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The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

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(Yellowknife South)
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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Wednesday, March 2, 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. 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.): Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Municipal and Community Affairs.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 216-19(2):
NWT OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEER AWARDS

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NWT volunteer awards program was developed in 1991 as a way to recognize outstanding volunteers and highlight the importance of volunteerism in the NWT communities. Today, I want to congratulate everybody nominated for the 2021 NWT Outstanding Volunteer Awards, and to share some of the incredible achievements of the award winners.

We received a total of 23 nominations this year, including three in the elders category, six in the group category, 12 in the individual category, and two in the youth category.

Mr. Speaker, each of these nominations are noteworthy of their own but I want to highlight the contribution of the award winners. I am pleased to announce the recipients of the NWT Outstanding Volunteer Awards for 2021 are:

- Outstanding Elder Award, Margaret Henderson;
- Outstanding Youth Award, Madison Pilling;
- Outstanding Individual Award, Kurtis Sheane;
- Outstanding Group Award, Edward and Bertha Landry.

Mr. Speaker, Margaret Henderson had been nominated at the Food Rescue Yellowknife -- volunteering at the Food Rescue since 2008. She has been instrumental in the development

of the Food Rescue board structure and has served as a board member herself for many years. She has volunteered at all levels of the Food Rescue's operations and acts as a liaison between the Food Rescue and the food contributors in Yellowknife. She currently acts as a volunteer kitchen manager and helps run the day-to-day operations. Margaret's compassion, organizational skills and outreach and leadership has contributed greatly to the high regards in which the Food Rescue is thought of in the Yellowknife community and beyond.

As part of the winning this award, Margaret received \$1000 to donate to an organization of her choice. She chose Food Rescue. Congratulations, Margaret, and thank you for your contributions.

The 2021 outstanding volunteer in the youth category is Madison Pilling. Madison has been an active volunteer in Fort Simpson for many years. She has a passion and love for speed skating, hockey, golf, and curling. She sits on volunteer boards, helps coach and coordinate local events. Madison also spearheaded the first co-ed hockey team in Fort Simpson called the Ice Breakers. Madison has been an active member of the Fort Simpson volunteer fire and ambulance department for five years. She volunteers her time taking ambulance calls, has demonstrated leadership qualities in her involvement with the department, and this year became the department's training officer. She also volunteers around the community by assisting with youth programming, grade 12 graduation, and using social media to promote local Indigenous art and tourism in the Deh Cho Region. Madison received \$1000 to donate to an organization of her choice. She chose the Hay River animal shelter. Congratulations, Madison, and thank you for your contributions.

This year the award winner for the 2021 volunteer award in the individual category is Kurtis Sheane. Kurtis has been an invaluable volunteer in Hay River for many years. He has made and served food to hundreds of community members and provided one-on-one support to members of the vulnerable sector through peer support and access to local services. Kurtis offers food delivery to local elders and assists them in getting to and from medical appointments. As well, he offers youth mentorship and manages the homeless shelter in Hay River. He goes above and beyond to provide support to the

vulnerable sector in Hay River and has helped improve the lives of hundreds of people. His tireless commitment to the members of his community means that he is the person who is called in the middle of the night for help, and he has proven time and again that he is willing to lend a hand to those in need. Kurtis received \$1000 to donate to an organization of his choice. He chose the Hay River Committee for Persons with Disabilities. Congratulations, Kurtis, and thank you for your contributions.

Finally, Edward and Bertha Landry are the recipients of the 2021 Outstanding Volunteer Award in the group category. Edward and Bertha started the Fort Providence minor hockey group many years ago in efforts to bring hockey to the youth of Fort Providence. Together they organize fundraisers for the minor hockey group and reach out to local businesses and organizations for support. They work to get parents in the community involved with the group and has made great efforts to get hockey equipment delivered to the community so that all the kids are able to play. Edward and Bertha spent an exceptional amount of time and work together to overcome challenges that often act as barriers to youth participating in small communities. They act as chaperones when the group travel for tournaments and frequently offer financial support to make these out-of-town trips possible for children for Fort Providence. Edward and Bertha received \$1000 to donate to an organization of their choice, and they chose Fort Providence Minor Hockey. Thank you for your contributions, Edward and Bertha Landry.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recognize all the individuals receiving an award this year and to everyone who has been nominated. Congratulations, and thank you for your dedication. I want to thank everybody who submitted a nomination this year. I would like to remind everybody that nominations for the NWT volunteer awards are open year-round. Please encourage your constituents to send the nominations at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 217-19(2):
ADVANCING AGING IN PLACE INITIATIVES

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as the Minister responsible for Seniors to update Members on our mandate commitment to enable seniors to age in place with dignity. This is an important commitment to me personally because of the number of seniors who live in my constituency. I continue to hear from them that they want to stay in their homes as long as possible. That means taking a cross-department

approach to providing seniors with access to various services and supports when and where needed.

The GNWT has identified several ways in which this goal will be achieved, including:

- Increasing support for seniors to stay in their homes and communities, including home care;
- Funding actions that enhance inclusion and safety;
- Expediting the removal of barriers to aging in place; and
- Protecting seniors from abuse and neglect.

The Department of Health and Social Services, the NWT Housing Corporation, and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment are working together to advance this mandate priority.

For example, the NWT Housing Corporation has amended its policies which will result in improved access to housing for low income seniors. These changes include eliminating the requirement for applicants to have land tenure or insurance when they apply for homeownership repair programs. In addition, specific to seniors the NWT Housing Corporation no longer counts the income of adult children or grandchildren when calculating whether they are within the income threshold of the program they're applying for. As a result of these changes, we have seen seniors' participation in home repair programming increase by up to 25 percent.

The NWT Housing Corporation also has several other relevant housing initiatives underway, including the Seniors' Aging-in-Place Program, and new and innovative public housing designs that have wide doorways and halls to accommodate barrier-free use.

To assist in addressing the current demand for seniors' housing, the NWT Housing Corporation is preparing a submission to the federal government's National Housing Co-Investment Fund for new public housing. The NWT Housing Corporation also supported Avens with its application to advance the Avens Pavilion Project, which will add 102 new seniors' housing units in Yellowknife later next year.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is also working on improving life for seniors by creating a new stream of the income assistance program tailored to them and to persons with disabilities. The department is currently engaging various groups to ensure that this program will meet the needs of NWT residents.

Mr. Speaker, for our part the Department of Health and Social Services is ready to engage the public to

gather information for the development of an NWT Seniors Strategy. Our hope is that the dialogue will identify gaps in services and offer solutions. The NWT Seniors Strategy will be complete by September of 2022.

The Department of Health and Social Services will also make funding available in 2022-2023 for communities to deliver services and provide support to seniors so they can age in place with our unique Age-Friendly Grant Program. The detail is online, and we are now taking applications.

We are also working to ensure NWT seniors are better protected from abuse and neglect. Mr. Speaker, three key initiatives are already underway:

- A review of current programs, services and regulatory frameworks;
- An examination of training options for staff and bystander intervention; and
- The development and launch of a public awareness campaign.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is committed to understanding and addressing the needs of seniors so they can remain in their communities for as long as possible. It is critical that our government offer a sustainable approach to meeting their diverse requirements. We have made and continue to make significant progress towards achieving this priority. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 218-19(2):
PREMIER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise the House that I will be absent from the House for a portion of today's proceedings to participate in the Residential School Survivors Workshop here in Yellowknife. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 972-19(2):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES VACCINE POLICY

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in November 2021, the federal government implemented a mandatory vaccine policy that would impact employees and contractors

working in federally-regulated sectors, as well as travelers in Canada. The two federal sectors that directly impact the NWT are air and marine transportation services.

Mr. Speaker, to enhance the safety of its residents, this government implemented vaccine policies of our own to public sector workers and contractors in the NWT. The policies are comparatively uniformed throughout departments, except for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation and marine transportation services. Due to the federal mandatory vaccine policies, both opted for stringent policies.

Mr. Speaker, there are limited exceptions to the vaccine requirements for travelers to address the realities of remote fly-in communities. However, the Government of Canada, in a backgrounder document dated October 6th, 2021, stated that this vaccination mandate will include specific accommodation to recognize the unique needs of travelers from small, remote communities, some of which are not accessible by road, to ensure they will be able to travel to obtain essential services in support of their medical health or social wellbeing.

It went further by committing to engaging with Indigenous groups and territories.

Mr. Speaker, in the Northwest Territories, communities outside Yellowknife rely on the knowledge, experience, supports, and multiple of services provided by public sector employees and contractors living throughout the NWT. Not all employees require access to the communities which is, in part, why there is the allowance for accommodation and enhanced use of PPE and testing.

Almost two years of operating without terminating or placing any employees on leave without pay, this has become a reality in the last month; in part, due to the mandatory federal vaccine requirements to board aircraft.

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that we are not only losing long-term employee but we are placing our small communities at risk through the loss of northern expertise, knowledge, and experience.

I would ask those on the other side of this floor to actively lobby, based on our unique circumstances in the Northwest Territories, the federal government for relaxation of vaccine requirements for all air travel in the NWT or, in alternative, the charter flights. Mr. Speaker, I'll have questions for the Minister responsible for Human Resources. Thank you.

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

Colleagues, before we continue I'd like to recognize former Member, former Minister, and former Premier, Mr. Jim Antoine, first elected in 1991 and 1995 and 1999. Welcome to the House.

---Applause.

Members' statements. Member for Great Slave.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 973-19(2):
PANDEMIC RECOVERY

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I consider a post-pandemic world, one that appears more chaotic by the day, I'm reminded of the quote by Deepak Chopra: "All great changes are preceded by chaos."

A year ago, I was speaking about the need for realistic or zero-based budgeting instead of sticking with the status quo and putting faith in the idea that we could wait until things got "back to normal." Just like the world after 9-1-1, I think we can all finally agree we are not going back to a pre-COVID world. And rather than waste time crying over spilt milk, we must use this time of chaos to create real and meaningful change for the people of our territory.

The resource extraction sector is our largest economic driver and will remain so for a long time. Therefore, we must take measures now to ensure that this revenue source is protected and that exploration is able to rebound. Remember, Mr. Speaker, it takes over a decade for an exploration project to go through permitting before it becomes an operating mine producing royalties. Given the lack of exploration projects on the horizon, we should all be very concerned about where our economy will be in ten years.

Our massive infrastructure deficit is hurting our territory. Mines want clean energy to operate and need roads to move supplies and concentrate. Therefore, it is imperative that our three strategic infrastructure projects continue to advance, Not only to directly lower the cost of living and connect our residents but also to encourage investment in our territory.

I can't stress enough how critical the Taltson Hydro Expansion, the Slave Geological Corridor, and the Mackenzie Valley Highway are to the NWT's future prosperity. We must ensure northern companies that hire northern people are given priority in procurement. We need to end the lip service around Indigenous involvement and introduce financial repercussions when obligations aren't met. Whether they be infrastructure projects or mining-related, our people need to be more than just laborers or housekeepers on site. Government must work with Indigenous governments to advance regional mineral strategies and help facilitate the

conversation between them and industry And we need to expand funding initiatives such as the Mining Incentive Program.

Mr. Speaker, one thing we know how to do is build roads. With climate change, it's imperative we replace melting infrastructure with permanent all-season community access. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement. Thank you.

---Unanimous consent granted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I promise this is the last time.

With climate change it is imperative we replace our melting infrastructure with permanent all-season community access. Further investment in roads, including pushing for 100 percent federal funding, will keep Northerners employed while addressing the critical infrastructure gap that impedes investment in our territory. We should also plan for linear infrastructure corridors where telecommunications and power lines are run alongside transportation routes to facilitate development in the region. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of ITI at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 974-19(2):
EMERGING STRONGER - GOVERNMENT OF
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ECONOMIC
RECOVERY PLAN

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. On May 31st last year the Premier released Cabinet's plan for economic recovery called "Emerging Stronger." Following pressure from this and other MLAs, a public engagement web page was set up and it's still open. I am not aware of any response or "what we heard" report from that public engagement. I am not aware of any progress report or tracking of any of the commitments made in Emerging Stronger.

On June 4th of last year, we had a discussion of Emerging Stronger in Committee of the Whole right at the end of the sitting. As I said then, I was hoping for something more bold leading to fundamental changes. In September 2020 I endorsed the Just Recovery Initiative led by NGOs from across the NWT that called for:

- good jobs;
- living wages and sick leave for all;
- guaranteed livable income;
- affordable housing for all;

- universal access to internet;
- community healing and wellness; and
- a green new deal.

What we got in Emerging Stronger is a document closely linked to Cabinet's mandate or, quite frankly, more of the same. We have an opportunity to help rebuild an economy to make it more sustainable and just. I would like to see broadband service made a strategic infrastructure priority over the other big projects that this government continues to push.

We did make some progress with our vulnerable populations in Yellowknife, Hay River, Fort Simpson, and Inuvik, and we need to keep those gains.

There was nothing in the document about fiscal sustainability or tax fairness and a new relationship with Ottawa. There is very little in Emerging Stronger about the climate emergency or remediation economy. Most of the so-called "economic diversification" is around promoting more mining. There is very little that addresses the mental health crisis that's arisen during the pandemic and there is nothing on food security.

Most revealing was the lack of any financial information or specific programs or initiatives. There is some reporting to be done but it's not clear exactly what's going to be reported; Some key indicators but nothing really about how the analysis is going to be undertaken or how on those key indicators and, more importantly, how that leads into a response or action by our government. I will have questions later today for the Premier on where Cabinet is at with regard to rebuilding our economy and a just recovery. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 975-19(2):
TALTSON HYDRO EXPANSION

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we know in the North we face the most severe impacts from climate change, and the world is looking to the North to be a leader in climate change adaptation. Climate change will continue to increase rainfall, flooding, and coastal erosion, and increasing temperatures will affect habitat, change the availability of country foods, especially meat, disrupt Indigenous subsistence, and increase the cost of living here in the territory. We cannot afford to ignore climate change, Mr. Speaker.

At the beginning of this Assembly when all members established our priorities, the Taltson Hydro Expansion was identified as a critical infrastructure project to advance. The Taltson Expansion is not only critical to support major resource development

in the Slave Geological Province; it is central to achieving the objectives of both the 2030 Energy Strategy and the GNWT's climate change action plan.

This infrastructure project is the GNWT's primary solution to meet federal greenhouse gas emission targets. With estimates of generating 60 megawatts and offsetting 240,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually, Mr. Speaker, it's clear to say that without the Taltson Hydro Expansion Project, the GNWT may very well fall short of their emission goals. The GNWT's climate change action plan contains the roadmap for the NWT to meet international, federal, and territorial benchmarks for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The goals include:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent below 2005 levels by 2030;
- Improve knowledge of the climate change impacts in the NWT; and
- Build resilience to adapt to a changing climate.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT has a number of infrastructure projects underway to facilitate achieving these goals, including Taltson. But I am concerned about the pace of the Taltson project and our ability to meet our climate change adaptation energy and cost of living goals on time. I am concerned that as we press forward with our eggs all resting in the Taltson basket, we are still unclear about where the GNWT intends to sell power, the funding supports to back this project, and whether it has the support of Indigenous governments.

Mr. Speaker, in 2019, the NWT was 16 percent below our 2005 emissions. But at the same time that our emissions were declining, so were our major mineral economies. The GNWT is working hard to promote and build our mineral resource industry but the question is, will this come at the expense of our energy strategy, or will Taltson be done in time to save the day? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 976-19(2):
PANDEMIC RECOVERY

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I want to take time to focus on the pandemic recovery of our people. While there are many areas that we need to recover after this pandemic, today I want to focus on our men; and, more so, our young Indigenous men in the territory.

Mr. Speaker, social limitations and isolation affected us all but I'm very concerned with the impact

COVID-19 has left on our young men. I'm concerned, Mr. Speaker, that our young men face addictions, depression, loss of hope, and in the worst case scenario, overdose suicide take the grips of our young men.

Mr. Speaker, we have already lost too many young men. What can we do as a government to offer hope as we emerge from this pandemic? One thing, Mr. Speaker, is jobs. Jobs create a sense of worth.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT provides employment for 6,249 people. The GNWT has made the vision clear that GNWT wants a public service to reflect its population. Of the 6,249 employees, 1,832 are Indigenous. Indigenous people represent nearly half the NWT population and 29 percent of the GNWT employees.

I've said this before, this gap grows significantly however when you look at Indigenous males. As of March 31st, 2021, only 527 Indigenous males work for the GNWT, a mere 8.4 percent of the total workforce. Mr. Speaker, this statistic needs to change.

The GNWT should be proactively working to recruit and develop Indigenous young men to fill positions across the NWT to ensure that this is a representative government. The Indigenous Career Gateway was established in 2018. This program was created to target Indigenous candidates for entry-level positions. Mr. Speaker, what has been the success of this program? How many new Indigenous applications have been added to the GNWT payroll? Which communities?

When I've asked questions to the Minister on the use of this program, I'm told it's used when requested by the hiring manager but I've also heard that it's the responsibility of the HR staff to ensure that it's used. I'm confused, Mr. Speaker. If there's no policy to provide clear guidance, no reporting requirement, no accountability, then it won't be used, Mr. Speaker. We need policy teeth to actually make progress on these initiatives. Mr. Speaker, we need HR professionals in place to ensure that any Indigenous applicant to the NWT has extra support to ensure that their resume checks the boxes for screening, to ensure the resume gets considered in programs we have in place, and to ensure that entry-level positions are filled across the NWT, provide first consideration to P1 candidates by utilizing these programs every time.

