



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

2nd Session

Day 144

19th Assembly

HANSARD

Thursday, March 2, 2023

Pages 5567 - 5614

The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

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(Frame Lake)

Ms. Lesa Semmler

(Inuvik Twin Lakes)

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Hon. Caroline Wawzonek

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Thursday, March 2, 2023****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.): Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 320-19(2):
LACK OF TRANSPARENCY AROUND
SPILLS AT KEARL OIL SANDS
DEVELOPMENT NORTH OF FORT
MCMURRAY

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, water is life for Indigenous peoples who have relied on it since time immemorial, for residents who rely on it today for clean drinking water, and for the thousands of species that live and thrive in our North because of it. I rise today to speak on a disturbing issue that has come to our attention in the past 24 hours. I was shocked to learn that one of the largest oil sands spills in Alberta was reported in February, and I was disappointed that we were not informed by Alberta as per our Bilateral Water Management Agreement.

According to media reports, approximately 5.3 million litres of industrial wastewater spilled over the banks of a storage pond at the Kearl Oil Sands operation north of Fort McMurray. The spill overflowed into forest and wetlands adjacent to tributaries of the Muskeg and Firebag Rivers, which flow into Athabasca River.

In a separate incident at the same site, oil sands tailings effluent of an unknown amount, with levels of some contaminants over federal and provincial guidelines, has seeped into groundwater and reached surface water since May of 2022. Again, we were not informed.

It was unfortunate to learn of these incidents secondhand. We heard about it from an

Indigenous government in the area after a regional municipal government in Alberta reached out to them.

Mr. Speaker, this violates the Bilateral Water Management Agreement with Alberta which commits our governments to communicating directly and transparently about issues that could affect shared waters. This is not the first time that information hasn't been shared in a timely manner. Every indication we have right now is there is no evidence for concern about water quality in the NWT. Enhanced water testing done at Fort Chipewyan by the regional municipality has shown no evidence of contamination of Lake Athabasca, which provides some comfort.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is taking several steps to respond to this issue. We have requested additional information from the Government of Alberta to ensure that we have what is required to communicate to our partners in water management and monitor about our possible risks. We will be activating dispute resolution measure in our transboundary agreement with respect to information sharing in light of this breach, and I have requested a meeting with the Minister of Environment and Protected Areas to ensure that our bilateral agreement is upheld.

We are currently communicating with Indigenous governments and the Town of Fort Smith to devise a plan which enhances monitoring of water in the Slave River to track potential impacts of the incident upstream.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work closely with Indigenous governments and communities every step of the way. This failure comes at a time when the Government of Alberta is asking for trust and cooperation with the NWT as they work towards regulations to allow the release of treated oil sands tailings effluent into the environment.

Important issues like these require trust, and there is no denying the trust of Indigenous governments, community leaders, and our own government has been affected by this lack of transparency.

This event outlines our position that the GNWT will not support the release of oil sands tailings effluent unless rigorous science demonstrates a safe way to do it and information sharing and emergency response provisions under our agreement are upheld. This government will ensure Northerners' voices continue to be heard as we move forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 321-19(2):
INFRASTRUCTURE CLIMATE CHANGE
ADAPTATION

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has mandate commitments to strengthen its leadership and authority on climate change and to ensure that climate change impacts are specifically considered when making government decisions.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Infrastructure recognizes the challenge climate change presents and are the taking necessary steps to ensure public infrastructure is more resilient to the impacts of a warming planet and can meet the current and future needs of NWT residents. Transportation Canada's Northern Transportation Adaptation Initiative provides us with much needed support to develop integrated climate change adaptation measures in transportation planning in the North. This partnership supports critical work, such as analyzing permafrost data from the Dempster Highway and the Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Highway, and the development of geoassets and geohazard data management systems to improve transportation safety in the NWT and preserve existing infrastructure.

During the planning and design stage of road projects, we are using satellite imagery and thermal analysis to gain knowledge about permafrost and select the most suitable alignment and design for our roads.

Mr. Speaker, replacing seasonal winter roads with all-season roads is another way to make our transportation system more resilient to climate change impacts. These seasonal ice roads are critical for communities to get goods and supplies they need and for mobility between communities. Construction of these roads are also being negatively impacted by climate change.

The opening of the Tlicho Highway in 2021 extended the ice road season into the Tlicho. Our government continues to advance two

strategic road projects - the Mackenzie Valley Highway and Slave Geological Province Corridor, which will either eliminate or extend ice road seasons.

Climate change is also impacting airports in the territory, and we have undertaken projects to address these impacts. We have either completed or have projects underway at airports in Sachs Harbour, Fort McPherson, and Sambaa K'e that focusing on drainage work to be able to improve their resiliency to climate change. Our government, with the assistance of the Government of Canada, is also investing in improvements to the Inuvik Airport to address the effects of climate change. Some of the work involves improving the drainage network to direct water away from vulnerable areas to protect against permafrost thaw. Our government's work to adapt to climate change and mitigate its impact on our public infrastructure also extends to buildings and energy systems. One example is our participation on the northern advisory committee of the Northern Infrastructure Initiative. This initiative develops Northern-specific codes and standards to address climate change resilience in infrastructure design, planning and management.

Mr. Speaker, NWT's energy system is critical to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, our climate change mitigation efforts. Our Capital Asset Retrofit Fund energy savings projects will reduce over 16,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions annually by the end of 2023, and result in \$3.5 million of yearly utility savings. The installation of over 40 biomass heating plants has been integral to the reduction of the GNWT's emissions. Approximately 35 percent of annual heating in our government facilities is now provided by wood pellets.

Mr. Speaker, the future initiatives, such as the Inuvik Wind Project, the Fort Providence-Kakisa Transmission Line, and the Taltson Hydro Expansion, will not only make our energy systems more secure, affordable and sustainable, but help us significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions as we take action against climate change and mitigate against the impacts of the rapidly changing climate. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Municipal and Community Affairs.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 322-19(2):
NWT COMMUNITY FLOOD RESPONSE

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs is committed to strengthening the Northwest Territories emergency management by improving response to emergency events and assisting residents and community governments to be well prepared when faced with an emergency. I will outline for Members the lessons learned from the 2022 flood and how we apply these lessons to prepare for the 2023 flood season.

Mr. Speaker, before I do that, I want to acknowledge the difficult journey for those people so heavily impacted by the 2021 and the 2022 flood. These events and the time, effort, and complexity of the recovery has been unprecedented and have a significant effect on residents. Recovery efforts continue but the shining light throughout is the resilience and resolve that impacted residents have demonstrated, and the generosity of NWT residents as a whole.

To make sure we enact the lessons learned from these experiences, Municipal and Community Affairs is working on an after-action review related to the 2022 flood in two phases. Phase one, currently underway, focuses on preparedness and response, while phase two will follow and focus on recovery. This review includes input from a public survey and public engagement sessions that took place this past January.

Mr. Speaker, Municipal and Community Affairs has made it a priority to provide more support to community governments to plan for emergencies like flooding. The department has expanded staffing resources, including one staff person in each region for the first time, all dedicated to emergency management. An additional three positions at headquarters has resulted in the expansion of community emergency planning workshops, including table-top exercises in all communities, and updating and distributing templates for community governments to develop and update their emergency plans.

The department continues to review disaster-related policies and procedures. There has been valuable lessons over the past two flood events, and the department is focused on substantial improvements in the way disaster assistance is administered.

Recovery from a disaster event like a flood is a long and difficult process, and I want to reassure all Northerners that we are working to bring clarity to this process.

Finally, I want to assure residents that although we cannot control how or when natural

disasters may occur, these are things that all of us can do to prepare for and lessen the impacts should a disaster occur. Having a household emergency plan and an emergency kit are critical for personal preparedness. We encourage residents to think about where they might stay in the event of an evacuation and to ensure their emergency kit is ready for high-risk periods like river breakup.

The Be Ready annual campaign for flood and other natural disasters preparedness began in February and runs through until May. This campaign provides tips and information on how we can be prepared if you are in a typically affected area.

Mr. Speaker, the intensity and frequency of floods and other natural disaster events is increasing due to climate change. More than ever, it is important that all Northerners do their part to protect themselves and their property and follow recommended steps like developing a household emergency plan and kit. Individuals, community governments, and the Government of the Northwest Territories all need to do their part to prepare for disasters because nobody can do it alone. We remain stronger together. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1407-19(2): SPILLS AT KEARL OIL SANDS DEVELOPMENT

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I read in the news that there were two separate environmental incidents tied to the oil sands in northern Alberta. Incidents that this government only became aware of yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta energy regulator is aware of the situation and, on February 26, 2023, issued to Imperial Oil, an order pursuant to sections 113 and 241 of the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act. The order, which I will table later today, confirms that since May of 2022, there has been ongoing seepage of industrial wastewater into the environment and the released material is known to have an adverse effect on the environment.

Then on February 4th, 2023, there was release of approximately 5,300 cubic metres from a wastewater storage pond which will also have an adverse effect on the environment. Both

these releases are from Imperial Oil's Kearn Oil Sands site.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that Imperial Oil and the Alberta energy regulator failed to inform, not only the First Nations in the area, but this government and those Indigenous governments who have signed comprehensive claims in the NWT. This is not acceptable. We have a transboundary water agreement; a transboundary water agreement with the Government of Alberta, that requires, through an emergency clause, immediate notification of any developments or activities that may negatively affect the Northwest Territories. This was not followed.

There is a dispute resolution mechanism that allows for this government to seek remedies, and I encourage the Minister of ENR to take immediate action using that mechanism.

Mr. Speaker, being downstream from where this leakage and spill has occurred could have substantial impact to our watershed, aquatic life, and mammals. Although it has been reported that a plan to clean up the site has been filed by Imperial Oil, the question is what are the details in this plan? Does this government know what's in the plan? And when will the government find out what is in the plan?

Mr. Speaker, we need to find out what when wrong from the standpoint of Alberta not fulfilling their obligation under the Bilateral Water Management Agreement and this government failing to pick up on the media stories which have been out for some time. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of ENR at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1408-19(2):
YELLOWKNIFE LIQUOR STORES

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Yellowknife liquor stores aren't very nice, and I would like to make them a little nicer. Mr. Speaker, every once in a while I go down south and I go to buy some beer or wine and I remember that buying alcohol can actually be an enjoyable experience. Whether it be the customer service, the selection, or just making sure that the building is in good repair, I think Yellowknife liquor stores leave a lot to be desired. And, Mr. Speaker, at this point I think it's time that we go out and re-tender our two Yellowknife liquor stores. Liquor stores in Yellowknife are basically a license to print money and I think that we share the love.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think the market in this city could hold one or two more liquor stores easily. And we're well aware of the problems that we have with alcoholism, but I don't think the solution is to just allow one vendor to make millions of dollars year over year on it.

Now my preference, as I have stated before, would be to allow alcohol in grocery stores or corner stores. I don't think that I am going to quite get that but I am hoping that I can get a commitment that we will re-tender the Yellowknife liquor stores, look whether the market can handle one more, perhaps open on Sundays, and perhaps amend the Liquor Act so that if Yellowknife wants to do this but another community doesn't, that's okay, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister of Finance.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1409-19(2):
AFTERCARE AND DETOXIFICATION
SERVICES

MS. MARTSELOS: After that, Mr. Speaker, for my statement today I want to speak once again about aftercare and detox services within the NWT.

This is an issue that I have spoken about several times throughout this term because it is an issue that touches nearly every family across the NWT. Mr. Speaker, two months ago, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction released a report entitled "Canadian Guidance on Alcohol and Health." In their report, which was developed by an independent expert working group of addiction researchers, they provide an updated set of guidelines for the recommended limit in the number of alcoholic drinks a person consumes per week. This report was very different compared to the guidelines where they released in 2011.

Mr. Speaker, in 2011 the CCSA said that women should not consume more than ten drinks per week and men should not consume more than 15 drinks per week. However, the updated guidelines state that regardless of gender, age or race, all people should not consume more than three to six alcohol beverages per week. The reasons for these new guidelines are due to the evolving nature of the science and research on the subject and to help Canadians reduce the long-term health effects of alcohol and maintain a moderate risk level for all alcohol-related health issues.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, according to a report from the Canadian Institute of Health

Information in 2016, the rate for hospitalization due entirely to alcohol for the NWT was six times higher than the national average. Also, according to a 2019 study from the same organization, NWT youth were more likely to be hospitalized from harm caused by substances than youth anywhere else in the country. We also need to consider the high number of suicides in the NWT over the last year. According to the data from the NWT coroner's office, 2022 had a record number of suicides, with 18 confirmed to date, which is more than any year since 2002. We also need to consider the rise in opioid-related deaths that the NWT has experienced recently, with six deaths confirmed for 2022 caused by drugs laced with fentanyl and all those deaths occurred in Hay River. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

In closing, Mr. Speaker, these are stark statistics, but it is for these reasons, among others, why I strongly believe that the NWT needs to open an aftercare facility that has the option for clients to detox as well. There is clearly a need among the people of the NWT for this type of facility.

