory and around the world with COVID. Students are at much different places from missing a lot of school or just from the mental health and anxiety that comes with COVID and the disruption to stability for students, kids, and everybody these days.

So to help improve student outcomes, will the Minister pass a directive reducing the student-teacher ratio in NWT schools and provide additional funding for additional teachers? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the 16 to 1 ratio is a minimum, and it's a legislated number. We actually fund to about 12.8 to 1. And that is just including teachers, program supports, staff. So it is basically instructional staff. So that number is a minimum, and we already exceed that number. And I will be the first to say there's never enough money for education; there's never enough teachers to go around, and so I appreciate the Member's comment and the school board's comments. But unfortunately, we've talked a lot about competing needs today, and we've talked about our overall debt, and our efforts to ensure that we are supporting every area to the greatest extent possible. And so that's what we're working on, and we'll be going through the budget in this sitting, and I'm happy to dig deep into the details of the school funding formula at that time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Final supplementary, Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Minister's comments, and I think it's important that on this side of the House, we continue to talk about the things we would like to see more money go into because those are the things that are important to the people we serve.

That being said, I know that education is top of mind for many Northerners, if not most Northerners. And I'm wondering if the Minister would be willing to revisit the education funding formula in advance of the modernization of the Education Act in order to address things like inflation and increased needs for inclusive schooling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the funding formula is quite complex, and the funding that is provided to education bodies is complex in general. There's actually additional funding available for inclusive schooling on an application basis. And I've seen those applications come across my desk, and we've been approved.

We are always looking at the funding formula. There have been some improvements made to the formula during this Assembly. I expect to see some more made before the end of this Assembly. But as for a wholesale revision, I can't commit to that given that the Education Act is become modernized, and it would take a lot of effort to redo the entire funding formula and then redo it again once we finalize that Education Act. So while I can commit to continuous improvements, I can't commitment to a wholesale revision. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Finance.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 561-19(2):
MAIN ESTIMATES 2022-2023

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Main Estimates, 2022-2023. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TABLED DOCUMENT 562-19(2):
FOLLOW-UP LETTER FOR ORAL QUESTION
828-19(2): INUVIK WARMING SHELTER FIRE

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following document: Follow-up letter for Oral Question 828-19(2): Inuvik Warming Shelter Fire. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TABLED DOCUMENT 563-19(2):
MEDIA RELEASE – ALTERNATIVES NORTH AND
ECOLOGY NORTH COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES STATEMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

TABLED DOCUMENT 564-19(2):
ALTERNATIVES NORTH AND ECOLOGY NORTH
COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES STATEMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I wish to table the following two documents: A Media Release from Alternatives North and Ecology North Comments on the Draft NWT Statement of Environmental Values.

And the second document: Alternatives North and Ecology North Comments on the Draft NWT Statement of Environmental Values. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Tabling of documents. Member for Thebacha.

TABLED DOCUMENT 565-19(2):
ARTICLE – "VOLVO ANNOUNCES MASSIVE 50-
GIGAWATT-HOUR BATTERY PLANT IN SWEDEN
DATED FEBRUARY 7, 2022

TABLED DOCUMENT 566-19(2):
EDMONTON JOURNAL ARTICLE – “FORTUNE
MINERALS AIMING TO DEVELOP IN ALBERTA
AFTER SASKATCHEWAN REJECTED
PROPOSED METALS REFINERY” DATED
FEBRUARY 4, 2022

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table an article entitled "Volvo Announces Massive 50-Gigawatt-Hour Battery Plant in Sweden".

And the second is titled "Fortune Minerals" from the Edmonton Journal, "Article Aiming to Develop in Alberta after Saskatchewan Rejected Proposed Metals Refinery". Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Bill 23; Bill 29; Tabled Document 561-19(2), Main Estimates 2022-2023, 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. I move that the chair rise and report progress. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. There's a motion on the floor to report progress. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, committee. I will now rise and report progress.

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

Report of Committee of the Whole

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 23; Bill 29; Tabled Document 561-19(2), 2022-2023 Main Estimates, and would like to report progress, and Mr. Speaker, I move that report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you.

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

---Carried

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

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Wednesday, February 23rd, 2022, 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Replies to Budget Address (Day 2 of 7)
7. Acknowledgements
8. Oral Questions
9. Written Questions
10. Returns to Written Questions
11. Replies to Commissioner's Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Motions
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Bill 23 An Act to Amend the Public Utilities Act
 - Bill 29 Resource Royalty Information Disclosure Statute Amendment Act
 - Bill 38 Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act, 2021
 - Tabled Document 561-19(2) 2022-2023 Main Estimates

22. Report of Committee of the Whole

23. Third Reading of Bills

24. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, February 23rd, 2022, at 1:30 p.m.

--ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 4:46 p.m.