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

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to put authority and accountability on to HR staff to ensure competitions and hiring decisions are run

accordingly to the vision of the GNWT, to have a public service that reflects our population. I will have questions for the Minister of Finance later today.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 977-19(2):
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm doing it on socioeconomic indicators.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier in the House, we know that Tlicho region has some of the worst socioeconomic health indicators across the NWT. When compared to the rest of the NWT, Tlicho region has the lowest level of education, second highest unemployment rate, low levels of family income, and highest income assistance.

Mr. Speaker, in my region nearly 60 percent of residents do not have a high school education. 24 percent of our region lives on less than \$30,000. Mr. Speaker, that's nearly one out of four families in my region living on less than \$30,000. How can you feed your family, pay your bills, or improve your life on less than \$30,000?

The Tlicho region also has the smallest proportion of families in the NWT earning above \$75,000.

The Tlicho region has the second highest rate of unemployment in the NWT at nearly 21 percent. It is no surprise, Mr. Speaker, that Tlicho has the highest rate of income assistance in the NWT at 17 percent. What is the GNWT doing to improve the socioeconomic health of Tlicho residents? I will have questions for the Minister of Education at appropriate time.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 978-19(2):
POST-COVID EDUCATION

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we move into the post-COVID world, we can't forget all of our students who have had a pandemic disrupt their last three years. According to the Yellowknife school boards, due to the various closures the schools here in Yellowknife have lost up to one year of school days. And I know that this is a problem that the entire world is facing and that students around the world got behind during COVID-19, but the reality is that our students were already falling behind before COVID and a pandemic certainly didn't help.

This worries me, Mr. Speaker. Our teachers have been performing performance assessments and

many say that their students are already one year behind. And what does this mean in the long run? I think we have to provide extra resources to our schools to make sure that we are not going to see a COVID generation graduating in the decade to come.

Further to literacy and numeracy skills, students have not been able to explore the arts throughout the pandemic. With rules of no singing or public-staged performances, I worry about the socialization of those children and I think we need to see some extra support to make sure that our students can once again sing and dance and be children in the classroom, Mr. Speaker. Academics are not the only recovery in the schools that will need to be addressed.

I know many students are seeing signs of increased anxiety and the pandemic just highlights the importance of in-person learning, and that it's just more than education. There are various nonacademic supports that we need to see. And I know the Minister has been meeting with the school boards, and he's been hearing these concerns, but I'll have some questions to make sure that we provide our school districts and our schools the resources in the years to come to get our children caught up. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 979-19(2):
PANDEMIC RECOVERY

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm trying to come with solutions or views as to the pandemic recovery is quite the task, especially trying to address mental health issues. Something like this is best left up to the mental health experts who are trained to deal with a person's wellbeing, including mental health. I do know that what we have experienced since the coronavirus showed up on our doorstep is one of total disbelief and concern.

The first thing on people's minds were that of the 1921 Spanish flu, where millions of people were infected and died. People were throwing their arms up in the air, like what is really happening? Travelling to communities and to the south were suddenly shut down. You weren't allowed to visit anyone, especially your own immediate family. Everyone was posting signs on their doors and windows stating no visitors allowed. Border sentry posts were set up at all roads leading in to the territory, and even communities were setting up their own. A total lockdown.

That lockdown presented a whole new set of other issues, whether they be related to health or for one's

own release of emotions or the pleasures they missed.

There was more alcohol intake than before due to the lockdown. We now have more drug use than ever before. We now have more cases of domestic violence due to the excesses of alcohol and drugs. This pandemic recovery exercise is not an easy one considering what we have to deal with and not being the authority to address mental health issues, that is best left to the trained.

It is up to the individuals to say enough is enough, and seek mental health counselling. We need to offer more guidance to provide avenues to access the mental health experts in every community. The mental health workers need to be visible and accessible to the community. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 980-19(2):
VOLUNTEERS OF NAHENDEH

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I know each community and region in the NWT have amazing volunteers out there. They are individuals that make things happen for the betterment of our residents.

This year, I would like to recognize three ladies from the Nahendeh that were nominated for the outstanding volunteer award. As you heard me speak earlier today in my Minister's statement, the NWT outstanding youth volunteer was Madison Pilling from Fort Simpson.

Madison has been a volunteer in Fort Simpson for many years with a variety of organizations. She sits on volunteer boards and committees in local hockey, curling, NWT speed skating, and Sport North. Madison has helped organize community events, coaching various sports. To add to this list, she's an active member of the Fort Simpson volunteer fire and ambulance department for over five years, spending many hours taking the ambulance calls and acting as a leader on the fire grounds. In 2021, Madison was named the department's training officer where she designed, trains, and tracks the training of her fellow volunteer members. Madison acts as a role model within her community, and her volunteering efforts have impacted the life of many in Fort Simpson.

Mr. Speaker, Beth Hudson has been recognized by her peers in Fort Simpson for her volunteerism and leadership. And during the 2021 flood that ravaged the community, Beth's contribution helped residents in need get access to food, water, shelter, firewood, among many other necessities. Beth also lends her hands-on approach to mental health support in the

community, mentoring youth, volunteering at community events, and hosting archery competitions, both in Fort Simpson and around the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, Vanessa Merceau was born and raised in Fort Simpson and has volunteered in many different facets throughout her life. She was most recently nominated for the NWT volunteer award for the time, effort, and leadership she dedicated to the Fort Simpson volunteer fire and ambulance department. In 2021, Vanessa was promoted to the rank of lieutenant within the department in recognition of her hard work. In this role, Vanessa volunteers her time for training and administrative duties in support of the department in addition to activities providing medical and fire support for emergency calls within the community. Vanessa's dedication to the Fort Simpson fire and ambulance department has been invaluable to the village of Fort Simpson and she makes the lives of residents safer daily.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of knowing these three ladies personally. I can say they are amazing individuals and make a difference in everybody's life. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Nahendeh. Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Honourable Premier.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize Premier Jim Antoine, the 8th Premier of the NWT. When I first met Premier Antoine, I asked for wise words of advice. He said, "Get'er done." I took that pushing our departments. With 22 priorities and halfway through this Legislative Assembly, I take those wise words even more appropriate today. I apologize, Mr. Speaker, I know this more of an acknowledgement but I'm not sure how long he will be in the House today, so I apologize. But I do welcome him in the House. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Premier. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Yellowknife South.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Antoine's leadership didn't end when he left this building. Since the inception of the NWT Health and Social Services Authority, he's been chair of the leadership council, and he has provided strong leadership through the transformation of our health system. And he continues to provide wise counsel, and I sincerely appreciate his role. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I too would like to recognize Jim Antoine. I first met him probably over 30 -- about 35 years ago as a former Chief in Fort Simpson, and I can vouch that he's still a pretty good hockey player. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Deh Cho.

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Although I can't see past honourable Member Jim Antoine, I'd like to acknowledge that he's a respected Indigenous leader in our region for the Deh Cho First Nations and whatnot, and welcome him to the House today. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too want to recognize Jim Antoine, former Chief and Premier. I also had the privilege as a former Chief going to Dene Nation meetings et cetera and serving, and so I just want to recognize Jim Antoine.

Also, I just want to recognize also Dennis Drygeese, a translator from Lutselk'e, and all the translators in the House that are doing a wonderful job. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Sahtu.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also want to recognize former Premier Mr. Jim Antoine as well too. And as I sit here as an Indigenous woman and being a member of Cabinet, it's a paved trail for Indigenous people to put their names forward and it's a line of encouragement. And I'm in -- in complete awe, to be honest, and I just -- it's an honour to be in his presence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Nahendeh.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Jim, thank you very much for being here. Jim is a constituent of mine, and he's done amazing work. Everybody's acknowledged him here so I thank him for the work that he's done for Nahendeh, Fort Simpson, and the Deh Cho region and the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Welcome. If we have missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to the Chamber and I hope you're enjoying the proceedings. It's always good to have an audience in the House. Mahsi.

Replies to the budget address. Member for Kam Lake.

Replies to Budget Address

MS. CLEVELAND'S REPLY

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to reply to the 2022-23 Budget Address. I'd also like to acknowledge the work of staff across the government who have worked hard to prepare the budget.

Mr. Speaker, in total, the budget increased by \$43 million, representing a 2.1 percent increase in expenditures over the previous fiscal year. In various ways, departments report on the progress of their initiatives that relate to the Assembly's priorities. However, it would be helpful if the budget reflected both the budgets and expenditures for those priorities come budget time. This would allow us to see the return on our investment, the financial effectiveness of the money we are spending, and make some judgement whether these investments are worth it. It's been said that what gets measured gets managed. So it would be worth measuring what we are spending on our priorities to ensure that these initiatives are well managed.

Mr. Speaker, while this is largely a status quo budget, four departments do show decreases and the most significant budget increase is for the Department of Finance at 13.9 percent. This increase needs to be evaluated along with what I would like to speak to today –

- The almost 2 percent decrease in the NWT population over the last five years,
- The 5 percent increase in inflation over the previous year,
- The forecasted approach of the debt cap, and
- The Assembly's housing priority.

Mr. Speaker, this government has been largely silent on attracting new Northerners. With the economic and social potential from growth, this government needs to take every opportunity to remind the world that we are open for business not to mention a great place to plant roots. Budget time is a great time for this by identifying the specific and broad potential that infrastructure investment creates. For example, the Road to Whatì opens access to bismuth deposits for the Tlicho people, and the multitude of R and D investments across the government open doors to reimagine the way the GNWT serves the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, inflation alone could increase costs significantly beyond budget projections, especially when petroleum products have increased by as much as 33 percent. This will affect operational costs in every building the GNWT occupies as well as the fuel it uses in government and medical travel. As costs rise, departments will find it difficult to operate within their budgets. The GNWT's reliance on government renewal to change the way it uses its budget is clear - find the path to change or start cutting. And Mr. Speaker, what is required may be a bit of both.

Mr. Speaker, we can't talk about government spending without talking about COVID-19. The reality is COVID-19 has cost governments worldwide, and our fragile system is not immune to these expenses. Although the eruption of further variants is unpredictable, the country as a whole, recognizing increasing vaccination rates, is quickly opening. Even here in the NWT, we expect to see the end of a two-year public health emergency within the month. Even though future variants may require public health restrictions or new vaccines, we should now have a less onerous mechanism to protect our health and galvanize individual responsibility for mutual care with less public oversight and enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, after the introduction of seatbelt legislation, buckling up did eventually become nearly automatic behavior every time we climb into our cars. Managing the pandemic needs to cost less over time.

This fiscal year will see the Covid Secretariat budget reduce from \$26 million to \$12 million, but the number of people employed by the Secretariat remains untouched. About half are directly involved in compliance, monitoring, and enforcement. Given the demands on our system, surely there are positions around the territory that would better support the ability of our territory to thrive.

Mr. Speaker, this is a business-as-usual budget, But these are not business-as-usual times. This is an opportunity to budget for a different future.

For instance, even after COVID global political disruptions just aren't likely; they are already happening. Look at the devastating realities of the war in the Ukraine. Here at home, these are likely to disrupt supply chains and especially the availability and cost of refined petroleum resources.

This increase in cost of living, coupled with the caution imposed by COVID, will continue to affect specific industries like tourism, our overall capital investments, operational costs and, yes, our cost of living.

Climate change will have increasingly wicked impacts. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change tells us we are still on a collision course with average temperatures warming greater than two degrees Celsius in our lifetime.

Increased extreme weather will continue to disrupt food production and transportation. Last year, we experienced historic Mackenzie River flooding with huge impacts to Jean Marie River, Fort Simpson, Fort Good Hope, and Aklavik. The West Coast experienced the same with significant impacts to key highways and the cost of food. We will continue to see climate change increase rainfall, flooding, and coastal erosion here in the North. Increasing temperatures will affect habitat, change the availability of country foods, especially meat, disrupt Indigenous subsistence, and increase the cost of living.

Although we are moving forward toward a 30 percent decrease in GHG emissions by 2030, our goals depend on the mitigative actions of industry and the expansion of the Taltson, and neither of these are assured.

Mr. Speaker, I question whether it is the efforts of our government or the reduced mining activity in the North that has reduced our GHG emissions. We have a lot of work to do, and implementing the GNWT portions of the approved 2030 Energy Strategy largely depend on federal contributions.

In June 2021, the federal government renewed its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and passed Bill C-12, raising the bar to a 40 percent GHG reduction and a target of net-zero by 2050. The spectrum of issues will change and the costs will increase, Mr. Speaker.

Demographically, we are becoming fewer in number but older in age. Housing options and care will need to change for seniors to live in place with dignity or, alternatively, further hollow out our small communities through rural to urban migrations. The spectrum of housing and care requirements will change, and the costs will increase, Mr. Speaker.

Although the legacy of colonization has been recognized through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry, the repeated discovery of unmarked graves at residential schools, the work of decolonization and its impacts on collective trauma, structural inequality, and political self-determination, has hardly begun. The spectrum of issues will change, and the costs will increase, Mr. Speaker.

My point is that the future is uncertain and more complex than before. If we are trying to build resilience to return to business-as-usual following each coming disruption, we will not win, Mr. Speaker.

A status quo budget does not serve us at a time when the world is anything but status quo. At the least, we must innovate and adapt. But the goal, really, is to innovate and transform.

A sense of urgency needs to pervade government renewal exercises. We need to redirect our little remaining debt capacity toward a very different and even more prosperous future. The word "bold" was peppered across the first half of the 19th Assembly, but this budget is not bold. Instead, I want to see this government take risk by rethinking the way it serves its residents and developing realistic budgets to implement the most desired futures while preparing to prosper through the worst-case scenarios. We need to make budget decisions that position us with the flexibility, strength, and courage to choose wisely and be well prepared to pivot. I hope the government renewal process will evolve GNWT program evaluations to focus on outcomes and value for dollar of the programs. In keeping with that I would like to see the government move to a results-based budget format in the future, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this seems like a good place to end. But I'm not done. And I ask that if you only remember one thing I say today in response to the 2022-2023 Budget Address, remember this: The Housing Corporation cannot meet its mandate with a capital investment of \$11 million.

The Housing Corporation owns 2500 public housing units. At an average cost of \$600,000 per unit, the Housing Corporation holds \$1.5 billion dollars in public housing assets. The industry standard for O and M costs to upkeep units is 2 percent per year. That is \$30 million for 2500 units. The standard life of a public housing unit is 50 years. And industry standard says that the annual cost of unit replacement is 2 percent per year. This is another \$30 million. This means, Mr. Speaker, that the average cost to maintain 2500 public housing units is \$60 million a year. This budget allocates \$11 million in capital funding to the Housing Corporation, leaving an annual shortfall of \$49 million.

Mr. Speaker, you might be thinking but what about all of those federal funding announcements? And this is great news story. But the new funding from the federal government is not for operations and maintenance or replacement of existing stock. It is to build new stock.

The Housing Corporation has to fulfill its mandate to provide suitable, adequate and affordable housing and has a fiscal responsibility to upkeep and care for those investments. This budget does not do that. The NWT Housing Corporation cannot be responsible for its mandate within this budget.

This session, Regular Members have spent hours grilling the NWT Housing Corporation about the

GNWT's investment in housing. The Housing Corporation responded that it follows the budgeting processes of the government. But over the last ten years, the Housing Corporation has seen incremental increases of 31 percent to its budgets while the GNWT has seen an average increase of 51 percent to its overall budget. In this budget alone, we see a 13.9 increase to the Department of Finance.

In truth, Mr. Speaker, this is not solely on the Housing Corporation. This responsibility lies with all of Cabinet who have heard Regular Members, for three budgeting cycles, beg for increased funding to housing, who demanded it in budget negotiations, and now I stand here with the main estimates for Housing Corporation that is lower than the previous two years. Do not tell me that Cabinet hears our demands because these numbers show they clearly do not. This budget shows that housing is not a key priority of this government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Replies to budget address. Member for Thebacha.

REPLY 16-19(2):
MS. MARTSELOS' REPLY

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, today I am going to provide my response to the 2022 Budget Address, which was tabled by the Minister of Finance last week on February 22, 2022. As I prepared my budget reply, I reviewed my speech from last year's budget reply and much of what I said last year is largely still how I feel today about this year's budget.

Mr. Speaker, as someone with several decades of experience with business in the private sector, my primary focus has almost always been about the economy. First of all, now that our government is changing its approach towards COVID-19 and treating the virus as an endemic rather than a pandemic, it is now high time that our government also shifts its approach toward the economic recovery. I've said this before and I will say it again, if we don't have an economy then we don't have money to pay for all the social programs or services.

Mr. Speaker, at the moment our government is not on a sustainable fiscal path. We have an ever-increasing amount of debt, and we are already very close to our federally-imposed debt ceiling. At this rate by this time next year, if not sooner, we are more than likely going to need to ask the federal government to raise our borrowing limit which would be the second time doing so during the 19th Assembly. That's twice our borrowing limit would increase within just three years. Our debt is rising at an accelerated pace, and it is going much faster than our revenue streams can keep up with. That is worrisome.

Our government needs to find some concrete, long-term solutions in addressing the debt that we continue to accumulate. I am not seeing that in this budget address for 2022.