During the last session in October, I suggested to the health Minister that with the closure of Trailcross Treatment Centre in Fort Smith, there is potential to convert the old Trailcross building into a territorial aftercare facility. I still believe that this is a good idea for us to consider because, again, given the way the building was built it makes it an ideal location to house both male and female clients separately but under the same roof. I will have questions for the Minister of health later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1410-19(2):
LACK OF GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP IN
NUNAKPUT ENERGY PROJECTS

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The GNWT's energy strategy, that the GNWT will partner with communities and stakeholders, Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the GNWT partner on energy projects in my riding of Nunakput. In Nunakput, we face the coldest and darkest winters. We use diesel to heat our homes, our businesses. We pay the highest price of fuel in the territory set by the GNWT, is to do this. Not only is this diesel is a source of energy to operate our communities, we pay carbon tax on that fuel. In my riding, we are already facing the

highest cost of living, three and a half times more than Yellowknife, with some of the lowest employment opportunities across the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, how are our people to pay our bills, pay their heat, keep the lights on in their house? The government says they want to partner with our communities to implement an energy strategy, the government is partnered with Nunakput communities.

Mr. Speaker, the GNWT is partnering with Nunakput to make our homes more energy efficient, to help us establish local sources of energy. Mr. Speaker, M18, the project that is in Inuvialuit settlement region, we are already ready to develop a source of natural gas there, to have security for diesel fuel and compressed gas for Inuvik. And all I could think of is jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we have a solution in the ISR to promote energy security, sustainability, but the project continues to be put under review by the federal government. Which I remind them, the Inuvialuit settlement region is a settled land claim, for 39 years, on Tuk 7(1)(a) lands. The territorial government has to come and support us in regards to this project, Mr. Speaker.

What can the GNWT do to support the residents, to meet the rising costs of energy? If this is the case, the effective costs will go right across the board. The biggest increase is the cost of feeding our families. My communities need to secure affordable sustainable energy systems. I don't see the GNWT making headway to achieve this in my riding of Nunakput. The GNWT has to support M18. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the appropriate Minister of Infrastructure at the appropriate time, thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1411-19(2):
OPERATING BUSINESSES IN PUBLIC
HOUSING

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Entrepreneurship accelerates economic growth, spurs innovation, instigates social change, promotes research and development, and improves and grows existing sectors. Global business owners have been instrumental in spurring social change and improving the way people live and work around the world.

Mr. Speaker, entrepreneurship is a good thing for every NWT community. While some business ventures are large operations, so

many more are small home-based businesses expanding our workforce and economic and social health. But Housing NWT is standing in the way.

People in public housing work and their rent is based on their income through their T4 but Housing NWT prohibits home-based business in public housing due, quote, "to the fact that these homes are provided with subsidized rent." But the rent, Mr. Speaker, is subsidized according to a person's income. I think of a writer, a bookkeeper, a consultant, a baker, an artist or crafter, or maybe a labourer, wanting to start their own business but putting their housing in jeopardy by doing so.

Business startup for some NWT residents is a viable economic tool to access opportunity and pull themselves out of poverty. Building a business takes time. There is a time where a business owner grows their brand and reputation, to build their clientele as they grow their annual income. But to say public housing tenants with self-generated income are not welcome removes a very viable sector of opportunity from NWT residents, particularly those living in public housing dominated communities.

As a business owner, I followed the home-based business and zoning bylaws established in my community and income tax rules established by Revenue Canada that required me to submit GST quarterly and file my taxes annually. Zoning bylaws established what type of home-based business I could operate in my home and home-based business bylaws established rules around parking, people traffic, and signage. At this point, Mr. Speaker, it seems the only business operators protected in public housing are drug dealers.

I urge Housing NWT to create a home-based business framework for public housing to support economic diversification and growth across the NWT, especially in small communities. Entrepreneurship is a viable and much needed form of employment in our territory. Given the time and dollars ECE and ITI invest in skill development, building employment in small communities and entrepreneurial growth, I kindly ask Housing NWT to be part of the solution. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1412-19(2):
DEH GAH GOTIE SCHOOL TRIP TO
MEXICO

MR. BONNETROUGE: Mashi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Ambassadors of Deh Gah Elementary and Secondary School have returned home safely from a recent trip to Mexico. The Fort Providence contingent made up of 11 students and seven chaperons made the trip February 4th to the 12th. The trip was spearheaded by the school's child, youth and care counsellor Daphne Blanco-Sarlay. Daphne's idea is to create a cultural exchange between two Indigenous communities impacted by colonialism in what's called Connecting through Kindness. The city of Tulum, Mexico has a population of under 20,000 residents and is one hour south of the resort town of Playa del Carmen. Tulum has a history of Indigenous Mayan culture. The students fundraised for the past three years to help the small community rebuild their secondary school and loved getting their hands dirty for a great cause. The students raised \$10,000 and were beaming with pride as they understood this will benefit the education and future of the Mayan youth that hosted them.

Although there was a language barrier, the students immediately made friends with their counterparts and managed to communicate in their own ways. Together they jumped rope, played hopscotch, hide and seek, tug of war, and shared many moments together cementing their friendship. Students toured various places of interest but most of all enjoyed the walks on the beach, the water park, snorkeling through underwater caves, and swam in the ocean where the water was so crystal clear they could see the bottom of the sandy ocean, the ocean floor.

This was a trip they will never forget as they never imagined they would be in sandals, short-sleeved shirts and shorts, especially in the month in the February and are reminded of the temperatures back home in the North.

The students of Deh Gah School look forward to hosting the Mayan students this coming summer. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1413-19(2):
PUBLIC CORPORATE STRUCTURES

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Crown corporations are hybrid entities that walk the line between a government body and a private enterprise. Generally their goal is to operate at arm's length from the public government. They provide programs and services to residents in a variety

of ways, and have government support, with a goal of creating a more streamlined approach to program delivery. However, in the Northwest Territories, we do not appear to have a concrete plan or a consistent governance model for our Crown corporations.

I recognize that no two issues are the same, Mr. Speaker, and that our Crown corporations provide different services. What I cannot determine is if our public government puts any effort into truly examining and evaluating how our Crown corporations operate.

The government stepped forward when it needed to purchase MTS; however, it is unclear to me how the government plans to look at this model moving forward. What is the current business plan and structure option for MTS? We have a board of deputy ministers for the NTPC right now. There is no independence in this structure, Mr. Speaker. The connection to government is not at all arm's length with government operation.

Additionally, there is the NWT Housing Corporation. The board structure was removed decades ago for a president who reports to a Minister. Now there is a working group with our Indigenous governments on the implementation of this work. But, again, Mr. Speaker, we have no consistency for vision for our Crown corporation.

Mr. Speaker, it is not lost on me that we require collaboration with government in many of these areas. We need shipping on to our communities, we need sustainable power rates, and we need to collaborate on housing. However, what we also need is a clear and consistent governance model for these Crown corporations. They cannot succeed without government support, but we can benefit from flexibility and independence from government if process is established appropriately. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Premier later today. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1414-19(2):
MINING ROYALTIES MODELLING

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. Yesterday I spoke on attempts by this government to engage the public and mining industry on mining royalties. Other work on mining royalties came to my attention when there was a presentation at the November 2022 geoscience forum by a consultant apparently hired by ITI. This consultant is the same one who conducted a nine-page peer review of the

Price Waterhouse Coopers benchmarking study that found that GNWT is doing just fine with royalties and taxes from mining. That peer review was in agreement with the benchmarking study and its conclusion that the NWT is competitive with other jurisdictions - at least the ones that were included - and that public investment in infrastructure and technology is the best way to get more mining revenues. That study though focused on competitiveness and not fair return or maximizing benefits.

In any event, the same peer reviewer from Vancouver has been hired by ITI, again, through a \$75,000 sole source contract to conduct some sort of modeling of mining royalties. Given that this consultant has already concluded that the NWT is doing fine in terms of competitiveness and mining revenues, I'm not sure what kind of modeling is going to be done. I will have questions for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment on this modeling, whether the public will get to have a say on what is done, and whether any of this work will be released publicly. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1415-19(2):
EULOGY FOR DIANE EDWARDS

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to speak about a respected elder who passed away in Fort Simpson. I am lucky to be able to use the eulogy provided by the family. Those close to her knew her as Dinah.

Mr. Speaker, Diane Edwards made a difference to the people she touched, loved, and worked with. Diane Mary Edwards was born on November 1st, 1946, in Fort Liard. Her parents were William and Marguerite Edwards. After finishing high school at Akaitcho Hall in Yellowknife in 1968, Diane moved back to Fort Simpson. She was an active member of the community. Sports were her venue especially curling and softball which were very popular and well organized at the time. In the days without internet or cell phones, the whole community would be involved with special events such as tournaments, a source of entertainment and a common place to meet for everyone. Diane was very active as a participant or in the crowd cheering loudly for the teams.

Diane started her government career 1970 at early age. She has one of the single longest

public service career in the NWT, with over 40 years of meritorious employment as a member of the public service of the GNWT. This is quite an achievement. Diane would always go the extra mile performing her duties at health and social services with a focus on excellence.

Diane is the definition of a working-class unsung hero who didn't look for accolades and acknowledgements. She would find comfort in humility, charity, and performing her duties at an above par.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to meet and know Diane. She was an amazing person who could help you with whatever task you asked. When Diane retired from the government, they were hard pressed to find an award for 45 plus years of service. HR had to create a special plaque just for her as no one had ever retired with 48 years of service. What an accomplishment.

Diane was always a treasure trove of information and when HQ needed something, Diane was their go-to and always found what they were looking for. If somebody from HQ came to Simpson, they always wanted to put the face to the voice.

Diane Mary Edwards passed on Saturday, February 18, 2023 at 1:49 p.m., surrounded by family and friends who loved her dearly. Her heavenly journey began, and she is now free from the bonds that held her back on earth. She's taking her place with our ancestors, and she will live in our memories forever.

Mr. Speaker, I have several messages that were shared at the service from people from the region, and I have added them to my statement here. I would like to have them deemed as read. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. She'll be sadly missed.

Family stories: When Ama passed in Oct 1999, Diane became very close with her sister Madeline, who also lived in Fort Simpson. And over time the two sisters became inseparable. Two peas in a pod, as Diane was the provider and protector for Ama in a supportive role throughout her life. It was a natural transition for Diane to provide that same support for her older sister Madeline, a widow living independently in her own home.

The two had many adventures together - Greyhound bus trips to Edmonton, gardening, berry picking, camping, and fishing were high on the list of things to do. They always found time for some "entertainment" and very well respected from all diverse groups of people in the community.

I went on a few road trips with Diane as well. She loved to travel but kept her routine simple and exact. She was a creature of habit. She only liked to shop at Army and Navy, stay in fancy hotels like the Macdonald Hotel in Edmonton. And later, after the Army and Navy store closed down on 97th Street, she would go to Kingsway. We went to Klondike Days together with my kids'. Boy, she watched out for them at all times, especially her favorite Brendan.

After Madeline passed in Oct 2018, it was a transitional moment for Diane. Her health started to wane, and her memory lapses became more frequent. Unfortunately this was foretelling her future.

With a series of ailments and accidents, Diane became bedridden and could no longer communicate normally. The fact that Diane was able to survive for as long is a true testament to stubbornness and love of life.

Kathy Tsetso shared about the first time she met Diane was at a curling tournament at the old community hall, way back in 1975. Diane asked her to curl on her team, so she did. Kathy never curled before and was shy since she had only been in Simpson for three months. They won the women's event. She was so pumped and grateful for being asked to curl by Diane. Side fact, this was when she met Albert at the Saturday night curling dance for the first time and they never looked back. Kathy credits Diane for getting her to come out and for Diane being a bit of a matchmaker too.

Amy: Diane... Lady Di as we would call her. Di was one of the kindest people I worked with who would bend over backwards for those she genuinely cared about, and I consider myself one of the lucky ones who got to be a part of her journey. I valued our special friendship, from our little break cruises around town, lengthy talks about when she was a little girl, berry picking in Liard, her love for curling, her travels with her sister, the special gifts she would bring in for me whether it be her niece's fresh bannock bread to share with me, or a new pair of socks or mitts she just finished. If I am honest, she was pretty choosy when it came to picking friends or people gave her time and trust to.

She would always make me laugh. Daily I would find myself in stitches with her spicy demeaned as she did not hide her true feelings well when she was not fond of someone. But if she was fond of you, she would give her shirt right off her back. I will cherish all the moments. Di is loved beyond measure and will be missed deeply by all those who had the pleasure of knowing her.