Mr. Speaker, further adding to our fiscal uncertainties is the record level of national inflation that Canada has reached. Statistics Canada reported last month that the country has reached a 31-year high for inflation, by increasing 5.1 percent since last January. Costs in the NWT for consumer goods have increased for just about everything.

I shared several statistics last week about the costs going up for everything from food to shelter to gasoline. These costs hurt everyone, but especially people who are low income, persons with disabilities, and seniors. Plus, with a war brewing in Eastern Europe, costs for goods will almost surely increase even further. The world finds itself going from fighting a global pandemic into what I hope will not be a global war. I understand that this a worrying statement to make but that is the reality we are living in right now.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, another major issue that the NWT is facing is a crisis of housing. There are housing waiting lists that are sky-high in all communities and regions of the NWT. In Fort Smith alone, there are 212 people on the housing waiting list and some folks have been on that list for many years. There is not nearly enough housing supply being created to keep up with the needs of the communities.

There are also many structural and inherent flaws within the NWT Housing Corporation as it currently stands. There are many outdated policies it has which simply do not help people. Mr. Speaker, despite our government releasing the Emerging Stronger document last May, I have not seen any real substantive plan outlining economic recovery for the NWT.

For the last two years our government has been reactive to the evolving situation around COVID-19. Much of the response towards the economy was to provide temporary financial relief to help industries stay afloat and not close entirely. Well, we've now entered a new chapter with COVID-19 therefore our government must now shift how it engages with the economy. We need more collaboration with Indigenous governments and organizations, such as the NWT Indigenous Leaders Economic Coalition. We need more results on the review of our government's procurement policy. An Indigenous procurement policy and improvements to the Business Incentive Policy are needed as soon as possible. We need to eliminate inefficient and time-consuming red tape in certain areas.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, we also need to advance the work on settling and implementing the various treaty, land, resource, and self-government agreements. Doing so we would create greater economic stability and conditions to attract and secure more investments in the NWT. We also need to consider devolving certain powers and responsibilities to Indigenous governments. That would cut costs by our government and provide greater autonomy to Indigenous governments. Changes in those areas would go a long way to improving our long-term economic outlook in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to continue to pursue large infrastructure projects, such as the Mackenzie Highway, the Slave Geological Corridor, and the Taltson Hydro Expansion. These projects need to go forward, and they need to be done in partnership with Indigenous governments. We also need to continue with other projects such as the new territorial fire centre and construction of new seniors facilities that are currently underway in several NWT communities.

Overall, Mr. Speaker, given the unprecedented situation we endured with the pandemic and the speed with which governments acted in responding to it, our government now must also respond with urgency and haste toward our economic situation. I've said this before, we need to be able to think outside the box and to move with greater pace to improve our delicate economic situation. We need to come up with innovative ways to retain more of the wealth that is generated here in the NWT. We need to find new sources of revenue to help with our debt load, and the best way to do that is to increase the level of business and economic activity across the NWT. That is how we pay the bills and create a stronger economy for future generations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Replies to Budget Address, day 7 of 7. Member for Monfwi.

REPLY 17-19(2):

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG'S REPLY

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the people in my riding make up 6 percent of the territorial population and represent four of 33 communities. The Government of the Northwest Territories' budget is \$2.3 billion. Mr. Speaker, if that money was allocated based on population, Tlicho would be at least \$120 million. I am waiting on the Minister to provide me with the information but I estimate the amount we receive is half.

According to the 2019 Government of the Northwest Territories Health Status Report, their own report says Tlicho region has the worst outcome in

education, health, social issues, crimes, mental health, and housing yet no additional funding is being allocated to the Tlicho region.

Mr. Speaker, with this in mind, Tlicho people did not negotiate land claim and self-government to be part of the North Slave region.

On August 23rd, 25th, 2003, Tlicho Agreement was signed by all three parties - Government of the Northwest Territories, federal government, Government of Canada, and Dogrib Treaty 11 to the Tlicho Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement.

Mr. Speaker, the Tlicho region should not be considered as part of the North Slave region administrative boundaries. The North Slave region boundaries bring the Tlicho into Akaitcho territory and the city of Yellowknife. Being part of North Slave is not helping to serve Tlicho people.

Socioeconomic Condition

Mr. Speaker, earlier this week I spoke about social and economic challenges in the Tlicho region. We have high rates in income assistance, low levels of family income, low levels of education. We have high rates of addictions and substance abuse. Mr. Speaker, we have little options for housing. We have highest overcrowding in the NWT, with many homes in need of repair. We also need safe shelter options for women and children fleeing domestic violence.

We are also lacking infrastructure and services. Mr. Speaker, most of our infrastructure is over 30 years old. For example, Mezi Community School in Whati and Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Edzo is over 50 years old. The Mezi School in Whati was originally built to serve elementary school children. It was not built to accommodate high school students. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, the school is beyond their capacity and is in need of retrofit or replacement. Chief Jimmy Bruneau School is also over 50 years old. The community wants a new school built in Behchoko. Wekweeti and Gameti health facilities are also over 30 years old.

What I would like to see, I would like to see the following:

- Transfer child and youth care counsellor to the Tlicho government without restriction;
- Dedicate funding to create a safe shelter for women and children in the Tlicho region;
- Additional houses built in the Tlicho region and housing policies that meet the needs of the people;

- An evaluation of both community and Government of the Northwest Territories infrastructure in the region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Replies to budget address, day 7 of 7. Colleagues, we will take a short recess.

---SHORT RECESS.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member for Frame Lake.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 962-19(2): EMERGING STRONGER – GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Premier. Today I spoke about the less-than-spectacular Cabinet plan for economic recovery called Emerging Stronger.

Can the Premier tell us whether there were any comments submitted on the document and what, if anything, was done with those comments? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Comments were received from the standing committee on the development of the plan from Indigenous governments, the NWT Association of Communities, and the Business Advisory Council prior to its first release. Since the release we received some comments, and EIA is tracking the feedback provided. We received comments from the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, the Business Advisory Council, the NWT Chamber of Commerce, and the Yellowknife Dene Nation after this. We also solicited feedback from the public through the EIA websites, and a small number of responses were received. We do have a commitment that the economic Emerging Stronger document will be updated and tabled in May 31st, 2022. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Premier for that. I'm glad to hear that there were some comments because there's nothing posted on the website about those.

Can the Premier tell us whether there's any intention to actually respond to the comments that have been submitted and when that's going to happen and whether those responses are going to be made public? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government of the Northwest Territories provided written responses to the groups that I listed in our response. The comments from the public were received anonymously. The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce posted their letter and our response on their website. The NWT Chamber of Commerce posted their letter to us on their website, and other groups are welcome to share correspondence as well. We also responded to the standing committee's written feedback on the draft plan and provided responses to individual Members' questions when the plan was discussed in the Committee of the Whole and a public committee briefing back in June 2021. We won't be publishing individual responses when we update the plan but we will be doing -- including all feedback when we table the plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Premier for that. I think it would be more helpful for us to actually post some of those responses on the engagement portal. But I noted in my statement that Emerging Stronger commits to some tracking of key indicators, and I haven't seen anything yet in terms of tracking or public reporting.

Can the Premier tell me whether any key indicators of recovery have been identified, whether they have been tracked, and when the public can expect some sort of progress reporting? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We did commit to quarterly reporting of the economic and social indicators. EIA has worked with all the departments to compile a list of the social and economic indicators to reflect how we're doing. We're now working with the information shared Services and the bureau of statistics to create a dashboard that'll provide the public with easy access to view progress. This will be completed early this summer. The dashboard's going to be a living document, and the public can access it at any time. In the meantime, much of the information that will be included in the dashboard is accessible on the bureau of statistics website, and details of the current economic situation and outlook are also found in the economic review that accompanies this budget. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Premier for that new information. I acknowledge that the pandemic is not quite over but we have to start to turn our mind to rebuilding our economy, and that's going to take some enthusiasm, creativity, and justice.

Can the Premier tell us whether Cabinet is committed to progressive change and specifically how it is going to -- how that's going to happen in collaboration with Regular MLAs and the public? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I like to think that our government's working towards progressive change all the time. We've got comments from Members so I'm excited for that. We engage with Regular Members on a regular basis through normal processes, process conventions. We also engage with Indigenous government partners, more so than any other government in the past. We have the Council of Leaders, the modern treaty and self-government tables, for example. And as well as other -- numerous other organizations, community governments, and the public on important initiatives.

Just one example is the Minister of Finance engages in budget dialogues every single year now with the public and stakeholders. This engagement provides a further opportunity for the public to express their views on the recovery priorities and to inform our actions coming out of the pandemic.

And we will make a commitment that we will be providing an update to standing committee prior to the tabling of the updated document. Thank you, Mr. Speaker?

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

QUESTION 963-19(2):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES VACCINE POLICY

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. These questions are for the Minister responsible for Human Resources.

Can the Minister provide the number of GNWT public sector employees impacted by the GNWT vaccine policies and what is the break down by accommodation, enhanced PPE and testing, early retirement, terminations, those that have resigned, leave without pay? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with respect to the vaccination policy, accommodations to begin with, I can advise that no employees have submitted a medical reason at this point for not providing proof of vaccination. We don't have any duty to accommodation files in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, less than 5 percent of the GNWT's workforce, or approximately 325 employees, have opted to use enhanced PPE and testing rather than providing a proof of vaccination.

As for early retirement, Mr. Speaker, I don't expect employees to give reasons for when they choose to retire or why they might choose to retire. I have no information or awareness that there are any who

have chosen to retire as a result of vaccination policies. Similarly, no one has been terminated, Mr. Speaker.

If someone's choosing to resign right now, they well have done so during the course of the pandemic but I have no indication that there's been any resignations as a result of vaccination policies.

Mr. Speaker, only 13 employees out of the some 5,000 or so that we have with the public service are currently on leave without pay. One of those actually, I think, may have indeed provided a proof of vaccination and is going to be heading back to work. So that would put us down at around 12. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister confirm the breakdown by Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees, specifically those who have, I guess in this instance who are using the enhanced PPE and testing and leave without pay, due to the vaccine policies? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a breakdown of the 320 or so employees who are opting for the PPE option. I can certainly see if we do have that breakdown.

With respect to the 12 or so who are on leave without pay, that's too small a number, Mr. Speaker, and I'd be concerned about identifying individuals who have made that option. So I don't know that I'll be able to break that down. But I will look into the other number for the Member. Thank you.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister, for those employees placed on leave without pay, will those persons eventually be terminated if they're not vaccinated or will they be on leave without pay indefinitely with the possibility of returning to their work positions at a future date? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So again, to reiterate, Mr. Speaker, no one has been terminated. And coming back from leave without pay, really, it just depends on the reasons why they're on leave without pay. For those -- and I'm assuming the numbers that I have are reflective only of those who may be on leave without pay likely or very likely because of the federal travel requirements or federal regulations on their federal -- federally-regulated locations, as such we may be in a situation where we're waiting on the federal government to modify their policies. And I did certainly take note of the Member's statement earlier about ensuring that we are doing our part to on top of what's happening in that regard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister confirm what discussion, if any, has taken place been your department and -- her department and the federal government with respect to how the federal government vaccination policies is affecting not only employees and contractors but potentially our communities as well? Will the Minister commit to asking the federal government for relaxation on air travel in the NWT? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lead thus far in terms of ensuring that communities and residents of the Northwest Territories continue to have access to the necessary services that often involve a flight has really fallen thus far with the Minister of Health and that -- as was I think discussed earlier in the Member's statement, there are concessions available for individuals who are not vaccinated so that they can get access to medical care and have family reunification.

As far as seeking adaptations of the regulations solely for the handful of employees who may be choosing to not get vaccinated, Mr. Speaker, I don't know that that's going to get us very far. I will certainly commit, as I've said, to ensure that we continue to monitor, that we are staying on top of what's happening with the public service federally but also with other jurisdictions. And as we've done throughout the policy, this vaccination policy for the public service will be flexible and responsive as the pandemic continues to evolve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 964-19(2):
TALTSON HYDRO EXPANSION PROJECT

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering to date how much funding has been secured and spent on the Taltson Hydro Expansion?

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you. Since 2018, the federal government has allotted \$20 million to the GNWT to advance the Taltson Expansion Project. It's important to note that this is 100 percent federal funding. The funding has supported the establishment of partnerships with Indigenous governments as well as the collection of information to be able to define the project and move it towards

so that we could get our regulatory applications. The discussions with the federal government are ongoing in regards to the continued financial support so that we could get this project moving forward. Quyananni.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, what is today's estimated cost of the total project, and what is the status of securing that funding as federal funding? Up here in the Northwest Territories, we love 100 percent federal dollars, and we will take as many as we can get our hands on. Thank you.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyananni. A preliminary cost estimate for the project renewed in 2019 estimated the project construction costs in the range of \$1.5 billion. It is very important to note that this is preliminary costs estimate which will be reviewed and refined as our work to define the scope is advanced. Significant financial support from the federal government is key, again, to move this project forward.

The GNWT maintains active communication with both Canada infrastructure bank and officials from the Crown Indigenous relations as well as Northern Affairs Canada so that we can have potential -- so that potential funders are informed on the project as it progresses. Discussions and correspondence at the political level have also occurred. There is much interest from the federal government in this green energy project. Quyananni.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to the status of discussions to secure partnerships on this project. In order to make this project really worthwhile for the NWT, the GNWT is going to need to secure both purchasers and also ensure that it has the support of partners like Indigenous governments. Thank you.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyananni. The Member's correct. Working in collaboration with our Indigenous partners is key to the success of this project. A memorandum of understanding on the project was signed in June 2021 with the GNWT, the Akaitcho Dene First Nation, and the Northwest Territories Metis Nation. The MOU outlines how we're going to work together to advance the project. A steering committee of leaders has been established under this MOU to provide direction to the project. Two steering committee meetings have been held to date, and work is still underway. We have also had discussions with Salt River First Nation, and we have encouraged them to work with us under this MOU so that we can continue to advance this project. Quyananni.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Mr. Speaker, one of the questions I had asked about was about purchasers for the power, and I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to any partnership discussions about securing partners to purchase the power as well from Taltson? Thank you.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyananni. Yes, those discussions are ongoing. You know, you look at the Taltson project, and it's -- you know, it's a \$1.5 billion project. There's still a lot of work to do, including maintaining the -- building the partnership, being able to look at the three different phases that's included with this Taltson project. So yes, Mr. Speaker, we are having those discussions now because it is also key. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 965-19(2):

INDIGENOUS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned that there are too many ways for GNWT staff not to apply the Affirmative Action Policy the GNWT has created. Many tools to support Indigenous hires, but these tools are not being applied consistently.

Can the Minister commit to issue an HR directive or policy that holds HR staff accountable to ensure that for every entry-level position posted across the GNWT, that full consideration is provided to Indigenous applicants on the record with GNWT. Staff need to be held accountable, and can the Minister ensure there is accountability measures in place that require HR staff to report on the use of ICGP for every entry-level hire? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when we started this Assembly the ICGP, or the Indigenous Career Gateway Program, was not being fully utilized. There was gaps in terms of the funding available and its usage. I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, it is now fully subscribed. So departments are becoming aware, and they're becoming aware that it is a useful program to help bring young Indigenous people in to the public service and to ensure that they have the adequate training to get them to the next stage.

And as for accountability, to make sure that we continue, I'd rather have that program be oversubscribed and be looking at ways to expand it. Mr. Speaker, that's why we have the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework. That is going to provide and does provide the accountability.

It's providing accountability in terms of the highest levels where the performance measures are actually going to be part -- or the performance appraisals of senior management are actually going to be looking at the achievement of the targets that are there, and the targets are now being made public department by department. So I'm happy, again, to have that reinforcement here so that departments are aware that this is something that is, in fact, now a live issue and the targets are there and the accountability is present. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Minister create a departmental procedure within HR to ensure that every Indigenous candidate on the casual pool or Indigenous career gateway receive one-on-one support from an HR professional to provide advice and support for securing GNWT positions?

I understand that this is a -- this is something that the HR does provide to all -- anyone who needs the support on writing -- or resumes and things like that. But knowing what we know, that our Indigenous population is so low in our GNWT statistics, is this something that her department can commit to? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, under the action no. 1 of the IRRF -- the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework, it is that the Department of Finance will create resources and tools to improve the applicant's experience when applying for positions.

Mr. Speaker, I take the Member's point, and I don't disagree. It's not about asking someone to ask for help. Some people simply will not ask even if they could use and benefit from that help. So as we move forward with this recruitment and retention framework, Mr. Speaker, we are, indeed, going to create those resources and tools, and I will certainly commit to get back to the Member as to what that's going to look like so that we can, in fact, achieve that action goal. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I know that is a big barrier with a lot of people looking at the resumes and stuff, and I know it's part of a lot of the review that they're doing within the human resource department, is looking at these overinflated job descriptions. My worry is is that if the job description is rewritten and, you know, that the pay goes down but is there a possibility of a way that HR can review a lot of these entry-level positions that have been overinflated to accommodate salaries, which is the way that the job eval works with the Hay Plan and the whole union thing. I really would like that a lot of these entry-level positions are looked at with the salaries remaining the same. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And Mr. Speaker, as mentioned in the framework, the point of reviewing the job descriptions isn't to find a way to reduce pay. The point of reviewing the job descriptions is to make sure that we are aligning the necessary level of credentials to the job that is to be performed. So there's no intention or desire to reduce pay. Again, it's really about finding a way to make sure that we are matching skill sets and matching opportunities to the labour market, to the labour force, and bringing in a more representative workforce, bringing in more people who are otherwise not seeing themselves because of too narrow a job description that doesn't actually fit what is required.

So -- and Mr. Speaker, I know -- I know the Member's had a lot of personal experience. I've had -- actually have had her sit down with folks from Finance before, and they found that helpful. Perhaps the way to address some of the bigger issues in this question is to have the -- see if she'd be willing to do that one more time now that we're at a different point in the framework and that we can benefit from her experience. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think this is the first time I get to say yes, Minister.

Can the Minister commit to making the NWT Indigenous labour force statistics by gender and community available? You know, the reason why I'm asking that is we do get statistics broken out by Indigenous, regional, Yellowknife, but it's the age. Like, within -- like, I'm talking about in my Member's statement is these young males that are -- are -- starting careers and, you know, and needing this step in the door. So I'm really hoping that we can get this and be -- have it public so that we're transparent for the rest of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the public service annual report does provide some of the information with respect to the breakdowns by community, by gender, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Meanwhile, I know ECE also does reporting with respect to the overall labour force although not directly to the public service. So I'll certainly commit to going back and seeing if there's a gap between what's reported by ECE and what's reported by the Department of Finance public service report if there's something more that we can do to put those information pieces together so they're more clear and make it more useful, with the goal always of ensuring that we are being transparent about who's being hired and being transparent about areas where we still have some

work to do. So, you know, again, I don't know if that's quite what the Member's looking for but if she is going to take up my offer to sit down again, we can work through any other gaps that she may see. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 966-19(2):
CARBON TAX

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment or Finance, with whichever hat she would like to put on. I'm going to ask about some of the things I see as variables towards our economic recovery, and one of the things I hear a lot from the private sector is around the carbon tax.

Can the Minister maybe explain to me -- it's my understanding that currently a lot of the carbon tax and other fees for, say, a shipment gets rolled up together and then the GST is applied on top of that. To me, that sounds like a tax on a tax. So perhaps the Minister could speak a little bit more to that and whether or not the upcoming changes to the federal government's -- sorry, I'm having trouble speaking today. The federal government's changes that are coming up, how they will affect us as a territory? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Conscious of Mr. Speaker's direction that we be brief, I will try to wrap this up quickly. And Mr. Speaker, the federal carbon tax system does indeed create a system whereby it is indeed a tax on tax design. It's a tax that is in all of the inclusive price of a thing. It is then -- the carbon tax is then placed upon that on top of that. That's administered by the federal government. It's not something about which the GNWT can necessarily change or alter.

That said, also, Mr. Speaker, with respect to changes that are coming and that have been introduced in the last several months by the federal government, we certainly are expecting those changes to be fairly significant to the GNWT and we are right now quite actively working on how that's going to impact the Northwest Territories in terms of industry and consumers. We want to, of course, ensure that as a jurisdiction that's at the frontline of climate change that we are leading the way but also cognisant that we are quite far behind in terms of the tips -- the tools we might have at our fingertips to respond. But Mr. Speaker, we are going to come up with that plan and make sure that we are aligned and

ready to respond to those new benchmarks when they come into force. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Minister's response. One of the things I heard at COP, and was the messaging that we took there, was that we can't afford to, as a territory, pay for the federal government's commitments.

My next question is a little bit along the lines of my colleague from Kam Lake. I just wanted to know if the Minister could provide us with an update on the Taltson Hydro Expansion business update. I know that there has already been some conversation around this. I'm just wondering if there's been any change now with respect the way that the world is changing with COVID and whether we have more interest from the feds? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if COVID has been the motivating factor, but certainly the realities of the climate change as they become only ever more pressing, I think are having an impact. And as my colleague already today spoke to today, Minister Archie and I are both sitting together on the steering committee where we sit with Indigenous governments who are signatories to the MOU, provided they continue to wish to participate in that, and it's in that context that it's progressing. We are, as I think my colleague has mentioned, at a stage of having our preliminary business case and moving that through approvals to have that shared with other Members of this House. And once we've done that, we'll also be sharing it with -- continuing to share with the federal partners that we know we need to have.

And Mr. Speaker, it's, you know, picking up on my -- the Member's point, that this is about climate change and adapting our missions, Mr. Speaker, when I do hear the ITI hat and engage with industry on the mineral resources sector, there's a lot of interest in this project because they also want to reduce their GHG emissions, not only because of the cost but because it's good practice; it's social licence. So there's -- this is a good time, and it's a good opportunity for us to continue to move that business case forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister and I align fairly well with our feelings on the importance of the Taltson Hydro Expansion.

Next, I just want to ask, again further along about emissions, there has been new benchmarks brought in to Canada for the first time enshrined in law, as my colleague from Kam Lake was saying. I'm just curious to know, does the Minister know if there will need to be updates for applications or projects that we already have underway in order to assess them for these changes in the climate emissions?

I think of the Frank Channel Bridge, which I know had a climate lens study as part of the application under the Trade Corridor Fund. So I'm just curious to know if we'll have to do any updates on that type of work, or are we sort of brought in as from before? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is fortunately a project where we are working, the Department of Finance, Department of Infrastructure, and federal colleagues over at Transport Canada, are all working together. So Mr. Speaker, at this point I am not concerned that there's going to be any difficulty moving that project forward. The intention is still to continue to expedite given the importance of that project for so many strategic reasons in the North. And no doubt, there will be some impacts that will be some benchmarks for climate change emissions are certainly going to be -- bring some changes. We're still working on what that might mean and exactly how we will respond. The fact that those conversations are happening with respect to the Frank Channel Bridge leaves me confident that that project won't be negatively impacted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I probably don't have to tell the Minister that that bridge's lifespan is up in 2024 so there is no way we could actually entertain any further delays there.

And last, I'd just like ask the Minister one of the main things I spoke to in my statement was the importance of our mining and exploration sector and the lag that we see between an exploration project becoming a full producing mine with royalties.

Can the Minister speak a little bit to how the upcoming exploration season is shaping up? Are we seeing the reopening or the lifting of restrictions; has that come in enough time in order for the exploration sector to take advantage of it for the upcoming field season? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would say that this is where I give a generally positive outlook on that. Mr. Speaker, it's -- we've just come through round up. I know the round up was still fully virtual, the virtual format gave me the opportunity to meet with quite a number of proponents here in the North, and all of them are suggesting that they're very keen to get back to work. They weren't unable to attend. Of course, as you might recall there were some allowances made under the previous COVID restrictions. The difference now is that it's easier to hire folks; it's easier to move around. There's less of a cost or a burden in terms of having to modify their staffing or the mobility. So I do think with the planning

already in place, it's only going to get easier given with the changes that are coming when they are now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 967-19(2):
EDUCATION

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For question to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

Okay, so how is the GNWT going to change the education levels in the regions so no kids will be left behind?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we made the decision to basically look at the education system we have, figure out what's working, and fix everything else. We are embarking on a process of modernizing the Education Act in partnership with Indigenous governments. We looked at the curriculum, and we are adopting BC's curriculum and modifying it to the needs of the territory. We're making investments, and we're partnering with the Government of Canada in early learning and childcare to expand the number of spaces and ensure that early learning and childcare workers are paid more so that we can attract more people to that field and are receiving the training and education that they need to help students.

So these are all things to do exactly what the Member was stating. Earlier the Member had a reply to the budget address and she highlighted issues of poverty and issues of lack of education and that's -- those are the issues I think about every day when I make decisions. I always say that there's some people who they are born into the circumstances that are, you know, very fortuitous and they're going to do well in life because they have supports that they -- they have supports around them. There are other people who need a little extra support from the government, and they need us to take those extra steps and that's what I think about when I make decisions. So I'm working for the Tlicho people and all people of the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. What community-led solution has the GNWT supported to keep kids in school and to help raise graduation rates, especially now after pandemic? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There was a program a few years ago to, you know,

encourage kids to go to school. I think it was maybe relatively successful or somewhat successful but nothing to the level that we need.

The rate of attendance in the Northwest Territories is low, and for the past seven years, it's been getting lower every year. Here in Yellowknife, it's pretty stable. I think it's probably around 87 percent attendance rates. You go into the regional centres, you're looking -- you drop down to the 80s -- or sorry, the 70s, and it's even lower in the small communities. So what we need is community-led initiatives. It needs to be people in communities valuing education and wanting their kids to go to school. The education system has to make them want that. So we do have a part to play but it really is grassroots are. If kids aren't in school, if they're missing, you know, one out of every four days, they're years behind by the time they get up into the upper grades. So I agree that we do need initiatives, and we work with the education bodies who are really the ones on the ground to help them, support them when they advance those initiatives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. So what percentage of teachers are Indigenous? I should have told him earlier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the number somewhere. I gave the number to the Member not long ago in response to a written question. I can't -- I don't have it off the top of my head. But definitely not the majority, I can say that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Does the department have a plan in place to increase the Indigenous teachers and to increase the numbers? And has the department considered doing a community-based training? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I've spoken many times about the teacher education program that was offered by Aurora College and wanting to ensure that we have something in place once that review is complete to do exactly what the Member is saying and train local teachers. So that is going to be a large part of the plan going forward. And perhaps I can leave it at that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 968-19(2):
EDUCATION

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleague from Monfwi for many of her

questions. I'm going to build up on this theme of education.

I know depending on the school district and whether your school's had outbreaks, a significant school time was lost over the last two/two and a half years of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Yellowknife, it's close to one calendar year the schools were closed, and some of that was made up with online learning.

But I'm just wondering, given this reality as we head into the oncoming school year, whether the Minister has any plans to add additional school days or perhaps look at different options of tutors or summer schools or whether there, you know, over the next -- as we bring these children through the further grades, there's a plan to make up for that lost time? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And this is a topic of discussion for, you know, students in the JK to 12 system as well as post-secondary students. But I don't want to give people the impression that, you know, these students, we need to teach them faster. And we need to work with them where they're at and support them where they're at.

As the Member -- as I've said many times to the Member and this House, it turns out I don't have the authority to just add extra days to the school year. The number of instructional hours, minimum numbers, are in the Education Act. Most -- or if you look across the territory, schools have between 946 of the 1300 hours of instructional time during a year, anywhere from 167 to 182 days. So there is flexibility in the calendar for schools to add instructional time to their schedule. They can start earlier in August. I mean, I don't think there's any reason they can't start August 1st and, you know, kids would only get a month of school but I think studies have shown that it's better to, you know, have students in school with shorter breaks. And heeding your words about keeping my answers precise, I'll leave it at that. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to get into the school funding formula a little, which was based on enrolment. I know during COVID, the Minister agreed to essentially freeze enrolment at the 2019 numbers because a lot of students, as school went online, stopped going to school. And now as we move into the 2022 school year, I know a number of schools, their enrolment are down. They're trying to get those kids back in the classrooms but the school boards are anxious to know what enrolment numbers will be used. And I was hoping the Minister could provide a bit of an update about whether we're going to be using the

pre-COVID numbers, whether we're going to be using some hybrid system, or whether some of these schools are going to see a shock to their budget as kids have not returned or dropped out during COVID? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And the Member is correct, there was some hesitancy in sending students back to school. So to account for that, the period over which the enrolment was counted was extended in the hopes that more students would have returned to school. And so we will be using -- we won't be doing the best of two years as we have done previously. We will be using the normal funding formula. However, there are methods to adapt to increased enrolment.

So if a school is funded for a certain number of students but in reality they actually have a large influx of students that they're not funded for, there are ways to ensure that they are provided funding for those students. There are some criteria that they have to meet. But, you know, we don't just leave them hanging. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll have some more questions on the nuances of the funding formula when we get to Education today, the main estimates.

But I wanted to talk about, you know, it's not just the academic that during the last two years students have not been able to do lots of the regular activities in school. And admittedly, Mr. Speaker, I've lost the plot a little on what is currently allowed in schools. I know the schools -- we have new public health orders but the schools have plans, and then ultimately it's up to the school boards what they are going to do for the remainder calendar year. But my question to the Minister is, are children allowed singing in schools yet, Mr. Speaker?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So our goal is to keep schools as safe as possible, because we don't want parents to send their kids to school -- or sorry, we don't want parents to be scared to send their kids to school. Let Hansard reflect that I did correct myself. And we want to ensure that when kids are in school, they are safe and they're not getting sick. So because of that, the enhanced measures and the protective safety measures are still in place in schools and we are working with the CPHO to, you know, provide new recommendations as necessary. Of course, everyone sees things are changing and so I expect that there will be some changes. But as of right now, no singing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another kind of issue that got brought to the forefront was the terrible quality of internet in the Northwest Territories, and the switch to online learning was difficult for many.

I'll note that the GNWT's IT budget, you know, in the broadest sense of that term, is about \$50 million a year. And I know all departments, they get billed back quite a bit from the TSC, something over the \$5 million ECE is paying. And I guess I'm just wondering can the Minister speak to what efforts are being done to get better internet in schools? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So this really is a Finance and Infrastructure issue so I don't want to step on anyone's toes. But I can say that there have been substantial increases to the bandwidth in about half of the communities over the last number of months here in the Northwest Territories, and we expect there will be substantial increases to a number of communities still. As well, my colleagues have spoken about investments being made by Northwestel and the Government of Canada in increasing broadband.

So that being said, you know, we've all been on meetings here and sometimes they're great; sometimes everyone has to shut their camera off so you don't get dropped off. So the internet is up and down everywhere in the territory, and it's not ideal to have to learn online. So while we do want to increase broadband, we want kids in school. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 969-19(2):
LABOUR MARKET SUPPLEMENT

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to turn to the issue of the labour market supplement policy that was kind of discussed in the House yesterday. The policy is on the Department of Finance website, but it's marked draft and it's unsigned. I'd like to know from the Minister of Finance whether the policy's been finalized and approved by Cabinet? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's finalized. I'm not sure why the copy online is marked as draft, but we'll make sure to look into that and see that it gets corrected. Thank you.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. So I did review the

policy over the lunch hour and one of the principles states that GNWT, quote, "will work with them", which means UNW and Northwest Territories Teachers Association, "to negotiate labour market supplement", end of quote.

Yesterday, we received a statement from the UNW that the recent offer of a labour market supplement for some healthcare workers has been withdrawn. I'd like to know from the Minister whether she can confirm the offer has been withdrawn? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, discussions with the UNW began last fall, when we planned the labour market supplement to ensure that we had their input in designing that, and those discussions then continued and they continued so that there would be, you know, an awareness of while we were doing what we were doing around the labour market supplement. And there was a process that was taken, on our part, knowing full well and having seen what happened with the obstetrics unit, that registered nurses would certainly appear to fall well within that labour market policy. So we were certainly taking the view that that would be the first application of it, certainly the expected first application of the labour market supplement. And I've realized that the UNW may have wanted to see it expanded to include many more potential positions but under the labour market supplement policy that we see, it was certainly thought that that's where we should start. And we've always said that it would be our effort and our intention to expand it in due course and are happy to have those discussions in due course, but for now, we were putting some parameters around the application of the policy, and that's unfortunately where we've landed, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I guess I'm not sure I actually got an answer there. Is there still an offer on the table to discuss the labour market supplement policy with UNW with regard to healthcare workers, yes or no? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I said this yesterday. I'll say it again now. We're always happy to have discussions and engagement. We continue to engage with the union as an employer on a great number of issues and are happy to continue to have that discussion here or discussion again. I don't know that there's any information that wasn't made available, Mr. Speaker. I think we've made every effort to ensure that whatever information we have could be made available. Aside perhaps from, you know, detailing at length why there is such a need for registered nurses, that seems fairly evident, and if in fact that that is still something that is interested in having pursued as an option, then again, we're more than happy to continue that conversation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Again, I'm not sure I actually got an answer. I'd like to know if there's still some ongoing discussions or negotiations with UNW over the scope of a labour market supplement? So in other words, who's actually eligible? That's what I think the issue seems to be. And I want to urge that the Minister get back to the table and, if necessary, look at an option like mediation. This has got to get resolved. And I want to hear a commitment from the Minister that she's prepared to sit down and work with UNW to come to an acceptable compromise here. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, there's a great many conversations. Mr. Speaker, I would be more than happy to see the labour market supplement applied to the workers that we believe fall within this policy. That was why we created the policy, was when there was a crisis for the frontline registered nurses and the obstetrics unit and the lab technicians that support them. We would be happy to see this apply to them, happy to see the amounts that we expected flowing to them. But we're not going to be in a position, Mr. Speaker, to open this up broadly outside of the policy, outside of the application of the policy, to any and all who, you know, might have felt that they're -- that they want to hire more people. We have to limit it right now to where the policy is. If we can reach an agreement on that, I would be happy to see it move forward. This was always what we thought was going to happen, Mr. Speaker. You know, again, open the -- open always to having that conversation. The doors, the employer certainly never closed, and it would be certainly my hope that we could move forward with this labour market policy. We came up with it quickly, created those parameters, but it's got to fall within those parameters, Mr. Speaker.