Cindy: I wish we were home a day earlier so that I can pay my respects to Diane. Diane was the sweetest and also could be a little feisty if she did not like you, lol.

I still have two pairs of knitted slippers that she made me. When we worked together, our office would do a gift exchange and if she did not get my name, she would always tell me to stop by, she had something for me, and I would get a pair of slippers. I loved exchanging gifts with her. Use to enjoy our Saturday outings with Sandra. Rest in Peace.

Deb: I am honoured and privileged to have had the years spent with Diane in my life. They were filled with adventure, our many trips to Fort Liard. Great stories. She was an amazing source of knowledge and always willing to share. Her sense of humour brought tears of laughter. Her heart was big enough to offer individual attention to every person that came to her for help through her role with health and social services. Diane made a difference in the lives of many. Her kindness and positivity will leave an in-wavering legacy in the community of Fort Simpson and many others whose lives she touched. Always missed, never forgotten. Go rest on that high mountain.

Diane's niece Shirley Ann Bertrand of Fort Liard sent me the following about Diane and her life in Fort Liard and she spoke with elders who remembered her.

The elders in Fort Liard remember Dinah. Here are some words they shared. "Dinah knew who we were" one said. Another shared a short story. "I trapped with Dinah's Dad (William Edwards). We used to trap beyond Fisherman Lake in the mountains. Dinah was born in Fort Liard and raised there until she was maybe eight or nine years old. Dinah's mom and Dinah lived in a house her dad built. After his passing, Dinah and her mom moved to Fort Simpson. Where her mom had family.

Even after she left to attend school, Dinah would return to Fort Liard time and time again. Dinah kept in touch with the elders, relatives, friends, including her sister Vera Bertrand and her family. Although a private person, Dinah would be known for working many years for Fort Simpson Social Services.

She also had a collection of photos. Dinah loved to go fishing and would be seen fishing at the mouth of the Petitot River. Dinah also liked to pick berries. Mahsi for sharing your life with us Dinah. Rest in Peace.

These are our memories of her from people of Fort Liard.

Diane loved Fort Liard and her family members there. So many times, she talked about going back and building a house on the lot she owned there but always something else came first. She was a devoted daughter, sister, auntie, friend, and co-worker to many.

When Diane's father passed away, they moved to Fort Simpson to be closer to her family William, Alice, and Johnny Tanche. The Tanche family have fond memories of their Auntie Diane. Diane was one special person in our lives, and she watched our children and grandchildren grow up. They all have memories, which I'm sure they will cherish. There is not one person in our family who did not call her Auntie. She touched their hearts in her own witty, kind-hearted person way. Auntie Diane will be missed.

She was so close to our family; she was Auntie to everyone.

She loved spoiling the kids and often bought them treats if she saw them in the store. One of the grandchildren said that their best memories of Diane were watching Animal Kingdom at Diane's while mom and my aunties played bingo. Diane and her mom looked after Cathy when she was young and loved her like their own. Later Diane would often tell Cathy that if she didn't let her go, she would have never married Tod.

She will be sadly missed but not forgotten.

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

Members' statements. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 1416-19(2): PETROLEUM SPILL IN ALBERTA

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of ENR confirm if any of his staff received notification from anybody in the Alberta government about the spills at the Kearn site in Alberta? Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with regret, I have to inform the House, no, we didn't hear anything. I didn't hear anything. We didn't even get notified

by any level of the Alberta government and we had to actually find out through, I guess you would call it the telephone system where somebody provides something else and then they cut to our staff and then this is how we found out. So, unfortunately, no, we did not find out the way we were supposed to. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister tell me if any of the Indigenous governments and partners were aware of this spill? Has he been in contact with any of them to find out if they were aware of it prior, because there was media releases out there and, you know, for some reason we didn't pick up on those. Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning after becoming aware of this spill, ENR compiled a "what we know" information sheet, and it is being sent to all Indigenous and community governments, partners, in the area. We are currently communicating with Indigenous governments in the town of Fort Smith to enhance monitoring of the water in the Slave River to track any potential impacts of upstream incidents. This is a precaution as we do not expect to see any changes based on the monitoring that is occurring in Alberta. We will continue to work closely with our Indigenous governments and communities.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, we received the information from an Indigenous government through the system there. So we are working with that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a spill like this could have a devastating effect on the water, aquatic life, mammals, vegetation and that. So, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister tell me what impact his department thinks that may have on the residents, water, aquatic life, animals and that, and vegetation as well? Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear there is no evidence for concern about the water quality at this time. Enhanced testing of water, drinking water in Fort Chip, where the water is typically drawn from the Lake Athabasca show no evidence of contamination. There is no denying that the truth of Indigenous governance, community leaders, and our government has been affected by the failure to provide direct notification. So we are working with it down in Fort Smith as well to keep the monitoring of this, and we will provide information if we have concerns moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this issue, I guess, arose partly because of Imperial probably wasn't doing their job by informing people but the other thing is that the Alberta government failed. I'm not sure if it's because it's a Conservative government and not some -- another one, but anyways. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister tell me what are the next steps this government will take on this matter? More importantly, what steps will they take and what discussions will they have, if any, with the Alberta government? Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is right. Residents rightly want to know their government has taken steps to ensure they're safe. To this end, we continue to work with Indigenous governments and the Town of Fort Smith to enhance water monitoring in Slave River. We also communicated with the Alberta government officials to better understand the nature of the spill and the potential for impact and plans for cleanup. Recognizing this is an unacceptable breach of our bilateral water management agreement with the Alberta government, we will be activating the agreement dispute resolution provision. We will be working to ensure the terms of our agreement are honoured by the Alberta government. And most importantly, we will continue to work with our Indigenous governments and communities and keep them informed.

Mr. Speaker, I've been trying to reach out to the Alberta Minister as well. I will be reaching out with a letter to both the Alberta government, the minister, as well the federal minister. This is unacceptable. We need to be informed, and that's what those transboundary agreements are about.

So, again, I apologize to the residents of the Northwest Territories that there was a failure with this system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1417-19(2):
ENERGY STRATEGY

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to -- I'm pretty sure that M18 project, I think we gave \$2 million a few years ago. So if I was -- I correct myself if -- out of my Member's statement.

Mr. Speaker, what work is the department doing to bring down the cost of fuel and electricity in the Nunakput communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Department of Infrastructure is working to get more fuel storage into the communities. We've applied for funding through the DMAP, which is the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund, program. So we're expecting to be able to expand our fuel storage capacity in Sachs Harbour, in Ulukhaktok, Paulatuk, and Tuktoyaktuk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's really good news, and it's good to hear. Will that drive down the cost of fuel, though, if we bring in bulk fuel? Mr. Speaker, what programs are available through the GNWT to help residents in the High Arctic communities, who are paying the highest price for fuel and electricity, to pay their bills? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any specific program through the Department of Infrastructure. Maybe perhaps through income support in trying to work with residents to be able to help fund some of the electricity and fuel. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, on income support, the inflation, I guess, it's went up by about 11 percent. Is there any increase into -- to that being said, then, is there increase for food and power and making sure that the rent's paid increase in inflation? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And during the Member's question there, I was able to look over and get some support from Minister of Education, Culture and Employment to be able to say that the Department of ECE provides 100 percent funding for both utilities and for -- just the utilities? Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know that we live in the most harshest environment in the territory. The cost of living and inflation's gone up so bad and it's the people that are on the income support, the monies that they do get, it lasts, I guess,

three -- used to last three weeks. Now it's lasting two weeks. People are going hungry in our riding, Mr. Speaker.

Will this government and our Minister in regards to working together with the energy plan, I guess -- because when the energy plan has to get in place sooner than later because of the cost, and it's going to fluctuate right across the board in regards to the stores, to the Northwest Company, to the Co-op, to the Stanton Group, Mr. Speaker, is there a way that we could work together with them, I guess, to get this energy program going sooner rather than later because people are -- in my riding, we pay three times already the cost of anywhere across from Yellowknife, three times more. So we get less. And we have big families and they need help, Mr. Speaker. Can this Minister guarantee me that she's going to work to get this done sooner rather than later? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have the 2030 Energy Strategy which is to be able to guide the development of affordable, secure, and sustainable energy for transportation, heat, and electricity here in the Northwest Territories. Mr. Speaker, we have this plan in place. We have the overall strategy, then we have the action plan. So we look at the action plan to ensure that we're keeping within timelines so that we can be able to make some changes and go forward on the strategy.

The GNWT is working with Arctic Energy Alliance, as one example of one of the programs that we provide support for. In 2021-2022, the GNWT invested \$52.5 million on energy projects. Mr. Speaker, I think that's a pretty good number for here in the territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1418-19(2):
DETOXIFICATION AND AFTERCARE
SERVICES

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, given recent statistics on the record number of suicides and drug overdoses within the NWT over the last year, can the Minister of health tell us if there's an urgency, or any renewed effort within her department, to convert any vacant buildings within the NWT into an aftercare and detox centre? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for this question and for highlighting the prevention piece which is to look at Canada's safe drinking guidelines that were recently revised and reissued in considering what level of risk you're comfortable with if you do consume alcohol. Drug poisonings are entirely another story, which really have to do with taking a different order of risk.

So there is urgency, and the urgency is both on the prevention and the treatment side. The magic is not in a building. The magic is in having a person make that appointment with community counselling and get him or herself into the treatment stream so that they can be treated appropriately for detox treatment and then hopefully, in the fullness of time, aftercare. Thank you.

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, in light of the new federal health funding that was announced last month for the NWT, can the Minister tell us is there any of that new funding will be used specifically to address the gaps in aftercare and detox services within the NWT and if so, what will that look like? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the new funding pots, and what they call the tailored bilaterals, has one for mental health and substance use. The specific use this money will be put to has not been negotiated or agreed to. It's tied to federally-imposed outcomes. So there's a set of negotiations that need to take place between the Department of Health and Social Services and the federal government to figure out how the four tailored bilaterals, including the one on mental health and substance use, are going to roll out. Thank you.

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain exactly what it would take in terms of financial resources and manpower for the Government of the Northwest Territories to convert a vacant building like the old Trailcross Treatment Centre, for example, into a territorial aftercare and detox centre? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I don't have the exact cost; they don't exist. And so what I can say is that there has been a preliminary assessment of Trailcross, and it seems to have some viable life left in it. So what the department has committed to doing is considering what kind of programming we could offer in that facility and make it viable as a programming site again, whatever that program might be.

I want to mention that we have a transitional housing program that is in development in the Department of Health and Social Services. We put out request for proposals last year. Four communities responded, and each of them have developed a model for aftercare and we're now working with them to bring those models to life. And so we're looking forward to strengthening our continuum of service with this particular offering. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, since the contract between Poundmaker's Lodge and Health ended last year, the NWT has lacked an option to send NWT residents to an Indigenous-based addictions treatment centre in the south.

Can the Minister tell us if her department has decided on a new service provider for this and will it be on track to be ready for April 1st? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JULIE GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for the question. There were two responses for the request for proposals for Indigenous-focused aftercare -- pardon me, a facility-based treatment. And they are being reviewed at this time. It is still our intention to have something in place by April 1st. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 1419-19(2):
MINING ROYALTIES MODELLING

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

I was surprised to see a presentation on modeling of mining royalties at the November geoscience forum from a consultant hired by her department. I understand that this Vancouver consultant was hired through a sole sourced contract for \$75,000.

Can the Minister confirm the hiring process and amount for this consultant and explain why this work was sole sourced? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, right now there's actually two contracts, and individually I believe they both come under the limits for what is permissible for sole sourcing; however, they

are going to one individual -- or one entity. So I'm certainly live to the reasons for that and very live to the reasons why a department would want to use a sole source. One of them is where the party or entity that you're contracting to is really -- is the only or essentially the only entity or person who can do certain work. In this case, models are, as I understand it, maybe not quite proprietary but certainly close to it. So rather than having to go out and have to rebuild and reexamine the entirety of the process, they are seeking to have the same person build these models and work off of those models in order to ensure that there's some consistency with the work that's been done and avoid any unnecessary risk to get everything done in a timely fashion.

I would note that this individual does have a fairly high degree of expertise in this area, does exactly this type of modeling for the federal government, and so that was the basis of going with this party. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. This consultant seems to have already concluded the NWT is doing just fine with regard to its competitiveness and royalty regime. Can the Minister explain what this consultant has been asked to do and when that consultant's work will be made public? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, so again, this is work that's being done to develop models. This has been something that I know I've spoken about in this House more than once in the last year with respect to the process for as part of developing the regulations and specifically with royalties, that there would be a process by which different models were run through -- prototype models were run through to actually best understand what we're looking at before we make final policy decisions for the kind of royalty regime we want. That is the process that they're in right now and to develop exactly those different models and then to apply those models to different types of mines, different types of mine prototypes.