We have heard a great deal within the last few days about the budget of the Northwest Territories, the parameters of what we're spending; there should be, you know, more awareness of our fiscal cliff. Well, Mr. Speaker, we have only so much money but we were certainly prepared to apply some of that towards the individuals that we felt fell within this policy, be happy to see that happen. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 970-19(2):
RUSSIAN PLANE LANDED AT YELLOWKNIFE
AIRPORT

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we're all aware of the events unfolding

in the Ukraine, and I know our hearts and thoughts are with them. And I don't want to make light of the situation and I don't want to sound like -- this next question to sound like the movie "The Russians are Coming" as the issue is serious. Now I hear, somebody told me that, and unconfirmed of course, that there was a Russian plane that landed in the Yellowknife Airport last night.

Can the Minister of Infrastructure provide the Assembly with details on that situation, if there was even a situation? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, ekati. Yesterday, I received a call after rise of the House that there was a civilian plane, with Russian nationales, that had landed in Yellowknife. It appears that the plane and its passengers were on their way to Resolute, Nunavut, with the intention of taking a planned Arctic overland expedition in a large all-terrain utility vehicle.

Ekati, the Government of Canada takes its border and national security responsibility very seriously. The safety and protection of Canadians are at the top of its priorities.

I can assure you that all travelers arriving into Canada are subject to strict screening measures and must demonstrate that they meet all entry requirements. Yesterday, federal officials attended the arrival of a private aircraft -- I'm just shaking. When I got the call, I was like oh my. Sorry, I'm even -- hard to explain what some of the -- the answers are.

So this flight has been grounded as per government orders. So Transportation Canada is working with Canadian Border Services to assess this matter. Transport Canada will review whether there has been any violation on the recently announced notice to airmen prohibiting Russian aircraft owned, chartered, or certified, from operating in Canadian air space. Potential consequences and enforcement actions will be determined once the facts are clear.

Of course, we're all aware of the terrible and unjustified invasion in the Ukraine, and I appreciate that we're all extra watchful. You know, this world, including those of us in the Northwest Territories, remain concerned about the Russian government's aggression towards its peaceful neighbours. Quyananni, ekati.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I don't think she expects me to ask another question but I will anyway.

You know -- you know, just looking at the events, and I would like to ask the Minister if she's had any further

discussions, I guess, going forward to address, you know, what would happen if we see any -- you know, anything happening north -- in the northern part of the territory, because it's -- it's -- you know, this is a serious situation, and I just want to make sure that the people in the territory know what's going on and, you know -- and especially in the North. And I know I've read some news articles now where the government -- and there's more interest actually in maybe throwing some money at the North just because of what's happening in the Ukraine. Thank you.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Quyananni, ekati. The international security, including Arctic security, is the lead on the federal government. But we communicate with them about the safety of our territory on an ongoing basis. Thank you, ekati.

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

QUESTION 971-19(2):
INDIGENOUS RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Finance, and it's more again towards the Indigenous Career Gateway Program. Although I'm glad that the Minister has reported that ICGP is fully subscribed, one thing is an issue is that when people are hired in this program they are hired at 80 percent of the wage.

So my questions are according to the policy where candidates meet the qualification, the position -- that the government provides the department with \$40,000 towards the salary. So are those positions then at 80 percent, or are those a full-time position -- like, they get the full salary? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not entirely sure I followed the Member's point. The point with the ICGP, the Indigenous Career Gateway Program, is certainly, like -- is intended to hire someone in who wouldn't otherwise be qualified for the position but then provide them the training so that they could be trained into the position. Once they're trained up, they'd be fully capable of the position and therefore would be getting paid their full salary. So I don't have the specific policy in front of me, Mr. Speaker, but that's certainly the intent of all of these programs for recruitment, is to bring someone in and make sure that they achieve the position and are fully paid to be in that position. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I do have the policy in front of me, and it does specifically say, where the candidate meets the qualification of the position, the department will be provided with the prorated amount of 40,000 per year to put towards the employee's salary.

So they should be getting the full salary.

And the second part, it says those who do not meet the requirements are given 40,000 which they then get -- you know, 80 percent of the salary, or it's prorated towards training.

So I guess my question is is those ones that are put on the trainee part, the MOU, with -- are they provided with learning plans and goals that are -- need to be achieved for this? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I still do want to double check that we are all talking about the same ones. There is also a secondment policy whereby there is \$40,000 provided specifically to support secondments between staff and public servants at the GNWT and public servants in Indigenous governments. So there is a \$40,000 amount there, although I will say, Mr. Speaker, because it's happened in my own departments, that where needed, departments will fund up in order to meet any gap that an individual employee may have.

And then as for training plans, yes, the point for programs like the Indigenous Career Gateway Program is exactly that, that there is supposed to be a training plan put in place to bring the individual as quickly as possible to the level that's required so that they meet the actual qualifications and can then assume the position in completeness but through a plan and not just ad hoc. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm reading Indigenous Career Gateway Policy. So it is this policy, so there are different parts of it. And so my question is, is if an employee has a learning plan and is hired as a trainee under a trainee MOU and they meet these goals as a trainee -- and I'll use myself as an example.

When I was hired as a trainee for the manager of acute care, it was a one year trainee but I met the goals within probably two or three months and then I was offered the position fully because there was no more learning goals for me to achieve.

So is this -- my question is is that if an employee is hired in this, will they be appointed and given the actual salary of the job if they're now doing the job and they have no more training goals? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have the policy in front

of me. But that certainly is my understanding, that the point of having a training plan is to bring the person to the position so that they can achieve that position and be in that role and not be in an acting -- or not be in a trainee role anymore. So that certainly is my expectation. I will go back to the department and ensure that it is their expectation. And if there's any gaps in this policy, we will be looking at them as part of the recruitment framework. The point of the policy is to get folks into these roles from across the territory, have them trained, and ready to assume their positions and ready to assume the responsibilities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister, that she's going to go and then go back to her staff to look at this, because I would really hate to see somebody sitting for two years in a position when they've met all their goals. It's just another, you know, imbalance again with Indigenous and non-Indigenous. And if I was in -- the employee doing the same -- in the job doing the same work as everybody else but being paid 80 percent less with no more learning goals, you know, I'm glad that there's a commitment, and I'm hoping that we can add this to our list of things that we can discuss when I do meet with her and her head of her HR department. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, we could certainly speak to it although, obviously, a great number of the public service does, of course, look at what's happening here in the House and it's coming in as quickly as I'm speaking that, yes, my understanding is correct. When somebody meets their goals, when they hit the 100 percent, then they do indeed -- they do indeed move up. So I'm still happy to the speak to the Member further about this, but that understanding is correct. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 972-19(2):
TOURISM

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to put the Minister of ITI on the spot yet again today. My question is around -- I'm looking here at a news release around the Tourism Restart Investment Program, or TRIP, that has been put out by the Government of the Northwest Territories.

First of all, I want to say thank you, because I have some lodge operators as constituents. This is \$2 million that we've given over the last, say, six months.

My question for the Minister is given that some of this is for infrastructure upgrades, etcetera, while it does

need to be spent by the end of March or the end of the fiscal year, are there any mechanisms in place for operators to extend the spending of this money past the fiscal yearend? Thank you.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, at this point, no, we are looking -- part of the reason of doing another intake and of boosting up the amount available was to try to get that money out the door before the end of the fiscal. So we're certainly going to be hoping that operators -- and also, Mr. Speaker, I'll say that was one of the motivations to push to get the announcement out earlier about the timing because, yes, they certainly are going to have to try to spend that money in whatever way they can to be ready for the reopening that has happened. There's certainly conversations still happening with the federal government about what other transition money might be available. But for now, certainly trying to get that money out the door. And again, hoping that with the announcements, that there's actually quite a lot of work to do to get prepared. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just worry a little bit for our business owners that it's been nothing, nothing, and then all of a sudden a lot of money to be spent at the end of the year when perhaps, you know, logistics may be difficult. We have snowfall, freshet, supply chain issues. I guess I would just like to ask the Minister that she do consider some extension.

My question, though, is does this amount of money, the \$2 million, is it fully subscribed or do we expect some of this money to come back and be distributed elsewhere? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I think there's probably a -- I mean, I guess I can't see into the crystal ball, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that it probably will not all be expended. And speaking as Minister of Finance, it doesn't just go elsewhere; it lapses. And so -- yeah, if it lapses, unfortunately Mr. Speaker, that's -- you know, just what it does, is go back into the -- you know, reducing -- or increasing the overall surplus that we'd be seeing at the end of the year of the GNWT, doesn't necessarily benefit individual operators. But, Mr. Speaker, there's other work underway. We're looking at getting -- as I said, I think in a Minister's statement, looking at what we can do to look at the confidence of people, the residents of the Northwest Territories, and have residents' sentiment dealt with. So there's actually a lot happening in this space right now, even though we're coming up at the end of the fiscal. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate that the Minister has to be more careful with her words than I do with mine.

So I guess my next question is just around, again those supports that the Minister speaks to. I know at one point, there was discussion around the federal government to get a Canada tax benefit to encourage Canadians to travel internally within the country when COVID reopened. Could the Minister speak a little bit to whether or not that's still being planned, or I'm more than fine if she wants to come back to me with some information on that. Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there were some changes made in terms of the residents deduction tax benefit in order to help encourage and allow people to benefit from staycations. So rather than having to leave the territory, for instance, they could now be able to claim their residence travel deductions around staycations and open that up to someone who wouldn't have had access to it through an employer but could actually -- that they weren't tied to having that benefit from their employees. So that would open up to more people to be able to benefit from staycations.

And, Mr. Speaker, there's also been a lot work done at the Chambers of Commerce and the Northwest Territories tourism around encouraging staycations and the Department of ITI's been there supporting a lot of those programs as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final -- colleagues, our time for oral questions has expired. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 582-19(2):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES INTEGRITY
COMMISSIONER ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR 2021

MR. SPEAKER: Pursuant to section 99 of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, I hereby table Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Integrity Commissioner to the Legislative Assembly for 2021. Tabling of documents.

TABLED DOCUMENT 583-19(2):
TERRITORIAL BY-ELECTION 2022 TU NEDHE-
WILIDEH OFFICIAL VOTING RESULTS

MR. SPEAKER: In accordance with section 265(1) of the Elections and Plebiscites Act, I wish to table the Territorial By-Election 2022 Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh Official Voting Results.

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 of Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Bill 23, 29, 38, Member's Statement 202-19(2), Tabled Document 561, 567, 578, 579-19(2), with Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes in the chair.

---SHORT RECESS

Consideration of 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: Merci, Madam la Presidente. Committee wishes to deal with Tabled Document 561-19(2): Main Estimates 2022-2023 with Education, Culture and Employment. Mahsi, Madam Chair.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, committee. We'll take a short recess and resume with ECE.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I now call Committee of the Whole back to order. Committee, we have been considering Tabled Document 561-19(2): Main Estimates 2022-2023, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, and we haven't finished early learning and childcare. So I'm going to ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort the witnesses into the Chamber.

Welcome back, deputy minister MacDonald and ADM Shannon. We are continuing on with early learning and childcare. And Member for Monfwi, you had questions under this section when we left off yesterday.

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: I think we're going to be setting and meeting with the Minister next week regarding that early learning childcare. So I think I'll just wait until then because it was related to that, yeah.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Okay. I did talk to the Minister -- or well, we did -- I asked him before, because early learning and childcare is very important, and he did identify that there's 13 -- 11 or 13 communities that does not have childcare. So in lot of these places, there's -- okay, we have -- you know, there's not enough jobs, lack of employment in the communities. And there's not lot of working parents. It's only -- the daycare is -- service is provided to working parents, not to parent -- stay-at-home parents. It would be nice if the policy -- especially for the small communities where we're having lot of -- like, it's identified in the statistics that education level is low in many of the small communities. So I know that there's going to be -- it would be nice if the learning and childcare daycare program was available, open to parent and stay-at-home parents so that a child, you know, will have the same outcome as the child is going to daycare. So that's all I wanted to say, that it would be nice if they can have that open for other young parent, stay-at-home parent. Yeah, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Minister for ECE, do you want to respond?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure. I believe that might be a policy of the Tlicho or the childcare provider in the region as opposed to anything that the GNWT does. The GNWT doesn't provide childcare but it will fund childcare spaces, and there's no restrictions on who can attend that is related to the funding that the GNWT provides. So that could be a local policy that we're not involved with. But I do take the point, and I agree that even if you're not working that you should not be disadvantaged and your child should be able to attend childcare to receive that enriched environment. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: I wasn't just referring to my region but it was in general to -- to all the -- you know, to all the small -- to all the children in the communities, that's what I was referring to, not just -- I wasn't referring to Tlicho but in the whole Northwest Territories I was referring to that. So thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. No, I agree, there should be no restrictions on who can attend early learning childcare. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any further questions? No? All right. Do we have any Members who wish to speak to the early learning and childcare?

Seeing none, can you please turn to page 41, Education, Culture and Employment, early learning and childcare, operation expenditures summary, 2022-2023 Main Estimates, \$9,000,648 -- oh, sorry. It's -- yeah. No, \$12,791,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. And we are going to skip income security just due to witnesses switching around and we're going to go over to page 51 -- no, sorry. Find my right page here. Page 48, Education, Culture and Employment, junior kindergarten to grade 12 on page -- yeah, 48, with information items on page 50 to 52. Questions? Member for Deh Cho.

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi, Madam Chair. I'm going to reference the switch over in curriculum from Alberta to the BC curriculum. I'm wondering if there's any progress being made and if the Minister could update us to where we're at with this? Mahsi.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And so I will just start off by saying that the process is going to be slow enough so that everyone is well aware of what's happening, that teachers have an appropriate amount of time to become familiar with the new curriculum and that this rolls out smoothly. So we're not a rush to roll it out but, you know, we want to make sure we do it in a way that is not going to cause any issues for anyone. That's what we heard when we went out and had our discussions. People want to make sure that they know what's going, they know what's happening, they're familiar with the curriculum, and that we are not just forcing this on them. But for some details on how things are going, I can, through you Madam Chair, hand it off to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So as the Minister indicated, there isn't an intention to suddenly transition to a British Columbia curriculum. Currently, ECE is in the process of developing an implementation plan including involvement of Indigenous governments and organizations and, of course, education bodies, as well as the Northwest Territories Teachers Association. So currently, we're targeting the 2023-2024 school year as the year where we would begin to introduce a phased-in approach to curriculum, starting in the early years. However, we expect that within the next few weeks, we'll be reaching out to those partners so that we can begin to discuss everybody's needs and their level of

interest in participating in some of the planning. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. BONNETROUGE: Yeah, mahsi for that. It's going to be a pretty interesting transition to -- I note that the BC curriculum has a focus to competency-based learning. I'm not sure if I really understand what that is geared towards. Can the Minister explain what is meant by this? Mahsi.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I guess the easiest way to explain it is that it's not -- it's not based on just memorization the way that perhaps we might think of some older styles of curriculum. It's based on helping students develop competencies in different areas so they know how to think and they know how to do things as opposed to just knowing facts. I can ask the deputy minister for his description, which I'm sure is much more rich than mine. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So one of the things that distinguishes a competency-based curriculum from what would typically or more traditionally be an outcomes-based curriculum is it's centered on the learner as opposed to the teacher or the instructor, and it tends to be not so content focused. So those who have been in school before will recall that the curriculum is really focused on subjects and content and facts and dates, if you're thinking about social studies as an example, whereas competency-based curriculum is really around what skills and attitude and behaviour that you would expect to see from students, and that is really more focused on self-directed learning and skills that would be beneficial for all of life and that are more cross-curricular in terms of not being focused on one subject area. So that is the major distinction between competency- versus outcome-based curriculum. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi for that explanation. I guess I will require further information on that one.

It seems from what materials I have on the BC curriculum, it's based on Indigenous world views, knowledge, and perspectives. Is this a northern studies curriculum?

My concern is that we may be losing sight of the academic learning considering the Indigenous view

to educate our young to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, to name a few professions, but. Can the Minister comment on that? Mahsi.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And what the Member is saying about that -- I mean, academic view and ensuring that our residents can achieve what they want to achieve in terms of a profession, I heard that across the territory when we had our engagements, and I can assure the Member that, you know, Canada -- despite you know, some of our concerns, Canada really does have one of the best education systems in the world, and that's because each of the individual education systems is a world class education system, including British Columbia. And so I have no concerns that the curriculum from British Columbia will in any way disadvantage students. It is one of the best curriculums in the world. And so I'm excited that we get to, you know, go down this path. So I can assure the Member that he should have no concerns about the academic quality of the BC's curriculum. Thank you.

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

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mahsi for that, Minister. I look forward to more information on this and especially from the stakeholders, the teachers and the district education authorities, because I stated before that the DEAs really need workshops. They need to start, you know, incorporating those back in because right now I notice, and I talked to other DEAs, they're totally lost. Nobody's keeping them in the loop or telling them anything or not listening to them. So, you know, that's a little bit concerning. I did a statement on that before.

I just want to switch over and the Skills 4 Success, because I inquired with our school and the DEA specifically and they never ever heard of the program themselves before. I'm not sure if it's geared or has a component that does with high school students or where -- what this one is really for. If you could explain the whole program to me maybe, perhaps. Mahsi.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And when we get into a later activity, we can talk more about this as it is more in the labour activity. But that being said, Skills 4 Success is a strategy. It has related action plans and those actions are intended to help develop certain occupations in the Northwest Territories, and they have a focus on, you know, training of people after they come out of the JK to 12 system. But during this last round of consultation, there was a lot

of comments about needing to integrate the trades into secondary schools and, you know, the whole JK to 12 system. And so Skills 4 Success is not necessarily a program for the JK to 12 system, but we realize that stronger integration is required and we are moving in that direction. Thank you.

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

MR. BONNETROUGE: Yes, mahsi for that explanation. You said it was in the other section or something. I'll ask the question again there maybe but I'm okay. I'm okay at this time. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Deh Cho. Are there other questions? Member for Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm just wondering about -- looking at the northern distance learning, and I know there's a slight drop there, but not I guess by too much. I'm just concerned with the results of the pandemic and moving more to online learning etcetera. This often is -- this unit came up often as sort of a bridge to help students and communities access their online learning. And I'm just wondering if we've ended up sort of overloading them at all or if we do require more funding here if they should need more, or are they supporting that work further now that COVID is sort of moving to an endemic stage? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, thank you. And this is an area that I think we expected to expand a little more in the past couple years, but the fact is that there is, you know, equipment that needs to be installed in schools and there was communities who just didn't want people coming into their small community. And so because of that, we haven't moved forward as much as we would have liked. And this is -- you know, this is -- you know, uses the internet but it's different from the sort of distance learning I think that students have been saddled with the past few years. It is -- it takes place in schools and there's more -- there's a real teacher in front of students in person, and then there are students who are remote with another adult in the room to assist them and they can interact fully with that -- with that instructor. So it is a bit different and, you know, it's still something we're very committed to and see a lot of benefits to. Perhaps I'll stop talking and I'll let the Member ask another question, and then if we need to, we can go to the deputy minister for more information. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, perhaps I was mixing it up with the Aurora College sort of outposts or whatever you'd like to call them in the communities. And I do appreciate the Minister clarifying that for me.

Yeah, I definitely would like to see that, you know, as COVID has -- wraps up here, that we do start looking into that more. I often think and talk with other engineers and such before I got into this role about how we could get more engineers from the North which would solve a lot of our problems. And I could never sort of wrap my head around how a child from a community would take those calculus courses. I found it challenging to go to UBC after growing up in a suburb of Vancouver. So, yeah, I just wanted to emphasize that.

I guess my next question is around the northern youth abroad. As we haven't had any real, you know, travel happening in the last year, particularly internationally, is there money that's being sort of left over or carried over from these programs and do we see a need to maybe increase them as the -- you know, because there's been a lack of opportunities for the last two years, you know, to make up maybe for some that haven't had that chance, we could put more money here to send more students abroad. Thank you -- or youth.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'd like to hand that to the deputy minister.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So ECE has long recognized Northern Youth Abroad as a strong partner for a number of reasons, primarily and initially for their core programming. But over the past number of years, we've partnered with them for other areas and supports for students one of which actually connects back to the northern distance learning program, which you were just asking about, which would have northern youth abroad escort students to a university campus in Edmonton to help them see firsthand and to help them acclimate for that transition.

Specifically due to COVID, a number of the typical Northern Youth Abroad initiatives could not go forward but as was the case across government and across ECE, we continue to flow funding to them so that they continue to maintain operations, and they did provide counselling supports to students over the course of that period. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I appreciate that. And it reminds me actually of -- I did a program at UBC connect where they brought grade 12 students into UBC and we lived there for a week and thought we were much older than we were. So I think that's great, and I would like to just sort of reiterate my support for this program.

I guess the question that I have there, then, is the support that's being provided more on the -- like, kind of more emotional and personal level of supports, or is there also a piece of an educational support there from a tutoring or, like -- yeah, educational perspective? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'd like to ask the deputy minister for that information.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Deputy minister MacDonald.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the focus is primarily academic, but there are elements to that are a little bit more, let's call it, the social-emotional realm. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you. I notice the paper's been making that mistake lately too with me and the Member for Frame Lake.

My next question is around the professional development fund for the teachers. I notice that there really is not any substantial change there.

Given sorts of some of the challenges, again, that we've had in the last couple years with COVID, you know, do -- have we been able to maintain that same level of professional development for teachers that we would have in the past? I've often spoke about my mom being a teacher, and I know a lot of that time was spent in conferences and networking and that one -- or collaboration of teachers, they're quite a collaborative profession. So could the Minister's department speak a little bit to whether or not we're sort of on track there, or are we going to need to do some catch up? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So and that number is something that is negotiated with the teachers. It's in the NWTTA agreement. The teachers really have a lot of -- a lot of control over their professional development. We are taking steps to make it easier for teachers to -- you know, to find different opportunities and to track those

opportunities and to track, you know, the credentials the teachers gain through their professional development. But for some more detail, I can ask the deputy minister to answer. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So professional development is, as the Minister mentioned, bargained. It's an article within the NWTTA collective bargaining agreement. So it's through that mechanism that teachers individually or collectively make decisions about their own professional development as any association or professional group would.

In addition to that, ECE has increasingly played a role in providing training opportunities and supports to both education bodies and directly to teachers and schools. That's through our education operations and educator development division, including a shift over the past years towards an increase in remote or virtual learning through a new online platform that we provided.

And lastly, education bodies themselves do provide training to schools within their respective regions. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I appreciate that. I think, yeah, there's many ways that teachers could access different types of styles of learning. And I guess my last sort of area of interest is around the healthy food for learning. I notice that it's staying the same for the last few years here with \$650,000. Again, given supply chain issues, given, you know, how the pandemic has made everybody a lot more -- you know, having to stretch their dollars, the cost of living is increasing, I'm a bit concerned that sometimes I hear that this is the only good meal that a child may get in their day, and so I'm just wondering why we're not seeing an increase here to this amount of money and perhaps would it not be a great way to sort of set our kids up better for success, and maybe there is no need for it and the Minister can speak to that. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, and yes, I'm the one who -- I'll often been saying that, you know, schools are the only place that some students actually get a good meal. And, you know, when I was growing up, there was no food in schools and I was amazed as I took over this portfolio and toured schools just how much food there is. I mean, there's fresh fruit, there's eggs, there's sandwiches. Students can, for the most part, you know, get

something to eat whenever they need to so it really is an amazing program. There are third party funders who also contribute to this. Schools do fundraising, and they receive donations towards these programs. So this isn't the only money that is going towards this. But, you know, I -- I'm not going to say I'm opposed to seeing an increase here. As I -- I'm not opposed to seeing an increase in many areas. But in this budget, there isn't one, but, you know, given the comments of the Member, I will continue to look at ways to try and increase this number. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I appreciate the Minister willing to look at it. And I guess the reason I would ask that, and maybe we can look at more of a formal sort of -- not too onerous of an evaluation because I think often teachers end up picking up a lot of the slack themselves when they see students in need and often spend a lot of their own money back in their classrooms not only for supplies but also for food or, you know, if there are field trip fees, things like that, I know that teachers will often pay for that out-of-pocket, and perhaps that's a hidden expense to teachers that the department isn't quite aware of. So I would appreciate, yeah, just seeing some analysis of that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister, did you have any follow-up?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure. I can say what sort of analysis we can provide, and I have seen some -- I've seen, you know, the cost of a meal in Yellowknife versus the cost of a meal in Tuk, and so there is some of that analysis out there. And these are really run by the education bodies themselves. So it them who decide how to do it but nonetheless we do provide the significant -- a significant portion of the funding. So I will see what we can dig up to share with the Member. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I just want to turn to education renewal initiative, just found in a couple places. I'll start on page 49 in the program detail.

So in 2021-2022, we had budgeted \$2.7 million but didn't seem to spend anything. Can someone tell me what happened and why the amount -- yeah, why don't we just start with that. Thanks.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'll ask the deputy minister to answer it. If we get really into the

numbers, then Mr. Shannon will take over. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'll definitely try to stay away from those numbers. In this instance, the funding was diverted back to school contributions so ultimately it was determined that that would be best served by providing that funding back to education bodies as part of their annual funding. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Okay, thanks. So was that related to COVID stuff, or -- because and then when I see 2022-2023, there's only a million dollars, which is higher I guess than 2021-2022 but I'm just trying to make some sense of the whole line and the yo-yo. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So ERI has funded different projects at different times. And the way that the ERI money was found, I think is the reason that there might be some ups and some downs there. It is related to this contribution to schools, and the -- we have to approximate that amount. And so we were to approximate amount -- an amount that would be slightly higher than what the schools would end up receiving, and that little gap there is what we would traditionally use for ERI. So it was money that was already appropriated to the education system and we would use it to sort of fund some of these innovative ideas to help advance the education system. And so, you know, in different years, those numbers were different and we did what we could with it. And from there, we have grown successful projects that have then gone on to, you know, be funded on their own. Things like northern distance learning and a number of other projects, so. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, okay. As I seem to recall, ERI came about even before I was an MLA, about 2013 or 2014, and there's lots of great ideas in there and it was a collaborative effort. The problem was that it was never really followed through, and we went off on some crazy diversions. We had JK, and the schools weren't getting funded for it and had to fight to get that sorted out. Then there was, you know, STIP and just kind of a whole series of other crisis that sort of came along where I think if we have really focused more on ERI throughout all of this, that

maybe we would be in a better place. But that's just more of a comment.

But when I turn the page over on 50 and I look at the contributions for ERI, again it's a yo-yo here, Madam Chair. And, you know 2020-2021, \$163,000. Then 240 last year, nothing was spent. And now for 2022-2023, nothing is budgeted. So what's going on with the contributions line now? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And so all of those initiatives that the Member mentioned, those actually all came from ERI. So one of the criticisms of it was that there was -- we were trying to do too many things. There was too many actions. And so those were paired down and the current action plan that we have is a response to the OAG's audit as well as a response to our own ERI evaluation. It is a reflection of the fact that we needed to try and focus our efforts. And so that is actually the -- you know, the final two-year action plan of the ERI initiative. Perhaps I can get Mr. Shannon to talk a bit about the numbers that the Member was mentioning. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. ADM Shannon.

MR. SHANNON: Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Minister alluded to in his previous response in regards to the program detail, there was in the revised estimates the money that was originally targeted for ERI was moved back into the school contributions. So that's where you see the 2021-2022 going from \$240,000 to the revised of zero. In 2022-2023, there are no contemplated contributions to education bodies for the education renewal money. That \$1.01 million is for -- targeted for the departmental budget to continue rolling out the specific actions that are remaining under that funding. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Okay, thanks, Madam Chair. If I wasn't confused before, now I really am. It's kind of like two pots of money floating around here. One that the department has and then other money that's being pushed out to the boards. And I just don't really see or understand, I guess, how they're connected. But, yeah, I'm not sure what else I can say.

Does the department sort of ever do a report on where we are at with regard to the ERI? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Yes, when I took over this portfolio, the department had just finished a report on the ERI initiatives. It coincided with a report from the Office of the Auditor General, and as a result, we developed a -- that action plan that I mentioned earlier. So that is the last report on ERI. I believe it's been shared with standing committee. It's quite extensive. So I can leave it at that. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks to the Minister for that. What's the date of that report? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sorry, I didn't have my headpiece in. Could the Member repeat?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): What was the date of the report?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes. November -- or January 2020, something like that. I had a press conference that day, and it turned into a bit of a disaster. So that's a -- and no really report on the ERI, so. It was very early in the term. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks to the Minister. Let's avoid further disasters. Maybe the Minister might think about another report. I don't know how extensive the last one was but if it was a couple years ago, it might be time to redo or find another way to report on progress with ERI. That's a friendly suggestion. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. We do have an online progress tracker that is tracking those -- the progress of the last action plan which is related to ERI. And so we have that, and I'm not -- you know, we do do a lot of evaluations in ECE. Ten years ago, it might not -- might not have been the way, but there's a lot of effort put in to ensuring that what we're doing is working, and so I can ask the deputy minister what the plans are for any sort of ERI evaluation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Sorry. Just that your plate is -- Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I thought the Minister was asking his staff to provide some further information. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I didn't have my ear plate. It was buzzing so I can't hear. So deputy minister.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So with respect to ERI, we are in the final action plan which, as the Minister mentioned, is an OHE action plan as well. So we did, as part of ERI, have five year or a half way mark evaluation, which is the one the Minister mentioned for 2020. And there's an intention to have a final or a summative action plan or evaluation for the end of the ten-year ERI framework.

I will also mention that as part of that midpoint review, we did commit to providing annual updates on a number of difference indicators across the JK to 12 system. So within the next few weeks, actually, there will be a 19, 20 indicator's report to provide a more iterative response or an update. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. No, that's great. I appreciate being educated about the education renewal and innovation strategy. Thanks, Madam Chair. That's all I had.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And then just so I could, you know, provide a bit more context.

So ECE doesn't deliver education. That's what the education bodies do. And so what ERI really is, it's a way for us to contribute to the education system in a number of ways. And so some of the projects under ERI were the Our Languages curriculum, which I think is something that we can all be proud of. The New to the North Educators Conference, so when we get many of our southern teachers, we bring them together and we provide information about the Northwest Territories and its peoples, supports for small community school principals, who have a very unique job and it's tough for someone to be thrown into that role, and so we provide supports for them through this. The support assistance certification process, that is something that came out of ERI. So these are a number of the ways that we are trying to use our role as sort of a coordinating agency to contribute to the education system. So I just wanted to add that. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm wondering if the Itlo School, formerly Sissons, is all on track and ready to open?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. On track and on budget so far. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Always happy to hear that. I asked some questions today at session about the funding formula, and I want to get into that. I guess just as a start, can I confirm, so the plan is to go back to the regular funding formula which would see schools for the upcoming year have funding based on September 2021 enrolment, is that correct?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Correct. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm wondering if the Minister could provide us a breakdown of what that looks like for each of the different DEAs? And I've seen that data before, you know, of how enrolment looks and what the funding corresponding looks like, if that could be provided, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yeah, I think we -- we may have those numbers. I think that -- perhaps I can ask Mr. Shannon for either the information or when that information will be available. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. Shannon.

MR. SHANNON: Thank you, Madam Chair. We have our internal calculations now based on our proposed budget but once we have a proposed budget finalized, then we'll be able to roll it out in full to the education bodies and we'd be able to share the final calculations. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, and I guess I'll get to the -- my hope is that there's still some possibility to change this. I -- if we go back to September 2021, we were in the midst of a delta wave and there was quite a few people who did not want to send their kids to school and then there was quite a few schools who switched to online learning, and I know there was quite a few people who just stopped going to school at some point during COVID.

And I heard the Minister say today in session they're not considering kind of doing a best of two years model, and we're not considering using September 2019. But I've heard from the school districts that even if we used October or November when delta kind of started to subside, that their enrolment numbers would be much better and a much more accurate reflection of what they expect to see for this upcoming school year.

So is there any, you know, chance left to move this and do that analysis of -- if schools are going to be losing a bunch of money for students that they're likely to have in the fall, whether we can adjust the formula? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So if schools see an influx of students, we have an extraordinary enrolment funding pot of money that schools can apply for, and they have to meet some criteria, but it would give them the funding to accept those students.

We also made changes that are going to protect the -- primarily the smaller schools if they see large decreases in enrolment. So traditionally, the funding formula has some numbers and if a school hits those numbers in terms of enrolment, there's either increases or there's drops in their funding. So what we've done is we've adjusted those numbers to ensure that if enrolment in small schools falls, the drop in funding isn't so drastic so that they aren't having to, you know, find money for a position like a janitor or something like that, which can be quite stressful. And those are often local jobs as well.

And overall, schools in the territory have seen a decline of about .4 percent this year, and that's on track with sorts of traditional trends. And as I've mentioned before to the Member, in Yellowknife there's movement in between schools as well. So while some schools might see an increase, others -- or might see a decrease, others might see a corresponding increase. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just -- you know, I know that the curriculum development group here is about a million dollar unit, and -- which, you know, compared to other jurisdictions is not a lot, and I -- we are adopting a new curriculum.

Can the Minister just speak to whether there are going to be additional resources both for the department and the schools in adopting the BC curriculum in the coming school year? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So one of the factors that we had to weigh when determining whether or not we were going to -- or which curriculum we were going to go with was the cost. And so we don't expect to see increased costs for implementing this curriculum. In fact, I think we might be anticipating some savings from the curriculum that could be used for training and things like that. And I can ask the deputy minister for some more detail on that. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So as mentioned previously in response to a different question, the implementation plan associated with transitioning towards the British Columbia curriculum is being developed but there are a number of factors that are being taken into consideration. Definitely the cost of the curriculum itself, British Columbia has indicated that there will be no costs. So that's something that was very favourable. There will, of course, be professional development costs associated with training teachers to become familiar with this competency-based curriculum. But we are funded for that. As mentioned previously, the collective agreement provides funding for additional teacher directed professional development. So the cost associated with this, we believe, can be borne within the department's existing budget. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Further to that line of questioning about curriculum development, it's an exciting time for the North as far as curriculum shifts that are happening, and I think it'll be really interesting and exciting to get to watch. At the same time, I know that there are some questions still among residents about when does the NWT start developing some of its own curriculum. And I know that that is quite expensive and is a daunting task to even consider undertaking. But I know that we've done it in the past. Our northern studies class is an example of that. And another potential place to start, or to add to that, might be an arts curriculum. And the reason I bring that up is that ECE also has the culture component to it and developing kind of a made-in-the-North arts curriculum is an opportunity not only for arts preservation and revitalization as well. And so I'm wondering if the department has any indication of whether or not they have interest or plan to take on some of that work of developing our own made-in-the-North arts curriculum? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So currently, no, there is no plan to develop an arts curriculum. But we have developed the JK-K curriculum, the Our Languages curriculum, the northern studies 10. We're working on northern studies 11. I believe there's a health and wellness curriculum. There's a number of locally developed courses as well and those are developed by Indigenous governments, local education bodies. So there are a number of courses around the Northwest Territories that are locally-based, and the nice thing about the British Columbia curriculum as well is that the way it was designed, it's easy to insert local content in there. So -- as opposed to having to develop an entirely new course, we can, you know, insert parts of our own content into it.