So once that's done, there will be an independent third party review done as a sort of verification process or an auditing process and that will go out through RFP to ensure that, again, that there's enough appropriate level of expertise and eyes on the different models and approaches before the final decisions are made. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. The Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment hired an independent expert with global experience, you

know, helping governments manage resources. And that consultant found, quote, "NWT sells its nonrenewable resources more cheaply than most other jurisdictions in the world", end of quote.

ITI also commissioned the Natural Resources Governance Institute that found, quote, "NWT has one of the world's most charitable fiscal regimes for the mining sector", end of quote.

Can the Minister tell us whether her department considered hiring these other experts and what role, if any, these other studies will play in the modeling of mining royalties? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is an area that has been covered many times here with respect to whether or not, in fact, there's been a conclusion around competitiveness or non-competitiveness. And, Mr. Speaker, certainly one has to consider the fact that if there are no mines or less mines then there's no worry about there being any benefits because there won't be any benefits. There will be less benefits or no benefits. So, yes, the fact that there's going to be some disagreement on this one, I think, between the Member and I. That said, again, the feedback and response that we've had from standing committee, from other experts, has been considered; it is part of the "what we heard" report; it's part of the total package that goes to the technical working group of IGCS, or the Intergovernmental Council, and who then are able to direct what kinds of models should be done so that ultimately decisions can be made going forward as to what the final results should look like. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. It's not clear who is really directing the modeling or how it's going to be done. Is it ITI alone, the Intergovernmental Council, the mining industry? Will there be any attempt to analyze past performance of the royalty regime or model what could have happened with government revenues or internal rates of return? We've got eight years now, Mr. Speaker, of real live data we could be working with. So can the Minister tell us who is directing the modeling, whether the public will get a say, and whether any modeling will be done of past performance? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm surprised it's unclear, Mr. Speaker. ITI is the government lead on the Mineral Resources Act and has been now

for -- well many, many years, long before my time. And it's, I think, quite well known we're quite proud of the fact that this is being codeveloped with the ICGS, or Intergovernmental Council. There's a working group there, as I know I've spoken to many times before. And while ITI is the lead, certainly this has, of course, gone back to the partners and the co-development partners at ICGS. They've helped to develop the policy options that are being modeled and that -- and also we'll be basing that on historical production as well as looking to the future of what types of models are required such as, for example, base metals. So that is where it's at. That's who is directing it and looking forward certainly to seeing that work move forward, reminding of course that along the way certainly, Mr. Speaker, I remain available and open to having opportunities to speak to the Member or others about what is happening. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1420-19(2):
SMALL BUSINESS IN PUBLIC HOUSING

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister responsible for Housing NWT. Mr. Speaker, the Housing NWT prohibits home-based business from being in public housing. This works against four separate mandate items of the Government of the Northwest Territories, including one for increasing employment in small communities, which specifically says "amend the NWT Housing Corporation policies to allow appropriate home-based business opportunities within their units." It also goes against at least five Calls for Justice from the MMIWG.

So I'm wondering will the Minister commit to a framework that allows home-based business in public housing? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. Minister responsible for Housing NWT.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm quite excited for the Member's questions as well too because we've just completed our strategic renewal here for Housing NWT. We just went through a name change as well. And currently I am working with my colleague, Minister of education, and we are looking at establishing a criteria and a way forward of how we would be offering and looking at day homes. And that was one of the priorities set within this government as well. But

I would like to work towards a framework as well too on how we would further establish businesses in public housing units and look at what criteria would come along with that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the mandate called for policies to allow for home-based businesses as of summer of 2022. It also called for the enabling of public housing to have licensed child care programs in it in the fall of 2022 -- or sorry, 2020 as well. So given that these timelines have very clearly changed now that we're two and a half years later, when can this side of the House expect to see this kind of a framework and policy change? Thank you.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Housing NWT has went through an extensive review of their policies. We have went out and completed consultation amongst our employees throughout the Northwest Territories, Indigenous governments, the stakeholders. I'm looking at the date to have those policies available April 1st of this year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to confirm, the changes to allowing home-based businesses in public housing will follow and be included in the suite of policy changes to come out April 1st? Thank you.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are working with Education, Culture and Employment and looking at child care to be offered in -- child care businesses to be offered in public housing. We are going through establishing that policy right now. We will be working towards policies to acknowledge the businesses as well too. That would be forthcoming. But it's something that I'm very much supportive of. I do understand that in smaller communities that we need to start doing things differently. We need to start working with our tenants and our clients differently as well too and looking at those home-based businesses. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I also want to confirm that these policies will enable tenants to be able to adjust their rent. A lot of places in the territory, including in small communities, use seasonal work that might be part of this home-based business, and I want to make sure that people can adjust their rent even through a home-based business so that their income -- or

sorry, their rent is properly reflective of their income as they move throughout the year and throughout the seasons. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once this criteria is established, I would like to -- it to identify how are we going to be charging rent within public housing as well too. Currently we do have an income threshold. And I'm looking at the fairness throughout the Northwest Territories. If we have businesses that are established in the public housing units -- I'm just trying to slow down. I kind of feel for the interpreters as well, my apologies. And how we could fairly look at the calculation of rent compared to what those businesses and those operations are like. But then also considering that we do have an income threshold. But I would like to work with our tenants. I would like to see success in our smaller communities and to be more innovative and be working with our people throughout the territory. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1421-19(2):
PUBLIC TENDER ON YELLOWKNIFE
LIQUOR STORES

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the Minister of Finance can commit that when the current Yellowknife liquor store licenses expire that she can commit that they will go out to public tender? I know it's been quite a few years since that process has occurred. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, when the current existing contracts expire, they will go out for a public procurement process.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that. I know some people who have been interested in trying to get their hands on those contracts as they are quite generous and make quite a lot of money. And I'm wondering when those go out, would the Minister look at and seeing whether the market or the profitability of the license would justify a third liquor store in Yellowknife? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I may or may not be the Minister by the time that is occurring. I don't have the dates of the contracts in front of me. But I think perhaps we should also just mention

that there's the existing act and regulations are also under review, as Members may recall, and there may be reason to consider that as well before -- and I say that, Mr. Speaker, because before there's going to be additions of liquor stores or changes in where liquor is purchased, there are currently -- there are other considerations, including consultation with relevant communities. So just wanting to put all those placeholders in before giving too resounding of a yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'm wondering when those licenses are renewed, right now they are limited, their hours and the department sets their hours. Is it possible to get some beer on Sunday, Mr. Speaker?

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there's a lot of wonderful restaurants that the Member may want to attend on a Sunday and see what he can do. But as far as going on his own right now, that is not an option. But, Mr. Speaker, the rules, again, that are contained within legislation, within the regulations, are under review and, indeed, I appreciate the support and assistance from committee in terms of getting us forward to a point where I expect that that legislation will be introduced soon, and that may see some changes depending on how that proceeds. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1422-19(2):
CROWN CORPORATION STRUCTURES

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, my questions are for the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, each of the Crown corporations in the NWT has a very different governance model. So has the Premier and Cabinet reviewed the governance models of each of the NWT Crown corporations since we've raised concerns in this House on all three that I mentioned in my statement throughout this whole 19th Assembly? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that no, not all of the Crown corporations' governance models have been reviewed. However, I can say because of the issues that we're having with Marine Transportation Services, that one is being reviewed. And we're also looking at the NTPC.

But not all Crown corporations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the three Crown corporations I mentioned in my statement are wildly inconsistent and I want to know if this is something that's being reviewed. And as the Premier mentioned, two of them have been looked at but not necessarily said that they're being reviewed. If not, will they commit to reviewing to see if we can create a consistent and transparent governance model so residents of the Northwest Territories can clearly understand the relationship between GNWT and our Crown corporations? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that the Member has a point. I think there is some confusion in the public. And even myself when I came into government, understanding how Crown corporations are different from government departments. So I do think that there needs to be an effort on perhaps clarity to the public and maybe looking at the structures of those Crown corporations. Although, Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear that in the life of this government, I don't see this happening. It might be something we put in the recommendations for the next government. But at this time, we're looking at clearing off the priorities and the mandates that we already have so I'm not looking to take this on as a new task in this government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, currently without government supports we know that these programs would fail as why MTS has now come under GNWT as a Crown corporation. But what is the Premier and Cabinet doing to ensure that these Crown corporations have the ability to provide independent recommendations or advice and not be directed by government? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think, and that is -- that question kind of goes back to my statement in that it's going to take longer to review that. It's not something that should be done in a rushed fashion, for example in the life of this Assembly. I think that it needs to be really a comprehensive review. Each of the corporations have different needs, different goals, different purposes. So I'm not even sure if you could have one governance for all. So like I said, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's a bad idea; I just think that the timing is not correct at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, NWT Housing is very engaged with our Indigenous governments, and I think that's due to the Council of Leaders table that they've become -- they've had this internal working group to look at their policies. And so is this something that the GNWT sees advancing for all Crown corporations, or is that a model looking -- you know, when we look at UNDRIP and we look at all these other things, is this something that we could look at with our Crown corporations? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So I do know that within this session that we will be putting forward a proposed bill for the United Nations Declaration for Indigenous People. Part of that work is actually to be -- it's not just putting out a bill and saying it's done. If we really take the United Nations Declaration to heart, then it means ongoing work. So I think that in fairness to the Member, that every single program and service within the GNWT, including our Crown corporations, should be looking at the United Nations Declaration for Indigenous People and seeing how that fits within all of the work that we do as government and corporations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Written Questions

WRITTEN QUESTION 60-19(2): PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You caught me off guard.

Mr. Speaker, residents of Hay River and surrounding communities rely on the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority to provide them with timely and quality health care. Due to an ongoing and continued shortage of physicians at the facility, residents' personal health is now at risk. My questions are for the Minister for Health and Social Services and are as follows:

1. What is the current number of physicians at Stanton Territorial Hospital, Inuvik Regional Hospital, Fort Smith Health Centre, and the Hay River Regional Health Centre, and on a per capita basis, what are the number and types of physicians needed to provide an

acceptable level of healthcare service at each facility;

2. The department of health has the responsibility of providing timely and quality health care to all residents of the Northwest Territories. Is there a policy that requires the department to commit a minimum number of physicians to each of Stanton Territorial Hospital, Inuvik Regional Hospital, Fort Smith Health Centre, and the Hay River Regional Health Centre, and if so, can you please provide a copy of the policy;
3. Due to a lack of physicians at Hay River Regional Health Centre, have assessments been conducted to confirm the impact on the quality of health care provided to residents and staff satisfaction in the workplace, and if so, what were the assessment outcomes and recommendations;
4. For the community of Hay River, will the department of health consider turning over responsibility for physician recruitment to the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority along with the financial resources and provide access to the database of physicians and outline a process to move this forward; and,
5. Has the department of health undertaken an assessment of whether health care services for Hay River and area residents would be better served if the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority was incorporated into the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority, and are there any barriers that would make this unfeasible?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Mr. Clerk.

Returns to Written Questions

RETURN TO WRITTEN QUESTION 57-19(2):
PAYMENTS FOR LEASED SPACE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Tim Mercer): Mr. Speaker, I have a Return to Written Question 57-19(2) asked by the Member for Yellowknife North on February 9th, 2023, to the Minister of Infrastructure regarding the Payments for Leased Space. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Infrastructure maintains a portfolio of general office space in accordance with the Government of the Northwest Territories' Leasing of Improved

Real Property Policy. This policy is publicly available online and includes more detailed information regarding some of the exclusions and inclusions on the types of leases administered by the GNWT. Leasing of improved real property is excluded from the business incentive policy.

In addition, the Department of Infrastructure is not able to provide details on individual leases, including costs and lease terms. If this information were to be made public, it may impact the commercial real estate market and influence pricing for future leases. Infrastructure and the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs intend to work together to review the Leasing of Improved Real Property Policy once the review of the GNWT procurement review is complete.

I would also like to answer the specific questions raised by the Member, including providing lease fees paid by the GNWT to the following companies, broken down by individual lease and building space, for the last ten years as follows:

1. All lease payments made to Northview Canadian High Yield Residential Fund (Northview) and its predecessor companies, broken down both by residential leases and commercial leases per year:

The GNWT has six commercial office space leases with Northview, which are administered by the Department of Infrastructure for a total annual lease cost of \$8.9 million. This includes the base rent plus operations and maintenance.

2. All lease payments made to KingSett Capital, which is the co-owner of Northview, for the last ten years and broken down by residential and commercial leases per year.

The GNWT has four commercial office space leases with KingSett Capital, which are administered by the Department of Infrastructure for a total of \$6.5 million. This includes base rent plus operations and maintenance.

In relation to these first two questions, the Department of Infrastructure is not responsible for GNWT residential leases and is therefore not able to provide information related to residential leases.