Where a curriculum gets, I would say, probably very expensive to develop is when we're talking about a physics course, a math course, chemistry, and there's really no appetite to do that. You know, down the road something like an arts course might be something that would be considered but given the magnitude of the change that is taking place now, it's not something that would be our -- working on. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the next thing I wanted to take a peek at is the minority language education and second language instruction and that, on the page 50, it indicates that it's specific to French and that it has contributions of just over \$3 million.

Is that money coming directly from the federal government as a contribution, and I'm wondering if the Minister can confirm? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, that's correct.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And then when I turn back to page 49, there's about an extra \$200,000 in there. Is the additional \$200,000 then funded from within the GNWT? Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So we are looking at the minority language education and instruction? We are flipping through pages to try and find where

that \$200,000 came from. So perhaps we can get back to it after the next question, unless the Member wanted to follow this thread. Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you for that, Madam Chair. And I can -- I just want to be able to kind of follow investments in French language and investments in Indigenous languages as well. And I see that for Indigenous languages education, there's just over 11 and a half -- or well, almost \$12 million for this year's main estimates, and I'm wondering if this is application based and if it is solely accessible through schools or if it's also accessible through other organizations or NGOs outside of a school-based setting? Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Member. Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the Indigenous Languages and Education Secretariat sort of has two roles. One is to work on Indigenous language revitalization and eventually services to government and the other role is in the JK to 12 system. And so that's what this funding is intended for. It is directly provided to school boards, and it is a separate item because it can't be used for other activities. So, you know, we provided the school boards with a lump sum and for the most part, they can do what they want with it but not when it comes to this. This has to be used for Indigenous language and cultural activities. Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Member for frame -- or Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: A little farther at the other end of the town. Thank you, Madam Chair.

My next question for the Minister, so I understand it then is distributed through schools only and to all 33 communities. Can the Minister speak to how these funds are distributed as far as whether they're distributed to all 33 communities, is it number of students per school, and how the department decides how much is given to each community or each school board?

MS. SEMMLER: Minister of ECE, did you get that?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: I will answer the parts that I got. So there's no school in Enterprise yet so we don't have schools in 33 communities. But this money is distributed according to the funding framework. And so it would be distributed directly to the DEAs according to the framework or the DEC's if that is the applicable regional body. Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I should have said this on a previous section, and if you'll indulge me, can I just say one quick thing about language application programs here -- application-based programs?

MS. SEMMLER: You can say it, but we're not going back to -- go ahead.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, sorry, and I should have clarified in the other section whether or not language-based programs were application-based or not. And I see now that I should have asked this -- or said this before.

One of the things that we've heard on our side of the House is sometimes the application-based Indigenous languages funding programs, the -- it can be difficult for NGOs to maintain Indigenous language speakers if it's not multiyear funding or if the timeline of the application coincides too closely with the end of the school year, it can be difficult for people to maintain access to those language speakers. And so I think that's worth noting, is the length of the application for funding. And then also the time of year that applications come up can be challenging for some NGOs. So I just wanted to just leave that there.

And then I -- with my last two minutes, Madam Chair, the only thing I wanted to add is just that I absolutely fully support the healthy food for learning budget line item. And I know that in the constituency I serve that one of the schools, even before COVID, had spent well over \$20,000 trying to help feed families and help them with food insecurities even here in Yellowknife. And so food insecurity is definitely top of mind for many Northerners and kids who are hungry, it's hard to focus on learning. So thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister for ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, and I agree. That's why right before I came out here I made sure I had a snack because I didn't yesterday, and I felt it. So I hear what the Member's saying, and I thank her for her support.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Any further questions, Member for Kam Lake? Okay.

Are there any further questions under junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services from Members?

Seeing none, Education, Culture and Employment -- oh, sorry. Yeah, Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Madam Chair, just so I understand, so we -- we're going through the document by page here and so I have a couple

questions. I don't know if it's -- how do you want to proceed? Do we proceed by page or -- just so I understand.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): So we're just under the section. Anywhere under the JK to grade 12 section. So that goes right up to page 52. So you can ask a question on any one of those pages from 48 to 52. Okay? Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Oh, oh, sorry. Okay. Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. Just a quick question for the Minister.

Since this -- his announcement on December 12th, '21, in regards to the curriculum from Alberta to BC, I just want to know if he -- has he got feedback from Indigenous governments about this curriculum here in the Northwest Territories of opting out from Alberta to BC? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member for -- or sorry, Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, I made great efforts, and the department did as well, to engage with as many Indigenous governments as we could last summer. I personally attended every meeting where I knew leadership would be in attendance so I could hear directly from them. I spent hours of time discussing the curriculum. And so yes, I met leader to leader and the departments met at the officials level. Of course, no one ever has enough time, and I wish there was more engagement, but we did do our best to engage. And when we sent out invites or requests to meet and we didn't hear back, I would make personal calls to try and set up meetings. So I did my best. Thank you.

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

MR. EDJERICON: I think -- Madam Chair, thank you for that, Minister. I think that I have other questions on further down. I'll wait until I come to that. That would be it for now. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any further questions on junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services?

Seeing none, Education, Culture and Employment, junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services, operation expenditures summary, 2022-2023, \$198,676,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, do you want to switch the witnesses for the next two sections? Is it the same witness, Member -- Minister?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Yeah, just so it's on the record for today I want to switch out Mr. Sam Shannon and bring in Mr. Michael Saturnino. Thank you. And the deputy minister John MacDonald will be remaining. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms.

Welcome, Mr. Saturnino. All right. So we are starting on page 44 with information items on 45 to 47. Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm wondering if -- I see that the amount for the income assistance program is pretty much the same. I'm wondering if the Minister -- if the amount of people using the program is the same as previous year, and if the Minister can let us know the number of clients for that program?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And the income assistance program over the years has seen an increase in cost and the number of clients accessing it. For that information, I will just need one second.

I'm looking over at Mr. Saturnino, and I'm going to throw him right into the hot seat and see if he has the information. Thank you.

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just with regards to the question itself, we have had some fluctuations in the number of the clients over time simply because of federal benefits and so, of course, we had a number of clients receiving the CERB benefit and that transitioned into the Canada Recovery Benefit. So our numbers have gone -- went up, and then have dropped down. And we're basically at a similar place as we were about one year ago. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm wondering where that place is. How many clients does income assistance have? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'd like to pass it over to Mr. MacDonald.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Mr. MacDonald.

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So during the 2020-2021 fiscal year, the income

assistance program provided assistance to approximately 3,201 households. So just for a little bit more demographic information for the Member, 67 percent of those were aged between 19 and 59; 22 percent were disabled; and 11 percent were seniors or elders. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, I appreciate that. The next line item I wanted to go to was the senior home heating subsidy. And that one is staying the same as the previous year. The concern I have there is that the cost of fuel has gone up, and I know that the Minister and I have had this conversation on the floor and that the increase so far seen has not been hugely substantial. But I know that there was already concern about the switch going from a program that once calculated litres that now uses a budgetary amount, and so I'm wondering if there's an expected kind of shortfall in that budgetary item or a shortfall of fuel to seniors in the territory? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So I will say that, you know, we have -- I have had many conversations with the Member, and I think that people around the territory did see an increase in their fuel prices this year compared to last, and I would say the biggest reason for that is because there was that sharp drop in prices from two years ago to last year. And so there was a very significant decline in the price of heating fuel. And the price has actually gone back up to around where it was two years ago. And so that's why people really are seeing those increases, because they're back to pre-pandemic levels.

With that being said, it's been pretty cold and I know my fuel bill has gone up, and so I imagine everyone else's has as well.

If a senior uses their full allotment of this program and they have no more fuel and they have no more money and they can't afford to fill their tank, the income assistance program can step in and provide assistance as well. A number of MLAs have come to me and said, you know, my client -- or my constituent's an elder and they used up their entire allotment, and they can't afford fuel. And in every one of those instances, the income assistance program has been able to provide assistance to those seniors. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And I appreciate ECE's willingness to go out

of their way to ensure that finances are available for home heating for seniors.

Does the Minister or his department have the actuals for the number of seniors who were clients of the senior home heating subsidy in 2020-2021? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Yeah, I would like to hand it to Mr. MacDonald. Thanks.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So for the senior home heating subsidy program, the program uptake for the 2020-2021 fiscal year was approximately 685 seniors. And just to give a sense of regional breakdown Beaufort Delta would be about 16 percent, Deh Cho 20 percent, North Slave 23 percent, Sahtu 13 percent, and South Slave 28 percent. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'm sure it's not going to be a big shocker but I'm going down the line to student financial assistance. And my question there is I see that there is a remarkable drop in -- between the 2021-2022 Main Estimates and the 2022-2023 Main Estimates for student financial assistance. And I would like to know the demographic as well for 2020-2021 of student financial assistance clientele or clients, and then I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to why the predicted, I guess, drop in uptake of student financial assistance for the current fiscal year? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the federal government provided us with some -- about \$2 million, I believe, for supports for post-secondary students, and we rolled those out as a grant, a technology grant to help students purchase a laptop if they needed one as well as a grant to help students with the cost of internet on a month-to-month basis. And so that money was included in the previous main estimates, but it was time limited and so this has returned to the previous numbers without that federal investment. And as far the demographics, I can ask Mr. MacDonald to answer. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So again, for the 2020-2021 fiscal year, or academic year in this case, I should say, the SFA program provided assistance to approximately 1,128 Northwest Territories students. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: No, that's excellent. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I have one more question, and it's in regards to active positions within the income security division. I notice that there has been a loss of five positions that all come from the regions. And I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to why the loss of positions and why all from regional centres? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member -- or sorry, Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'd like to have Mr. Saturnino to take that one. Thank you.

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. On page 8 on the schedule of active positions for income security, there's no change in the number of positions between 2021-2022 and 2022-2023. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, that's one point for ECE, because I read the wrong line item. I near had a heart attack if they were taking away five jobs. So one point, ECE. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thanks. You're done?

MS. CLEVELAND: I'm done.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Okay.

MS. CLEVELAND: Stick a fork in me.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): All right. Any more questions from Members under income security? Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister give me an updated figure of how much income assistance is -- how much of income assistance goes to housing? And I note that some of that would be to market housing and then some of that would be for public housing. Whatever figure the Minister has out of this \$39 million, thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the income assistance programs provided a shelter benefit to approximately 2,000 applicants each year with the shelter benefits of \$8 million. So the average number of applicants within the past three years is about 1100 in public housing at a cost of \$775,000. And about 880 in market housing at about \$7.3 million. So the vast majority of that benefit goes to market housing. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I guess can the Minister provide an update on -- I know we're doing an income assistance review. I know the Housing Corp's doing a rental strategic renewal. I just really think that \$7.3 million that's being used for market housing at a market rate, given to the Housing Corp they could probably house that many people and maybe even some more.

So is there just any conversation about whether this is a sensible approach to mandate people to go into public housing when we know the waitlists are hundreds of people and that the Housing Corp has no money but the money's found over in this part of the budget; are we having that conversation? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yeah, and the Member's correct, we are doing a review of the income assistance program. This is definitely something that is being looked at. I've had discussions with the Minister of Housing. I've had discussions with the department. Ultimately, it's a -- it might come down to who pays. You know, if we remove the requirement to be on the housing waitlist, it would likely cost the income assistance program significantly more money, millions of dollars more each year, but it's a way to free up units. So it is a discussion that is ongoing. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I know part of the review, there's -- and in the mandate where there's a plan to bring in a seniors income assistance stream and a persons with disabilities stream. Do we have a date for when we expect that to come into force now? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So, you know, what the initial thinking is is to have an income assistance program for people who aren't in the workforce and who aren't going to be likely going back into the workforce. And so persons with disabilities who are not in the workforce and who won't be going back, as well as seniors who have -- you know, have -- let's say aged out or retired from the workforce, and the plan is to have that operational by March 2023. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the Minister speak to whether -- I guess I'm wondering -- and this is going to take a bit of nuance and perhaps I'm asking the question with wrong -- whether the goal is to have a completely different program for peoples with disabilities and seniors who are not ever planning to re-enter the workforce, or to just have -- to alter the rules? You know, I think we already have different payroll rules in regards to them under income assistance. And I guess what I'm getting at, would it -- there's a lot of other benefits flying around for seniors and peoples with disabilities and then income assistance itself through the regulations is very, very prescriptive in how the formula is allotted. But would it be possible -- is the plan that this would be a different stream and, for example, if MLAs wanted to increase it by 5 percent but not increase the other income assistance streams, would that be possible, or is this just simply some tweaks to the income assistance regulations for those people? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The plan is to have a completely different stream. There's no point in having someone fill out the same application as someone who's in a completely different -- in completely different circumstances.

We also have the, you know, additional seniors benefits, seniors home heating subsidy, seniors supplementary benefit, and we want to see how we can perhaps incorporate those into the program as well. You know, we want to support seniors and persons with disabilities. And we want to do it in a respectful way. You know, there is a stigma around income assistance. So a lot of people don't like applying for it. They don't like to -- you know, to admit that they've applied for it. And so what we want to do is create a program that is understood to be for seniors and persons with disabilities and so that that then -- and remove that stigma so that if you need home heating or you need help with your rent or you need whatever, you just go to this one program. That's the ideal. Will it turn out that way? You know,

time will tell. But that's -- you know, that's my dream. Thank you.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also share that dream, so I look forward to this work.

I guess as part of this work, can I get a -- or can the Minister tell me whether they're also working to perhaps somewhat align with federal programs? I know this has been one of those complications is that if a change to old age security is made or a change to Canadian disability benefits or, you know, have some sort of -- there's just so many federal programs, dozens of them, that apply to people on disabilities or people who are seniors with different reporting requirements. I think probably it would be wise to look at them all and try to somewhat align the criteria and reporting requirements so that, you know, if one is based on T4 income, ours is also based on T4 income.

Can I just, you know, get a commitment out of the Minister that we will be looking at the various federal programs and how they fit into these two streams as well? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, yes, we're doing that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any further questions to income security? Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a couple questions. First of all, I know in Hay River there, I have a number of clients that come into my office, and lately it's with the pandemic going on office closures and that. I'd just like to know with the department, how are those payments to income support clients made? Is there mostly direct deposits, cheques, cash? I'm just not sure how that works. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the client service officers will work with the clients to determine how they would like their payments. So I believe we always encourage direct deposit. It's -- you know, it's just safer. I know that I've lost cheques personally and so I use direct deposit whenever I can. But some clients prefer to get cheques, and some clients prefer to get a cheque every week as opposed to once a month, or every two weeks. Everyone's personal circumstances are different, and so we work with them. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the client actually has the option of getting paid weekly, every two weeks, three weeks? Is that -- or monthly? Whatever they want? Is that the way it works? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Yes. And I don't know if they do every three weeks. But I would imagine one week, two weeks, or four weeks are probably the standard. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And direct deposits are pretty straightforward. They usually know they're going to get their money.

With respect to cheques, if for some reason, like during the pandemic, if the office was closed, what -- and staff weren't there, say cheques were supposed to be mailed -- or provided on Thursday and nobody was there and there was a sign on the door, what would be -- would there have been a plan in place to ensure that those cheques would be made available to the clients? Because a lot of the clients are basically living, you know, possibly paycheque to paycheque, and it's -- and it's very important to them. Thank you Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Yeah, in most circumstances, or in all circumstances, we want to ensure that clients get their cheques. If there's an emergency circumstance where perhaps there's no one in the office and no one expected to not be in the office, there might be a different situation. I can ask Mr. MacDonald for information, though. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So maybe I'll just use an example. During the pandemic when there were regional or community closures of offices, one of the measures that the department took was to payroll clients so that they did not have to go through the typical application processes and that type of endeavor. And we've also been able to move temporarily to, you know, work from home circumstances for employees. So that has enabled us to get away from some of the traditional approaches, of paper-based approaches. But as the Minister has said, we've shifted mostly to direct deposits or, to a certain extent, cheques via mail

through the post office as well. So I think I may have answered the question but just want to be sure. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I just know that there are -- you know, there are a number of people that actually like to attend the office and pick up their cheque. And would the cheques be actually cut at the office or would they be coming out of, say, if it's South Slave, out of Fort Smith? Thank you.

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

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

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. Cheques -- income assistance cheques are printed on site in the different regional and community offices. And so they are available through the local CSO, unless there is no office in the community in which case it would be done by a different office and typically couriered into the post office for pick up from clients. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to move on here, and it's to do with customer service.