3. The total of future lease commitments to the above companies and the expiration date of each of those leases:

The total future lease commitments for leases related to Northview is \$20.1 million, which includes base rent plus operations and maintenance. The total future lease

commitments for leases related to Kingsett Capital is \$26.855 million, which includes base rent plus operations and maintenance.

4. A clear breakdown of how each of the leases were tendered and in what year they went out for public competition, if at all.

The GNWT is required to initially obtain new office space by public tender or request for proposals, except where Executive Council has authorized negotiations. The Department of Infrastructure cannot influence which businesses choose to pursue these opportunities.

The following information can be disclosed for the last 10 years of commercial office space leases held by the GNWT:

- 47 leases were transferred to the Department of Infrastructure by other GNWT departments;
- 9 federal leases were transferred to the GNWT during devolution;
- 28 current leases were acquired via public procurement; and,
- 9 leases were negotiated, with approval from the Executive Council.

Later today, at the appropriate time, I will table additional information to the Member's questions regarding payments for commercial leased space administered by the Department of Infrastructure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Replies to the Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Member for Great Slave.

Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills

BILL 68:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE CHILD DAYCARE ACT

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee would like to report on its consideration of Bill 68, An Act to Amend the Child Daycare Act.

Bill 68 received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on November 3rd, 2022 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Development for review.

On March 1st, 2023, the standing committee held a public hearing and clause-by-clause review of the bill with the Minister of Education,

Culture and Employment. Six motions to amend the bill were carried by committee and concurred with by the Minister. The committee thanks the Minister and department for their hard work and collaboration to improve this bill.

Mr. Speaker, the committee reports that Bill 68, An Act to Amend the Child Daycare Act, is ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole as amended and reprinted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Great Slave. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Member for Yellowknife North.

Reports of Standing and Special Committees

COMMITTEE REPORT 46-19(2):
STANDING COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS REPORT ON BILL 67: AN ACT TO AMEND THE FIRE PREVENTION ACT

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have got three pages for you today.

Mr. Speaker, your Standing Committee on Government Operations is pleased to provide its Report on Bill 67, An Act to Amend the Fire Prevention Act, and commends it to the House.

Introduction

Bill 67: An Act to Amend the Fire Prevention Act received second reading on November. 3, 2022 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Government Operations for review.

Bill 67 makes changes to the Fire Prevention (Act) that has not been comprehensively reviewed since it was first passed in 1988. Bill 67 is intended to improve regulatory functions of the Act, create an authoritative plan review process, and a formal avenue of appeal for plan reviews, as well as provide protection against personal liability that is comparable to other jurisdictions.

The new act specifically changes the following:

- adds a liability exclusion for fire officials.
- authorizes the fire marshal to delegate duties.
- requirements made in a plan review report are binding.
- establishes a plan review appeal board.
- modernizes language.

Committee Considered Public Input

Committee sought public feedback on Bill 67 with a public notice and targeted engagement letters. Committee received written submissions from the Northwest Territories Association of Communities which is included as an appendix to this report.

On January 12, 2023, committee held a public hearing to review Bill 67. At that meeting, committee heard remarks from Minister of MACA, asked questions to departmental officials, and received oral comments from the NWTAC. Committee thanks the NWTAC for their engagement.

One area that NWTAC identified was the need to provide clarity and certainty with respect to the timelines of the appeal board process. Committee agreed with this concern.

Committee also held concerns regarding the composition of the board and wanted to ensure the appeal board would consist of industry professionals from across the NWT and not be filled with public servants.

Committee was initially concerned about the exclusion of liability clause for the Minister or others carrying out a power or duty by the Act, but committee recognizes this is necessary to provide protection against personal liability for those performing statutory functions and that the clause is consistent with other jurisdictions across Canada.

Committee recognizes the NWT lacks standalone building standards legislation, as most other jurisdictions across Canada have. Committee has expressed concern that without building standards legislation the fire marshal is becoming the authority for both fire and buildings. The NWT is currently the only Canadian jurisdiction that has not adopted a building standards framework to support the National Building Code and the National Fire Code. The GNWT has identified this legislation needs to be developed and is targeting for the 20th Assembly.

Committee Amended Three Clauses

Timeline for Appeal Board Process

While committee welcomes the establishment of an appeal board to deal with appeals on decisions of the fire marshal, committee was concerned the legislation did not provide enough clarity on timelines for the process. The NWTAC also requested the timeline for appeal board processes be clarified in legislation.

A motion was drafted to ensure a clear timeline was established for the appeal board to make a decision on the appeal board hearing. Clause 14 of Bill 67 is amended to establish a 30-day

period for the board to "affirm, modify or revoke the order."

Committee is satisfied this motion provides a clear timeline for the appeal board process to be carried out and that the motion to amend clause 14.1(3) was passed at the clause-by-clause review.

Appeal Board Composition

While committee supports the establishment of an appeal board there was concern about the composition of the board. Committee specifically wanted to ensure that the GNWT would not create another board that is filled by public servants. Committee refers specifically to the composition of the Northwest Territories Power Corporation board held by deputy ministers and views this as highly inefficient and ineffective. Committee also wanted to ensure that clear provisions were in place to ensure industry professionals from across the NWT filled the composition of the appeal board.

A motion was drafted to ensure the "Minister shall make reasonable efforts to appoint members who are representative of the industries and communities of the Northwest Territories."

This motion was passed at the clause-by-clause review.

A motion was drafted to ensure public servants refrain from participation in the appeal board. The motion provided certainty that "the Minister shall not appoint a member of the public service to the board."

This motion was passed at the clause-by-clause review.

Conclusion

On February 13th, 2023, committee held a clause-by-clause review. Committee passed the motions to report Bill 67, as amended, to the Legislative Assembly as ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole.

This concludes the Standing Committee on Government Operations' review of Bill 67. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Reports of standing and special committees. Member for Yellowknife North.

MR. JOHNSON: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that the Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on Bill 67, An Act to Amend the Fire Prevention Act, be

received and adopted by the Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. The motion is in order. To the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Question.

MR. SPEAKER: Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? The motion is carried. It will be received and adopted by the Assembly.

---Carried

Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Infrastructure.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 865-19(2):
INFORMATION FOR RETURN TO WRITTEN
QUESTION 57-19(2): PAYMENTS FOR
LEASED SPACE

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Information for Return to Written Question 57-19(2): Payments for Leased Space. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TABLED DOCUMENT 866-19(2):
CANADA'S GUIDANCE ON ALCOHOL AND
HEALTH: FINAL REPORT

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table a publication from the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and Addictions entitled "Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health: Final Report." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TABLED DOCUMENT 867-19(2):
ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE
CANADA GUIDANCE FOR USING CLIMATE
POLLUTION PRICING PROCEEDS

TABLED DOCUMENT 868-19(2):
NOVEMBER 2022 GNWT MINERAL
ROYALTIES PRESENTATION TO
YELLOWKNIFE GEOSCIENCE FORUM:
"FINANCIAL MODELING IN SUPPORT OF
REVISING THE ROYALTY REGIME OF
MINING IN THE NWT" BY MICHAEL
DOGGETT, NICK DENNAHOWER,
HENDRICK FALK

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I wish to table the following two documents: The first one, Environment and Climate Change Canada Guidance for Using Climate Pollution Pricing Proceeds; the second one, November 2022 GNWT Mineral Royalties Presentation to Yellowknife Geoscience Forum: "Financial Modeling in Support of Revising the Royalty Regime of Mining in the NWT" by Michael Doggett, Nick Dennahower, and Hendrik Falck. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. Tabling of documents. Member for Hay River South.

TABLED DOCUMENT 869-19(2):
ORDER OF THE ALBERTA ENERGY
REGULATOR TO IMPERIAL OIL
RESOURCES LIMITED REGARDING THE
KEARL OIL SANDS PROCESSING PLANT
AND MINE

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to table an order of the Alberta Energy Regulator to Imperial Oil Resources Limited regarding the Kearl Oil Sands Processing Plant. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River South. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Minister responsible for Justice.

Notices of Motion for the First Reading of Bills

BILL 72:
OPIOID DAMAGES AND HEALTH CARE
COSTS RECOVERY ACT

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Monday, March 6th, 2023, I will present Bill 72, Opioid Damages and Healthcare Costs Recovery Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Member for Thebacha.

BILL 73:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
ACT, NO. 4

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on Monday, March the 6th, 2023, I will present Bill 73, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, No. 4, to be ready for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Bill 23, 29, 61, 63, 66, and 67, Committee Report 40-19(2), Committee Report 43-19(2), Committee Report 44-19(2), Minister's Statement 264-19(2), Tabled Document 681-19(2), Tabled Document 694-19(2), and Tabled Document 813-19(2), with Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I now call Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of committee? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madam la Presidente. Committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 813-19(2), 2023-2024 Main Estimates, with Department of 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 the first activity.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I will now call Committee of the Whole back to order. Committee, we've agreed to consider Tabled Document 813-19(2), Main Estimates 2023-2024. We will now consider the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Does the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment have any opening remarks?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I do. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am here to present the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's main estimates for the fiscal year 2023-2024. Overall, the department's estimates propose an increase of approximately \$24 million or 6.7 percent over the Main Estimates 2022-2023. These estimates support the mandate objectives while continuing to meet the GNWT's fiscal objectives to prioritize responsible and strategic spending.

Highlights of these proposed estimates include \$16.9 million to support new initiatives. The amount is comprised of:

- \$10.326 million in additional federal contribution related to the Canada-NWT Canada-wide Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care;
- \$5.149 million in additional funding for improvements and changes to the Income Assistance Program; and,
- \$1.458 million for further investments aimed at enhancements and changes to the Student Financial Assistance Program.

The proposed estimates also reflect a total increase of \$5.197 million for other adjustments, which include:

- \$2.028 million for additional federal contribution related to the Canada-NWT Cooperation Agreement on Minority Language Education and Second Official Language Instructions for 2019-2020 to 2022-2023;
- \$1.87 million in additional federal contribution towards Building Skills 4 Success;
- \$511,000 for the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association for 2020-2021 to 2022-2023 collective agreement cost increases;
- \$500,000 in new funding to support the operational needs of heritage centres; and,
- \$368,000 for the school funding framework to provide consistent and administrative support to small schools, which is offset by \$80,000 in interdepartmental reallocation of French language communications and services budgets.

The proposed estimates also include \$4.205 million in additional operations budget related to the reprofile of Labour Market Development Agreement from Fund 3, third party, to Fund 1, operations, and \$51,000 in inflationary adjustment increases to core funding for non-government organizations.

The estimates are partially offset by other decreases of \$752,000 broken down by the following target adjustments:

- \$662,000 in contract services budget reduction that supports the items identified in the 2022-2023 Main Estimates;
- \$80,000 in amortization adjustment for 2023-2024; and,
- \$10,000 in insurance transfer to the Department of Finance.

The increases are further partly offset by a total decrease of \$1.672 million reflecting funding scheduled to sunset on March 31st, 2023. The sunsets reflect year-over-year changes in the departmental activities in the Canada-NWT Workforce Development Agreement, Canada-NWT Agreement on French language services, Education Act Modernization Research, student records coordinators related to the federal Indian Day School Class Action Settlement records, Canada-NWT Early Learning and Child Care Agreement Extension, Specialized Territorial Support Team resources specialized funding, Education Renewal and Innovation and Northern Distance Learning budget changes.

This concludes my opening remarks. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Do you wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, I do.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses into the Chamber.

Minister, please introduce your witnesses.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. On my left is the deputy minister John MacDonald. And on my right is the assistant deputy minister of corporate services, Sam Shannon. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. And welcome. Does committee agree to proceed to the detail contained in the tabled document?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Committee, we will defer the departmental summary and review the estimates by activity summary, beginning with corporate management starting on page 35, with information items on page 36. Questions?

There are no questions. Please turn to page 35. Education, Culture and Employment, corporate management, operations expenditure summary, 2023-2024 Main Estimates, \$10,982,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Culture, heritage, and languages beginning on page 38. Information items on page 39 to 41. Questions? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. It's one of my favourite parts of the ECE budget. I understood that there was some kind of revenue study being done for the museum. Can I get an update as to what happened with that? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The Member is correct; we did have a contract in place to have a revenue study completed. Unfortunately, the contractor did not deliver that revenue study. So for some information about the path forward given the challenges we've been facing, I will hand it to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. As the Minister indicated, the revenue study was not able to be obtained. So the department is in the process of breaking down what had previously been a substantial plan to prepare to renovate the Prince of Wales Heritage Centre. We are planning to break that into smaller segments that may be more feasible. The priority being the NWT Archives and replacing that space and enhancing it going forward. So our intention is to advance that as part of the department's needs assessment and ultimately the capital planning process for the next cycle. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks, Madam Chair. Yeah, I guess in the seven years I've been here, I've seen a lot of studies on the museum, you know, needs assessments and some really good work's been done. And there's a lot of money that needs to be spent to invest in the facility. So is there now an overall plan as to how to do some of that work? Thanks, Madam Chair. And could it be shared with Regular MLAs, even on a confidential basis if required. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. There has been a lot of work done so we're not trying to reinvent the wheel as the deputy minister alluded to. What we are doing is going to pursue the renovations through the normal capital process. So Members will have a chance to get that information through that process. There's nothing that is shareable right

now really beyond what the deputy minister has stated. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, okay, thanks. Maybe something for the transition plan. Of course I know the last time I asked the Minister this, I think it was close to a visit, about changing the name of the facility, which seemed to be tied to actually fixing it up. So are we ever going to change the name of it? And as I understand now, there's no obstacles in the way, there's no protocol stuff, we can just change the name to something that's more reflective of northern culture and heritage. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. As part of that capital process and doing those renovations, we're tying those things together. So once we begin that work, we will consult with Indigenous governments and make determinations about how to move forward with names and what those names might be. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks. Yeah, I know we've -- you know, we're consulting on changing the name of the Stanton Legacy Hospital, or the building. You know, I'm not sure I'd even put that as high a priority as the territorial museum, but I want to encourage the department to move forward on that. And you can just put it on the engagement page, you know, and see where that takes us.

But I want to move on to -- in the last budget, the Regular MLAs worked with Cabinet to increase the funding for heritage centres across the NWT by half a million dollars. And I see that increase in here. Can someone just tell me about the uptake in the first year? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I will hand it over to one of my witnesses. But I will say that for the small organizations to receive a big chunk of money unexpectedly, it makes it difficult for them to just spend it if they didn't have a plan to spend it. In Hay River, we had, you know, the flood, and people were dealing with that, so. I don't think that it saw a significant uptake, at least not at all the centres. But for more information, I'll hand it to Mr. MacDonald. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you Chair. With respect to this additional funding, one of the things that we determined was that we needed to support the various heritage centres to be able to plan to undertake any type of capital enhancements to their facilities. So in addition to the typical operational funding that we have been providing to them prior to receiving this additional funding, we've provided each of them with what we refer to as infrastructure planning funding.

So that's intended to support them, to help them come to us or to the federal government with a clear sense of what their needs are. So each of the facilities -- or each of the organizations received \$50,000 over and above what we added to their regular funding. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Okay, thanks. Yeah, that's helpful to understand. So I think I've asked this question before maybe but GNWT has quite an extensive inventory of artwork, you know, across, you know, in different buildings. There's some in this building. There's some really cool stuff actually in the Caucus room. But I don't think we actually have an inventory of all of this artwork and some of it is of tremendous value, dollar value, not to mention heritage value. Is there an inventory of this, and what's the role of ECE in preparing an inventory?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The role of ECE is providing some expertise when it comes to the value of the pieces, perhaps even the handling of some of them. If it's discovered that this, you know, object in this office should be in a climate control facility, but we -- what we've discovered is that the GNWT's existing sort of inventory management software -- and I'm going to have to hand it to someone else to get into the details and provide exact names, but that can handle the inventory of the art. And so I believe that that work has begun. But I can hand it to Mr. MacDonald for more detail. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And the Member is correct in remembering that this was a priority, I think, of two years ago. At the time, ECE, ITI, and Department of Finance,

collaborated on looking at what type of valuable art existed in the possession of various departments, what options there may be, and who roles the various departments could play to support inventory and ensuring that high-value art was protected and maintained for the future of the territory. The Department of Finance determined that their systems could encompass tracking those artifacts or those art pieces. And as the Minister said, ECE's role is, through the culture and heritage division, is to provide expertise on art that should be valued and protected and documented. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. So yeah, I also want to recognize the work at the museum to prepare an inventory of their collection. It's available online now. You can actually see the stuff that's not on display and you can read about it. You know, it's searchable. It's a great tool. And I think that's the model we should be using maybe for a public face to the inventory that we need for all of our artwork across the system. Maybe there's some aspects of that that you wouldn't want to make accessible to the public necessarily, but it would be great to have that kind of a system. Is that what's being contemplated? And of course I can ask these of my friend the Minister of Finance when they're before us, Madam Chair, but while I've got these friends here I'd ask them. Thanks.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. That is not what is being contemplated. The museum does have a site, and it's amazing the way that you can view the different pieces of art. But that is not the plan right now for all of the GNWT-owned art. At some point in the future that would be great, but it is not something that we are currently working on or envision beginning any time soon. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I read the whole report from the language commissioner, and I was quite concerned about a couple things. One of them is that the language commissioner has said in that report that English and French are priority items within the language thing and the nine Indigenous language are kind of a second priority. That was pretty well the final -- like, some of the things that was said in that report. And I guess my concern is I'm going to -- you know, the official

languages report that's coming out from government operations, I agree with it. But, you know, I've decided that I'm not going to be voting -- I'm not going to vote against it, I'm going to abstain, but for the following reasons:

Until the Indigenous languages get the same standard as the French language, you know, I just cannot vote for -- because revitalization of our languages, the Indigenous languages is extremely important to the Indigenous people of the North. And there's a lot of non-Indigenous students that are also taking some of these courses in revitalization in the South Slave. I want to commend the school boards in the South Slave for all they do to revitalize the Aboriginal languages. But I have to make sure that -- I also want to make sure that the director of languages and that department also feels the same way and helps the mandate of revitalization of Indigenous languages. And I wonder if that is going to take place in financial assistance the way it should have. And I don't see that in the entire overall budget. You know, we have French schools, and I'd like to see the day when, hopefully in my lifetime, that we have a school of Indigenous language revitalization. And I want to see how the department feels about that, Madam Chair. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I would love to see a school of language revitalization. There are many efforts going on around the territory. I've spoken about things like the mentor apprentice program. The department has put time and resources into developing post-secondary courses related to languages and hopefully those can be implemented at some point in the future. I mean, there's a lot of ground covered in there, but we do support the revitalization of Indigenous languages. There's great efforts going towards ensuring that we are increasing the number of speakers the best we can, and we'll continue those efforts. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take away from the French or the English languages that we have to know in order to progress to post-secondary. I'm not doing that because those are also a key to our education system. But the main key for the Indigenous people of the North is that the Indigenous languages have to be revitalized and I want to know if we could have -- you know, to start thinking about making sure that there is going to be a school established in the North, the first of its kind, to revitalize the nine Indigenous

languages. And so we make a statement that how important the loss of our languages has been to the students and people of the North. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So as I stated, we are -- put resources in to developing language programming that can be offered at a post-secondary level. My hope is that the college, once it gets its feet under it in terms of the transformation, because there was a lot of work happening there, that they can begin looking at implementing some of those courses and that we can have these, you know, accredited post-secondary courses focused on language revitalization. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: I don't have any other questions.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Are there any further questions under this section? Seeing none, please turn to page 38.

Education, Culture and Employment, culture, heritage and languages, operations expenditure summary, 2023-2024 Main Estimates, \$21,306,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Committee, please turn to page 43, early learning and child care, beginning on page 43 with information items on page 44 to 46. Questions? Member for Kam Lake.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm wondering if the Minister can let us know, under fees and payments there's a significant increase and I'm just wondering what fees and payments come out of there as far as early learning and child care. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: So I believe those are for the -- we have rolled out a child care fee reduction subsidy, and we provided child care operators with administrative funds so that they could hire administrative support to help them with some of that reporting. So that would account for those increases. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, that's helpful information. I'm also just looking at the total raise in funds for the early learning and child care program budget. And I'm wondering what portion of this will go to dollars needed for the increase in the wage grid that is expected to come in the next year? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. \$2.3 million is what we are projecting for this upcoming here, and we do not have a wage grid in place. What we are doing is we're providing wage top-ups essentially. We are providing it this year and in the upcoming fiscal year, we plan to increase that funding. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to roughly what that wage top-up will look like from the perspective of ECE. Is that top-up going to be roughly -- or can it even be worked into, you know, an average figure for people who provide early learning and child care across the territory? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the way that we are distributing that, we look at how many staff are required under the regulations in a child care facility. And based on how many staff are required, which is based on the number of children and the age of the children that that facility cares for, we provide funding for each of those employees that are required. This year the funding is about -- or it is \$12,750 for each of those employees. And next year will be just over \$16,000. And I say for each of those employees, but this actually goes to the provider itself. It goes to the operator themselves, and then they distribute those funds to their employees because there could be instances where some employees perhaps have higher credentials; they might have diplomas or degrees and operators want to pay them more and they have that flexibility. So we provide them with a lump sum based on how many employees they're required to have and then they distribute it to their employees accordingly. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we're in a bit of an interesting jurisdiction where we are also very reliant not only on not-for-profit day cares, but we have a lot of day homes. When my kids went to child care during the day, all three of them went to day home providers, which was wonderful. I still have relationships with those people and adore them. My kids spent more time with those people than they did with me. And so I'm wondering how does it work within the territory as far as these wage top-ups? Is it provided to both day cares and day home providers, and how does that division happen when they both operate under the same act? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So day homes are for-profit businesses and nonprofit organizations are, you know, by definition nonprofit. And they have higher operating expenses. They generally have to rent or lease a space. They have salaries. So the parent fees that come into the day care centres versus the day homes don't go quite as far. And so day – child care centre employees are not paid -- don't earn as much as day home operators. So what we want to do is raise the wages of the child care workers so that we're going to attract more people to the sector but also to try to get everyone on par with each other and ensure that there's a level playing field. Thank you. So for that reason, that is why we are only funding the child care centres and not the day homes. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So I'm wondering can a day home call themselves a not-for-profit and in turn call themselves -- sorry, and in turn pay themselves a living wage, or where does that division happen? Is the division actually between the number of kids they have or the number of employees? How does ECE make that determination, or is it simply based on where they operate out of? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I don't think that a for-profit business can call themselves a nonprofit and then, you know, access funding as if they were a nonprofit. So that's not legal advice to the Member but that's my very basic understanding of it. Perhaps for some more information on this and how those two types of organizations are differentiated, I'll hand it to the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Family day homes are treated in the regulations, Child Daycare Act standard regulations. So it's how they're licensed. They're licensed for three space types. They can have two infants, four spaces for preschools, and two for out of school spaces. So, really, there's a limit to the number of children that they can have in care. And that's really what differentiates them from a centre-based program which has another set of space and supervisory requirements. And, again, because the current Child Daycare Act is really focused on child safety, wellness within the context of those programs.

As the Minister indicated, from a funding perspective we do treat family day homes differently currently than we would with centre-based programs. However, there are a host of different ECE programs that are provided to both types of licensed child care facilities. So one would be the early childhood program. The Member remember that one as the primary vehicle for funding licensed programs over the past number of years. And that is currently an attendance-based program based on actual attendance. So there are other sources of revenue for family day homes other than the program currently being discussed. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to move on to the infrastructure fund. And given that the goal of ECE is to increase spaces by 300 children in the life of the federal agreement, I'm wondering why we're not seeing an increase to this fund given that especially what we're seeing from lessons learned from Quebec was an urge to increase capacity upfront. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. We have a limited budget, and you can only cut it so many ways. I would love to see that fund increased. I think going forward that is -- may have to happen. We are at a point now where we have been receiving proposals for this fund, and those proposals have resulted in grants to the organization and then new spaces being created. We've seen it across the territory. A lot of the organizations who were on that path to, you know, or thinking about developing child care centres have already accessed this funding and so now we're finding that there's

not as many organizations out there that have as well-defined plans. Because it's not just an application to build a child care centre. You also need a plan to operate a child care centre. So that is one of the criteria. So we are trying to figure out now how do we best use these funds to support groups that want to build something, and it might not -- they might not be at the point where they're ready to build; they might need a different type of assistance. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. My -- I probably only have time for one last question. So the supporting child inclusion and participation, it says contributions to target the needs of children who are vulnerable, at risk, or who have specific needs. I'm assuming that this is largely used more in kind of an inclusive for kids with disabilities within a daycare or day home setting. I'm also wondering if given that children of teen parents might fall into a vulnerable or at risk category, if this would also be an avenue to access funding for teen parents? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'll hand it to the deputy minister.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So with the supporting child inclusion and participation program, the Member is correct. For those more familiar with a JK or a K to 12 system context, it is roughly analogist to inclusion where the ultimate purpose of the program and the funding is to support in this case licensed programs to be able to more effectively support children who may have exceptional needs of some kind or another.

In terms of how the program is broken out, there is an opportunity for support for community programs, such as family and tot programs. There is also a stream within it that focuses on additional staff to support child participation. So you could have a licensed program; you may need additional staff for that extra supervision that may be needed as well as program consultation which could be bringing in expert advice, specialized services, those types of needs. So that's really what that program is meant to address. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I won't get into the debate about what I feel about the comment of, like -- of the for-profit being the designation between helping and not helping. I would actually want to re-term that as the, you know, for barely-profit or barely-for-profit would be more accurate, I think.