Again, as, you know, a Regular MLA and I -- having a number of people come to the office, you know, we get complaints and I suspect you guys probably get complaints on the other side. So it's always good to hear both sides of the story. And when those positions are filled, what type of training, I guess, is provided to the employee and how much emphasis is put on customer relations training? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And most people are, you know, easy to deal with, easy to work with, but there are some people who are a little more difficult to deal with. And I know that income assistance, the client service officers often have to deal with some characters, and I know because they come to my office as well. And you know, as empathetic and as calm as you are, it can be difficult to sort of to keep your -- you know, keep your professionalism. And so I do have some empathy for

them. But that being said, we have to ensure that we treat everyone with respect and with dignity. It's already difficult enough for a lot of people to go into that office and ask for assistance. So, you know, there's a lot of emphasis on ensuring that the service they receive is appropriate. Perhaps I can ask Mr. Saturnino to comment. Thank you.

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. When a client services officer is hired, they're required to complete a two-week statutory training program and in order to receive a social welfare officer designation, or appointment, and so that would basically give them the foundations for what they need to do to deliver the programs. And then from there, they would undergo a significant amount of on-the-job training, working with more experienced officers, and we would also supplement that with a number of other different training, such as mental health, first aid, trauma-informed practice, various levels -- different types of training, whatever would be required to best serve that clientele. And we do place a large focus on customer service. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, and I understand it's probably, you know -- I suspect it's probably a difficult position to be in. You know, you're dealing with -- you're dealing with people who are -- you know, are usually -- they don't -- they may not want to be there but they have to be there just for whatever circumstances.

The next thing I'd like to move to is income assistance provides dollars for -- I guess, to help people pay rent in market units. What would be, I guess, the cost range or an average cost, say, per -- I guess per person or per family that the department pays out? Because -- you know, it's been said that it's cheaper -- it's probably cheaper for the -- or more cost effective for the government to own their own buildings. And when I kind of look at the numbers, I'm not quite sure that's true and I just want to make sure that -- that -- you know, I get the proper numbers so I can do some calculations. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So it would be difficult, I guess, to get an average because, you know, you could be -- we could be paying \$80 a month for someone who's in a housing unit, and they could be paying \$1200 for someone who's in a market rental unit. But there are some parameters on what, you know, is an acceptable rent and what

ECE will pay and for that information, I can go to Mr. Saturnino. Thank you.

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. For applicants that receive the shelter benefit, they're eligible for market rental rates in accordance with the rental market report by the Canada -- by CMHC and the Canadian National Occupancy Standards. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I had one more question, it slipped my mind, so I can maybe ask the Minister at a later time. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to start with the senior home heating subsidy as well, and I guess just throw my sort of thoughts around the change from volumetric to -- to a cost-based supplement.

To me, when the Minister says that, yes, people can come and get another, like, a top up or something like that, that just adds, like, another sort of hoop or level for people to jump through. And I just wonder if there -- it's great to say, yeah, everyone gets accepted but, you know, I imagine there's an income level that perhaps might get looked at and such, and while it may look on paper someone's making a certain amount of money, are they actually -- have that money in their pocket or are they helping other family members, etcetera. So what are the parameters around getting that extra money or extra heating fuel, and would that not be saved by just doing volumetric for everyone? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So if someone uses up their seniors home heating subsidy, they can apply to the income assistance program. And what looks at is what are your needs and what is your ability to pay for those needs. And the income assistance program will make up the difference. So, you know, there are individuals who, you know, while they might, you know, feel a financial crunch, they still might not qualify for income assistance. So I'm -- you know, I'm definitely sympathetic to that.

Part of this review of the -- not just the income assistance program but also the home heating subsidy program, which, you know, is reviewed on a -- every two years, is to determine if we can -- if there's a better way to distribute these funds. So

believe me, I've talked to the department about just going back to the -- you know, the volume measurement, but given where we are with this review, we've decided to hold off until we come to a final decision on a program. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And, yeah, I appreciate that you're looking at a bigger picture and revamp. But I just want to stress that anything that's easier for residents, you know, is probably the way to go and in the long run will probably save more of our time and your time for us coming and harassing you for exemptions or help.

I wanted to -- speaking of which, I'm going to move on to student financial assistance next, and I've had conversation with the Minister here.

And I know that -- okay, first of all -- sorry, I'll ask of the 1,128 students mentioned, what's the break down of that -- those students that are being helped in Yellowknife versus in regional centres versus small communities, and if that's not available right now, I can get that information at a later date. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I think Mr. MacDonald may have that information.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So for the student financial assistance regional breakdowns for 2021-2022, they would be as follows: So Beaufort Delta, 13 percent; Deh Cho, 5 percent; North Slave, 65 percent; Sahtu, 4 percent; and finally, South Slave at 13 percent. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member for frame -- sorry, Great Slave.

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And now that you're saying that, it sounds like that might have been the answer you had a question earlier ago but I always -- not sure if I'm listening to everybody else's questions all the time.

I guess around that, when I look at 65 percent being in Yellowknife, we also have most of our top earners etcetera living in Yellowknife, and I'm well aware of dual income homes where together two employees working for the GNWT are making over \$300,000 a year or even 250, and yet their children are still qualifying for student financial assistance. I get that in the past, this has been used as a hiring

mechanism or a way to attract professionals to our territory. However, I think we're sort of well beyond that time of, you know, everyone's coming north to work their two years and make their money and leave and in reality is a terrible model for us in a recruitment type situation.

So I guess what -- where I'm going with this is that I would like to see some sort of income testing begin and implemented within the GNWT and, you know, it doesn't have to be a really low number or -- you know, it can just be that those top, you know, senior -- senior bureaucrats for the GNWT are not having their children's education subsidized. It's kind of appalling to me that we have such a terrible, you know -- or a terrible outcome in our lower grades and then yet we're sending off, you know, people who are only first and second generation Yellowknifers to school outside of the territory. It's actually I think pretty disturbing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister -- or thank you, Member. Sorry. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So, yes, the program, it is pretty generous compared to other programs in Canada but the hitch is that you have to have gone to school in the Northwest Territories and the more -- longer you've attended school in the territory, the more you're eligible for. And, you know, I -- I don't like the idea of, you know, saddling students with debt because they are trying to start their careers. But that being said, you know, the Member has raised this with me a number of times and after the last time I did start thinking about how we might adjust the program. You know, we have small communities where there's perhaps no employment, no opportunities for students to save up money, and does the program, the way it is, disadvantage those students compared to other students whose parents might be, you know, doing well and they can find lucrative summer employment. So I've asked the department to look at ways to possibly adjust how we fund students based on need so that we are removing barriers for, you know, potential students who need those barriers removed, and spreading the wealth out differently. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, that actually brings up another point then is because then all those same students get funneled into GNWT summer jobs at -- you know, I can't tell you the number of -- of people's names I recognize coming across my desk when I was a Minister and asking what does that degree have to do with the job that that student is in, and honestly, it was one of the largest discussions we had as COVID hit us was what were we going to do for our summer students.

And to me, that was a bit of a -- again, a disconnect on, well, sorry but, you know, privileged Yellowknifers who have, you know, good, steady incomes and their parents don't need -- didn't need those summer jobs when other people, I think, could have used that support. So I think there's a real -- I look at it as there's been a group of people in this town that have really set themselves and their children up for -- for quite a lucrative and bright future at the expense of the Indigenous and local people to this territory. So I'm going to continue to pursue this with the Minister. And I know that, you know, he may be the one receiving my comments right now but it's not, you know, his doing that that has set itself up that way.

Yeah, and I guess -- I guess here, I've never been one where coming from a private sector I felt that a guaranteed universal income was something that I -- I supported. However, as I've gone through COVID and I've watched and learned about how our income assistance program does work and the hoops that we're making residents jump through to get it, I just want to throw support that I do think if we're going to give people this money regardless, and I know the Minister's working towards it, let's just cut out the paperwork and give it to them and then that takes some of the shame away as well. If you're automatically qualifying for it, you know, you're not saying well, I went with my hand out for welfare. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. And, you know, I'm also here to fight the establishment as the MLA is, so that's why I appreciate her comments. And yeah, and I appreciate the comments about income assistance program or, you know, moving towards something maybe not a guaranteed-based income but something that is a little more reliable, a little bit more steady, something that could help people get over that welfare wall as they call it. So that is the goal. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I too want to question the seniors home heating subsidy. So if we use up this budget or -- and the people in the homes are short of fuel for heat or any other one, it could be propane, it could be other things, what is the -- you want them to go to income assistance programs? A lot of seniors are extremely proud and having them go to another level in income security is -- I don't know if that's acceptable because, you know, it's -- first of all, they don't want to do that, I'm sure. I mean, why don't we have a bit of an increase in that seniors home heating subsidy in the

beginning so they wouldn't have to do that. That's a question for the Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And that's exactly why we are looking at ways to sort of consolidate this program, get away from that stigma of, you know, applying for income assistance or applying for welfare. So that's exactly the type of changes that I'm looking to make. And there were increases to this program in the life of this Assembly. They were modest increases but nonetheless they did respond to some of those changes. And for many people, this is, you know, what they need. Not everyone is, you know, uses up the max and then needs to go to income assistance. It's a small number of people who actually need to take that step. But even for those people, we do want to ensure that they are treated with dignity, and so we are looking at how we can do that. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: The income assistance program is increased by \$520,000. Is that enough, Madam Chair, with the increases of fuel, food? Everything else -- everything is increased. So we're just keeping the people in this income bracket, and most of the people are usually Indigenous, and are low income and, you know, some of them have large families, and I'm just wondering if we're even meeting the threshold of making sure that the kids are fed and housed and are able to attend school. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And so that's what this is intended for, to meet people's basic needs. So the very bare minimum. No one is getting rich or no one is even saving money on income assistance. But it's a legislated program so it means if someone applies for it and we've already maxed out our budget, we don't say no to them. We say okay, you qualify, you know, according to the legislation. And then we come back later in the year for a supplementary estimate, as happens almost every single year. And so as a result, there was an increase in 2021 I believe, so just this current fiscal year, of \$4 million to the program because it was consistently overspent. And over, you know, the last number of years, this program -- the money that's spent on this program has grown quite substantially, and I -- you know, if you look back at the numbers from ten years ago, we are -- I can't recall -- for \$10 or \$15 million more than that, it's been a significant amount of money we've invested in this program, and it just keeps growing. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also want to -- you to explain -- the Minister to explain how a person goes in to get income assistance and what -- what's the process? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Perhaps I'll ask Mr. Saturnino to explain it. Thanks.

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. There is an initial -- there is an application for the income assistance program and through that application, we seek to determine some of the individual's personal circumstances as it relates to -- when we collect their personal information under -- in accordance with ATTIP, but we also are trying to establish what their needs are, what their income, what their housing situation is, their family situation, if they have children. So that's all a part of the initial intake of trying to determine what the individual's circumstances are. And of course through that, that gives us the information to be able to determine their eligibility in accordance with the legislation.

From there, there are certain pieces of information that would be required such as a bank statement. If we're paying rent, we need confirmation of those types of pieces as well. So there is some information that we do need to collect. But that's all a part of the initial intake. And then if they're on the program month to month, then they would reapply however they wouldn't have to provide the same level of information as the first time. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm just wondering now that the social workers aren't involved in the actual -- with the client, which they were before, because most of the social department has gone with child welfare and some of those things, some of the clients are being geared to the mental health workers. I'm just wondering if that's the usual course, because I'm asking that question because a couple of clients that came to me just did not want to go because of that. And they were referred to mental health workers before they would -- before anyone would even look at their case. So I'm just wondering is that normal, or? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. So ECE has been administering this program for a quarter century now. So it was -- at one point, the social workers did -- you know, were involved, but that was quite a long time ago and so ECE does have a lot of experience. And I can't speak to any specific issue, you know, whether or not a situation is normal, because it could be a very abnormal situation. But that being said, you know, as an MLA I deal with income assistance issues, and I have for six years. And sometimes what we do is -- sometimes there's a personality conflict and so we will actually, you know, have our clients or have our constituents call the Fort Smith office, and they'll be dealt with through the Fort Smith office and that can alleviate issues. Because sometimes people don't get along, and that can cause some, you know, really problems. So perhaps to -- I don't know if Mr. Saturnino has anything he'd like to add to this but I can hand it to him. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. The delivery of income assistance can be complex, as complex as the circumstances of the individual. And so one of the things that our staff aim to do is to assist the client in any way possible and if that means that they need to do a referral to another service provider who is able to better assist them with their needs, we may do that. However as far as determining eligibility, it is predominantly based on the client's needs and their income, and it is a financial calculation. But if it was required, we would refer to other services in order to support that client in whatever that might be, whether that's with the Department of Health and Social Services, ICM through the Department of Justice, or any other service provider, perhaps through an NGL. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm not criticizing any of the process in ECE. I'm just wondering why a social worker would refer a couple of clients to the mental health when these -- there's no mental health issues here. And it has nothing to do with really once they get into the income support program over at ECE, because I have -- I've never had problems with the Department of ECE ever with any of my clients, and they -- I -- everybody's very professional there. But I was just wondering if that was part of the process because I wasn't sure. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Did you have anything to respond? Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure. So I'll say it's not part of the regular process. That being said, you know, I personally have been, you know -- and the department is very supportive of a -- I've been pushing an integrated service delivery approach and of course you know, all of the social -- all of the departments have signed on to that. And so it could be a situation where perhaps the -- you know, the client service officer thought that that would be appropriate, an appropriate way to, you know, give someone access to all of the services or to alternate services.

So if the Member wants to, you know, send some specifics about this with some names, we can actually look into it and go from there. But no, it's not part of the normal process. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. You said that 1,128 students from Northwest Territories. How many of those are Indigenous? You did mention North Slave, South Slave but you didn't say, like, how many of those. I would like to know because Tlicho is part of North Slave, and that's -- Yellowknife is North Slave. We're not part of Yellowknife. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And when the deputy minister read that out, I knew that this question was coming. So we can see if we have that information about the number of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous students on hand. But I think we might have to provide something to committee later in terms of the breakdown by community as opposed to just regions, so I'd like to hand it to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And we do have that information on hand. So for student financial assistance, the breakdown is 42 percent of recipients are Indigenous with 58 percent being non-Indigenous. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: Thank you. It's good to know that number even though -- yeah. And so this would be a student loans. Do the students receive the same amount of money for funding? Because I know Indigenous students, they -- you know, they are eligible for basic and supplementary. Do they receive the same amount of funding?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. That's a bit of a complex question. I can ask perhaps Mr. Saturnino to answer. Because I know from my experience applying for SFA, there's different pots of money and there's different amounts that you can get. So Mr. Saturnino, for you. Thank you.

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

MR. SATURNINO: Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Member stated, the benefits for Indigenous students are grants. For non-Indigenous students that were schooled in the Northwest Territories, they're eligible for remissible loans, which can be forgiven at a later date. The benefit levels are comparable, or the same, for those students. And if you're a non-schooled student, then you will be eligible for repayable loans, and that is an income-tested benefit or loan amount which defers from the others -- the other two categories. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON-ARMSTRONG: I have been, you know, hearing from students that -- our SFA, we do -- it's not enough. So lot of them, they do take full -- I have access to some of the student loans for their school year. So that's what they are saying so that's why I -- you know, SFA is not -- it is good program. I think that's one of the best but it's just that students are complaining, saying because of the high cost of living it's not enough for us. And if we're given more money then we would not be applying for the student loans because when they come back, they have to pay that one back. It's not the same as the remissible loan. So that's the part that lot of students are complaining about. So I just wanted to mention that.

And I wanted to ask does any of the outstanding student loan or remissible loan gets written off besides that remissible -- where, you know, that -- like, they don't pay the full amount after the remissible or after, you know, half is forgiven?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the benefit levels are supposed to pay for 80 percent of the cost of going to school in Edmonton. And that was in 2015, I believe, it was 80 percent. So you know, with the review, we're going to look at what the levels are now and what it would cost to -- you know, to support students at different levels. But, you know, we also have programs for when students do return. So if you did get a repayable loan, you can qualify for the northern bonus which is a -- I believe \$2,000 a year

for every year that you are living back in the territory. So you can get \$10,000 knocked off your loan, as I did over the last five years, and I just recently got my last payment of \$2,000. So I highly recommend that program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Members, noting the clock, committee members, I will now rise and report progress.

Report of Committee of the Whole

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

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee has been considering Bills 23, 29, 38; Minister's Statement 202-19(2); Tabled Document 561, 567, 578, and 579, 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 I have a seconder? Member for Yellowknife North. All in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Thursday, March 3rd, 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. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
11. Petitions
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees

14. Tabling of Documents

15. Notices of Motions

16. Motions

17. Notices of Motions for First Reading of Bills

18. First Reading of Bills

19. Second Reading of Bills

20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

- Bill 23, An Act to Amend the Public Utilities Act
- Bill 29, Resource Royalty Information Disclosure Statute Amendment Act
- Bill 38, Miscellaneous Statute Law Amendment Act, 2021
- Minister's Statement 202-19(2), Annual Status Report on the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2019-2023
- Tabled Document 561-19(2), 2022-2023 Main Estimates
- Tabled Document 567-19(2), Annual Status Report – 2019-2023 Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories, February 2021-January 2022 of the Government of the Northwest Territories, 2019-2023
- Tabled Document 578-19(2), Supplementary Estimates (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2021-2022
- Tabled Document 579-19(2), Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 3, 2021-2022

21. Report of Committee of the Whole

22. Third Reading of Bills

23. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Thursday, March 3rd, 2022, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 6:05 p.m.