My question, though, is when this money was announced, you know, I had hoped that we would be able to look into putting money into small communities to pay relatives, etcetera, that take care of grandchildren or nieces and nephews and such. And then upon my conversations and my many conversations with day home providers, it's my understanding that in order to do that there would need to be a subclass or sublicense created around a relative caring for kids. And I just want to know if the department is looking at that?

I mean, when I look at this again -- and I mean, go against the grain. I am a Yellowknife MLA however this is only benefitting large regional centres in Yellowknife. It's not benefitting people in small communities where we need people to be able to get out and be employed and be -- we all know being employed leads to better well-being and mental health because you have a reason to get up, you have a point of pride, you could take care of your family. So can the Minister or the department speak to how does this help get money into the hands of the people in small communities that need child care? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So in many small communities, there is child care that's provided often by the Indigenous government, and it is often provided free of charge unlike the larger centres. And we are aware of that then we want to support those organizations as well. So a portion of this funding is available to those centres to help them with -- yes, stabilization funding and as well we have our other streams of funding.

In terms of, you know, providing funding directly to, say, grandparents who are looking after their grandkids, we are bound by the terms of the agreement with the Government of Canada. There is a real focus on licensed child care centres. Perhaps I can ask the deputy minister to get into some more of the details around that. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And the Minister's absolutely correct. The

Canada-wide agreements that were negotiated by all 13 provinces and territories late in 2021 all focus on creating roughly equivalent a national early learning and child care system which is modeled off of the Quebec model. That system is generally focused on licensed facilities and, at least the initial focus of effort over the initial five years of that agreement, is to roll out that system. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I'm well aware; I've heard this department cite many times that it's the feds, it's the feds, it's the feds. Well, then I look at this again as another failure from our Cabinet and our leadership to properly advocate on behalf of the people of our territory. I think all of us in the discussion around child care are well aware that we are not Vancouver, we are not Toronto, we're not even Edmonton. So all I can say is I'm tired of hearing as this as the rationale. We have things in our upcoming bill that aren't even around the funding so I find this to be just a bit of a very easy thing to say rather than actually looking at what people in this community -- or this committee and this group are saying. The day home providers are not making money, and they are educated. They have master's degrees and 30 years of experience and a whole whack of investment into their homes. And the way that they've been treated through all of this is disappointing. And I have realized that the way that this department gets around it is by talking about day cares and supports to day cares, which is not day home providers which I only realized yesterday. And that's where a lot of that confusion has been in the media.

So, Madam Chair, I think this is has been a total failure of a rollout in this funding, and I don't really have any further questions because I'm tired of just hearing it's because of the feds. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any further questions under early learning and child care? Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. So over on page 44, the contributions, the last item supporting childhood inclusion -- child inclusion and participation, and it shows \$1.7 million. I just want to verify what the uptake for that program is and whether it's actually oversubscribed in any way. Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: It is fully subscribed.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Okay, thanks, that's good to hear. And maybe we need to increase it, but. You know, I guess the department has capped the ability of daycare providers to capture -- or get revenues from parents. They're also requiring -- will be requiring operators to pay staff more and to have them trained and properly certified. Those are all good things. But they're being squeezed at both ends now. So where in the budget would I find money increasing to daycare providers as an operator subsidy or the support for them; where do I find that? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So this would be the section, the early learning and child care section. Most of this money flows to the providers. We have a number of programs that support both day homes and day care centres. They're funded on a per child basis. We've increased the funding for staff for day homes. We are working on amending our per child funding as well to ensure that it is more responsive to the needs of child care centres and day homes. I mean, it's a pretty big question. I'll -- I won't just list all of our programs. I'll hand it back to the Member. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Okay, thanks for that. So has the department actually done an analysis to say gee, you know, as a sector, they've reduced income with the capping of the fees as X amount and the increased expenditures is Y amount, because of the training requirements, certification, the pay grid that's going to come in, so we need to increase it by Z amount. Have we calculated X, Y, Z? Thanks -- and does X plus Y equal Z. Thanks, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I don't know, but Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. It's been a while since I've done any algebra. But the plan is to develop the programs going forward in conjunction, or in cooperation with the sector to ensure that we have all those numbers and that in the end we are providing child care centres and day homes with the funding that will allow them to be sustainable while still ensuring that our own funding is sufficient. So we only have limited

dollars, and we are doing our best to ensure stability and stay within that budget. This is a massive system change. It hasn't been as smooth as I would have liked. If I could do it again, I would definitely make some changes. But that's the situation we're in. We realize that we need to get people on board. We need to be partners with everyone and so we are making those efforts. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks. Well, I agree with the Minister's assessment. I think part of this is because we signed onto the agreement late. It was late in the financial year and one of the things that had to be done was to make sure that parents had reduced fees, which meant capping the ability for daycare operators to capture revenues.

So if that kind of analysis hasn't been done, it's not a good -- we're not in a good place. And, yeah, if I -- if it could be rolled out again, I'd probably start with the carrots rather than the sticks. So how is the department going to provide some reassurance and confidence to operators that there is going to be more money available to them to deal with these restrictions on income and increased expenditures? And, look, this is all good stuff, I'm not questioning it, I think it's good. But they need -- we need to change the messaging and the bigger picture that we're communicating. And I think that's led to a lot of problems so how is that going to be fixed? Thanks, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And going back, you know, we needed to reduce fees by 50 percent by the end of 2022. I wanted to get money into families' pockets earlier than that and so I take full responsibility for the quick rollout and the poor relationships. Going back I would have not reduced fees so early. It would have -- you know, we would have -- we would not have put that money back in parents' pockets but the health of the sector, the long-term health I think is what is of the utmost importance. So, you know, that's -- you know, that's something that I learned from. Can I -- one second, please.

And in terms of sufficient funding, the Government of Canada, our agreement with them, increases year after year. The first year we receive less. More money will be received every subsequent year. So our budgets will go up. As we work through these regulations, we'll be able to put a finer point on some of those issues that the Member is talking about.

We did do modelling while we were negotiating this agreement. You know, that led to massive changes in what was being requested from us from the Government of Canada. But until you're actually on the ground working with people one-on-one and the providers and seeing all those numbers in real time, it's difficult to get an accurate accounting. So as we move forward and develop these regulations and work with providers, we hope to settle on a system that everyone's happy with. Thank you.

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

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. And thanks for that from the Minister. I guess -- yeah, I get that there's money for this but what I think you need to do is to change the messaging a little bit. Probably more than a little bit. But you want to instill some confidence and rebuild some trust here that there is more money for day home operators, for child cares, and it's coming. And some of that needs to be coming out of this budget. And you need to make that the message now, because you're restricting their ability to raise money, you're also increasing their costs. You're not telling them that you're going to increase their funding. So can we start to deliver that message, Madam Chair? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I'll say right now, to everyone, all the day homes, day cares listening, we are going to increase funding. We've told them that at the meetings. We have early childhood association meetings. The department has been meeting with them trying to make the -- repair those relationships. I know that discussions and meetings don't always make it out to everyone and so perhaps that's part of the issue. But we're also seeing entrepreneurs who have looked at the environment, the current operating environment, and decided to open day homes and so they are in -- we're now in the process of licensing a number of day home operators and we expect those to come online, you know, in the near future. So the situation we have right now, it is -- it's something someone has looked at and said, you know what, I can make a go at that. So, again, I'll admit there's a lot of work to be done. There's a significant amount of work to be done. There's a significant amount of collaboration that needs to happen and funds that need to be spent, and we are committed to doing that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any further questions to the early

learning and child care section? Seeing none, please turn to page 43.

Education, Culture and Employment, early learning and child care, operations expenditure summary, 2023-2024 Main Estimates, \$22,969,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Can you please turn now to income security, beginning on page 48 with information items on page 49 and 50. Questions? Member for Hay River South.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to talk a bit about I guess basic income. We're talking -- we're providing income anyway, assistance to people. And basic income, you know, it's been batted around. We talk about it. There's been, you know, people -- different jurisdictions have tried it, and some of the things that came out of it is shown that, you know, people who receive it are less likely to be hospitalized, likely more willing to continue education. It also doesn't discourage people from working. It helps them to, you know, get out there and actually look for work as well. So I'm just wondering has the department assessed what the number for a basic income would be for the NWT? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. You know, there were numbers batted around in previous years. There was not a number that I felt that I would be able to put forward given our fiscal constraints so instead what we did is we looked at revamping the income assistance program, creating a new program for seniors and persons with disability that is really much more like a guaranteed basic income because those individuals will only have to apply once a year and not report their income monthly. So I can leave it at that. Thank you.

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

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Like I said, is that we're already paying income support anyway and so the difference we'd be looking at is what we're already paying and what's required. So have we actually looked at that cost to see what that -- what that difference would be to, say, bump it up to a basic income. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. Tens of millions of dollars beyond what we're already spending. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): MLA Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Okay, thank you, Mr. Chair. So tens of millions of dollars? So is that \$10 million or is that going to be a multiple of ten and -- but I got another -- I got another question here as well.

So with some of the -- like, you know right now we're talking also about carbon tax revenue and what -- you know, what we could actually use it for, and I'm just wondering if, you know, there's an area that we might be able use some of that funding for as well because we're trying to get it back into the hands of the people anyway. And so if you add that in there, what people are already getting, is there an opportunity, I guess, to really take a look at it and see if we could do something with basic income, or even if it was just a pilot project just to try it out here in, you know, some of the communities and just see how it works for, you know, a few years. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So when the money goes into the pot, that's the money we have. So it doesn't matter where it comes from. If it's from a carbon tax, if it's from, you know, permit fees or anything like that. So we look at what we have and what we can do with it. I have not instructed the department to spend their energy working on guaranteed basic income given that we are expending a lot of energy working on the income assistance program changes. I did try to take the approach of lessening the -- reducing the number of times that an individual might be cut off from income assistance. You know, as MLAs, I'm sure you all hear from your constituents that perhaps they got some money in and then they got cut from income assistance. They got fired from their job and they got cut off from income assistance for 60 or 90 days, or. These things happen, so. We have eliminated a number of those instances so there will be much more consistency for individuals who are receiving income assistance. There -- and a project such as basic income was not one of the priorities of this Assembly and because of that we have not pursued it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi for that. MLA Simpson.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, I -- you know, I think that, you know, with

the population base that we have, which is fairly small, our budget isn't that great either. But, you know, we have an opportunity here to try some things out that are innovative and on a small scale and, you know, maybe there is some buy in from the federal government as well. You know, I know it's not a priority but, you know, there's a number of things that aren't priorities that we've been doing. So -- but, yeah, just a comment there. But I think it's just something that we should look at, we should consider. And I know nothing's going to happen, you know, during this -- the rest of this Assembly but it's something that, you know, the future MLAs can hopefully look at. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi for that. Minister, do you care to comment on that?

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I know that Alternatives North has been interested in this for some time and then I think they have produced reports in the past possibly, but I know they are working on another one and the department has been involved with them. So it is not something that is completely off our radar. But the Member's correct, it's not going to happen in this budget. But, I mean, the next Assembly could definitely make that a priority. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi to that. Next we have MLA Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My questions are in regards to the budget changes. The Minister had made some -- an amazing announcement under income assistance program to make those changes. And I think a lot of those changes came from a lot of the complaining that Regular Members have had and the review that they did. So I want to, like, thank the Minister for making those changes because I know it's going to affect a lot of the people. But I'm just wondering how those changes -- and I see that there's an increase in that program about five -- just over \$5 million. And how is this being communicated out to the public? Because, I mean, if it's starting April 1st and then all these changes, like, you know, we have a lot of people out there that don't even know about this and I know that they'll be going in through the program. But we also have people that don't know and might seem not wanting to use these programs just because of stigma and things like that. But we've kind of made this our living wage not -- it's not a living wage, but it's to help the people get the basic needs that they need. And so if they're working minimal wage jobs and they need those top-ups, this is where they can get those assistance. And I think the Minister made a lot

of announcements and I just want to hear a little bit more and, like I said, congratulate the department on the work that they've done here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I did make a statement in the House here. There was not associated communications that came with that. Those will happen later in the year. I'll just tell you it shows me the value of our comms teams because, you know, I've said some -- I made a big announcement but we didn't have any associated communication materials coming out and no one knows about it outside of this room basically. So I just want to -- kudos to our comms team there.

But the program changes are significant. It's more than just, you know, changing some dollar amounts. There's a lot of regulatory changes that have to happen and there's new software that we need because we are splitting the programs and really creating a new standalone program for seniors and persons with disabilities. So this will not take effect April 1st. We're aiming for June -- sometime June/July. Because that's so far out right now, we still don't have a firm date. But after the budget, assuming the budget is passed, then we can begin working on comms once we have a bit more information. So this will become widely known, and we will be getting the word out the best we can. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: Yes, thank you. So the senior citizens supplementary benefit, that benefit there, I mean, it's continuing along so that's not -- there's not -- I don't see another department -- so the new senior program, that will just be tied into that income assistance program? It's just being kind of split so it's more streamlined, is that my understanding? And then is it -- is there a -- can you clarify the age for a senior person to be falling into that category. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the idea of the new program is it will have one application. If you're a senior and you want assistance with your home heating fuel or you need income assistance, you will make one application and based on your income, you will be, you know, provided either the home heating or income assistance. So that is the plan. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: So what age is somebody going to be considered as a senior because I know, like, if I go to my Indigenous organization, there's an age. If I go to another organization -- it's just like our youth, we have different age. So what senior -- what age is seniors would be expect -- could they expect to be falling under this program because some of those ages might not consider themselves seniors but it's an age group so they may not access the program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The age will stay the same at 60 years old. The revamped income assistance program will be for persons ages 19 to 59 and then the seniors program is for everyone 60 plus. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Looking at the home -- senior home heating subsidy, so in 2021-2022, it was 2,155, and then our revised estimates for 2022-2023, 2,649. Main estimates 2,192. We know our fuel has gone up. We know -- especially in the Beaufort Delta, fuel -- heating home fuel has raised significantly and come April 1st we will be having to pay the carbon tax on top of that. So we know we're going to be expected to pay more throughout the territories so I'm just wondering why that number hasn't even matched last year's heating home -- senior home heating. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The goal of the senior home heating subsidy is to subsidize heating. So it's not to cover the entire cost, and we aim for 80 percent. There was a top-up early in the life of this government to the program to ensure that we hit that 80 percent. Given the dramatic increases we've seen, we're no longer at that 80 percent. So what we did earlier -- well, I guess it was last year, was we provided a one-time top-up to the program, and so that's reflected in the 2022-2023 revised estimates. In the upcoming fiscal year, we will look at our budget and look at the cost of home heating fuel and see if we can and should provide another one-time top-up. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: So thank you for that. So now that we're coming close to the year end, March 31st, so we should know exactly what we've spent this year, this summer we should be able to figure that out. So would we be -- would you be considering having to come back, or would you just find that money from within to reallocate the funds? Because we all know that it's not going down; it's only going to go up. So even to meet 80 percent coverage, we're going to need more money there. So I'm just wondering how the Minister's going to deal with that because we don't want our seniors without their home heating subsidy. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And the cost of fuel goes down and it goes up so it could go -- it could actually come down; we don't know that. It could continue to go up. I'm always the optimist I guess. And we wouldn't be coming back for a supplementary estimate. It would likely be funded from within as we did last time around. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: Okay, thank you. Just to the last topic there, the student financial assistance. I see that we've raised it. It's consistently went up and we've raised it again just under, you know, a million dollars there. And I'm just wondering with the changes that student financial assistance has made, has that -- you know, with eliminating the number of semesters an Indigenous person can only go to school for, I know that was eliminated. So I'm just wondering how much of an uptake have you received or has that started or when will that start, and are we budgeted properly for in case I decide I want to go back to school and I can get more semesters or any one person, any Indigenous person who's used up their semesters. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I had the same thoughts as the Member. So these changes that -- we really have not discussed publicly will take effect for the upcoming -- so the 2023-2024 academic year. So students going to school in September would have access to some of these changes that we're making. The increase in the budget is about \$1.4 million. As well, we've made some other reallocations internally to adjust the program as well. So some of the changes are the basic grant. We are increasing that for -- first of all, this program, again, is supposed to cover 80

percent of the cost of attending school in somewhere like in Edmonton. I think that was the original calculation. So we wanted to make sure that that 80 percent was still accurate so we looked at the numbers and we increased the overall budget for each of the grants available. We also decided for Indigenous students, to increase the basic grant to cover 100 percent of the cost -- the average cost of tuition, books, etcetera, and we removed the cap on semesters. So before you would have to -- you could only use 12 semesters of funding before you were done. So we've removed that. I'll just leave it at that for now. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mahsi for that. MLA Semmler.

MS. SEMMLER: Well, I guess that's -- sorry, I opened a can of worms. But with all of the numbers and all of the briefings and all of the budgets and all of the numbers, I think this is a good thing, though. I mean, that's why I think -- one of the things that I'm worried that within this number here, people going back to school or, you know, with COVID and people being -- without COVID now and people being able to go back to school in person, there's a lot of students that missed the years of going to school because they decided to opt out of going to school during COVID, virtually. So I'm just hoping that that number is going to be relooked at if we're going to need more. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi for that. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And we have been underspending the SFA budget for years, and it's sort of common across Canada. We've seen lower numbers of students so that allowed us to make some enhancements beyond the \$1.4 million here. And, you know, if it comes to the point where there's so much uptake that we're overspending this, then we're overspending it and we'll have to increase the budget. It's a great problem to have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Next, MLA Cleveland.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I'm going to work really hard not to repeat anything that's been said so far.

So first I wanted to start off with so the Minister indicated that the intent is to kind of go out and do some public relations in regards to this new program later on in the year with the intent of kind of looking at June or July. My concern is that revamps to income security include student financial assistance and student financial assistance has a deadline of June. And so I'm wondering how students will learn about

changes to the program in advance of them actually meeting up with a deadline because some people who, like MLA Semmler indicated, might all of a sudden be eligible for more student financial assistance that they don't realize, and there is a whole lot of planning that goes into becoming a student again in your life. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So we want everyone to be aware of these funds and know what they're going to be getting in September. So a lot of work has happened. Once this budget passes, a lot more work will happen. And we want to make sure that this is widely communicated. I think this is such a great new story that we shouldn't have a problem letting everyone know about it, once we iron out those details and are able to tell people exactly what we're providing. So we're well aware that there are deadlines and we want to ensure that -- we are working to ensure that everything is completed ahead of those deadlines so that everyone knows what they're eligible for. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA Cleveland.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And, you know, I assume that people like career advisors and counsellors and school administrators will be part of that education, even school teachers. But I would also like to ask, given that income security and income assistance is in here as well, that GSOs -- but not only GSOs, NGOs, be made part of kind of that training because there are NGOs like YWCA that spend a lot of time helping people access programs and kind of act as a mediator between residents and programs like yours. And so I'm just hoping that we can ensure that they're included because they can be champions in helping spread the good word of these program changes as well. So thank you for that. And that's just a comment.

My question is does the federal government contribute to income security, either the income assistance program or the student financial assistance program; is there any cost recovery that happens here? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi for that. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And of course we get most of our money from the federal government. In particular, we do get money specifically for the student financial assistance program. We receive \$5.6 million

from the federal government. They have the Canada Student Loans Program that we opted out of in order to be able to offer these types of customized programs to our residents. And because we opted out, we get that money from the federal government and we contribute GNWT funds as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): MLA Cleveland.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Yes, it was that \$5.6 million fund towards SFA that I was looking for. I'm wondering if there is any conversation, given the changes that have happened to income security and student financial assistance, if there's been any conversation with the federal government to increase that amount especially given that one of the most exciting changes that was made to income security was this opportunity for Indigenous students to really go for unlimited terms of education if that's what they so desire. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. The department does have a relationship with the federal government and at officials levels there are always discussions and there's always meetings. There haven't -- you know, we haven't made a formal request for more money from the federal government for the student financial assistance program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): MLA Cleveland.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll wait until the next section.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): MLA O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks, Mr. Chair. I want to go to some of the comments from two previous speakers. You know, it was great to get the Minister's statement on changes to income security on February the 27th but there was like a "what we heard" report. But I guess I'm hoping that there's kind of like a report that says "what we're going to do" because there was a lot in there and just not many people pay attention to what happens in here. So I think there's a real need to communicate. Look, that was a very big piece of work. Lots of good changes, things that I've had complained to me by constituents for years, so hats off for getting the work done. And I think you need to toot your own horn a lot louder on it. So I know you got a news release out today about this. That's good.

Keep it rolling. But put it together in a comprehensive way.

So I want to turn now to the budget here. So I see that there's an increase in income assistance program funding on page 48. And it's a big increase, and so it should be. 2022-2023 Revised Estimates 38.9; 2023-2024 Main Estimates \$44 million. So that's like a -- if I do my math quickly, \$5 million increase. That's a lot of money. And that's good. I support it. But how did you calculate that amount? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. We looked at the program, thought about what we'd like to do with the program, and then figured out how much it would cost, and then figured out how much we might actually be able to get. And that's really the way we do everything, is we shoot for the stars and then we get chopped down, you know, at each stage until we wind up with the number that we can get through all of the various stages. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): MLA O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: It sounds like a thrashing machine. Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yeah, well, presumably there's obviously some work in here about okay, if people are not going to have IBA payments deducted from income assistance, you got some sort of way of calculating that. If people are, you know, they're not going to lose income assistance because they lose a job. There's got to be some way of kind of predicting some of these costs. Is that the kind of work that went into calculating this? And more specifically, does this amount also include the benefits for seniors that are going to be rolled into this bigger program? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And yes, I know my last answer might not have been perhaps as serious as the Member was looking for. But that's what we are doing. We looked at every benefit that we wanted to offer and we costed those out based on the historical realities. We looked -- we removed a number of barriers as well. And so, you know, income assistance clients won't be cut off for certain things anymore. And there is a cost attached to that as well. So we did look at those costs and we factored those in. We looked at the -- exempting all of these, say the IBA payments, things like that, and we costed that

out. So, yes, every item in here was costed out. Believe me, I know that, you know, sometimes these numbers just appear here but it is a very, very rigorous time-consuming and resource-heavy exercise to come up with these programs and justify every dollar that we want to spend and then that's analyzed within the department, that's analyzed by the Department of Finance, and then it's analyzed here in the House. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): MLA O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, okay, no, thanks; I just wanted to make sure that that's what this number reflects and that the seniors stuff is in here. That's good. Good work. And thanks for sneaking it by your Cabinet colleagues.

Student financial assistance, there's an increase in here to the grants on page 49, and the Finance Minister in the budget addressed -- actually said some of this stuff about how the basic -- and I'm quoting, "the basic grant for northern Indigenous students to fully cover the average cost of tuition, books, and supplies and eliminate their 12-semester limit for the basic grants." Is that included in here? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, it is. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): MLA O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Mr. Chair, the other thing that was said is that proposing an increase to the basic grant for non-Indigenous students who were schooled in the territory to assist with 80 percent of the average cost of tuition, books, and supplies. Is that found in here as well? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, that is found in there as well. We've increased the supplementary grant and the remissible loan to that 80 percent threshold, and that's included in there. We've tied those numbers to the market basket measure for food and shelter. So there is something that, you know, we can always refer back to. It's not an arbitrary number. We've removed the number of semesters that Indigenous students can receive the supplementary grant, and that's costed out in there as well. We have looked -- yes, we've also looked at the student suspension. So if a student currently doesn't complete 60 percent of a full course load, they are suspended from income assistance. I don't think we need to -- or

sorry, SFA. I don't think we need to punish students for trying. And so we have removed that barrier as well and costed that out. There's also an increase for study grant for students with disabilities so that we are now aligned with the Canada Student Loan Program in terms of the amounts available through that stream. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. It was almost like a Minister's statement. All good news. No, seriously, that's good stuff.

I have had one Yellowknife resident who is non-Indigenous ask about why the removal of the 12 semester limit for basic grants is only being done for Indigenous students. Have you looked at -- is that federal money or why is it limited to Indigenous students? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. As it was one of our efforts to advance reconciliation. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks. Has the department calculated what it would cost to do that for, say, P2 students? Thanks, Mr. Chair. And what I mean by P2 is students that are actually born in the Northwest Territories. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And yes, we did look at that initially. Again, as I told -- as I told the Member before, we shoot for the stars and we get chopped down at every juncture. So we still wound up with an excellent program but we couldn't get everything in this program that we wanted given our financial situation. But I think we wound up with -- I would say we already had -- we already currently have the best student financial assistance program in Canada, and we're just going to leave everyone in the dust come the next school year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. MLA O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Yeah, thanks, and I agree with that assessment. I'm just a little bit concerned that we haven't found a way to extend that benefit, in particular to our students that are born here and largely educated here. And I

would suggest that the department make another run at that and try to do that because I think -- yeah, I think that's the right thing to do. We want to encourage all the students that go to schools here to go off and get as much education as they can and come back and stay here. And I think we want to try to eliminate barriers. So I'll just leave it at that, Mr. Chair. Thanks.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Mahsi. No further questions? Yes, go ahead, Minister.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And so there used to be a limit on the number of semesters that, as the Member said, P2s could access remissible loans. We have -- or we are proposing to remove that as well. We've tied the amount of those remissible loans again to the Canada market basket measure. We've increased them again. We are proposing to remove income testing for spouses and not tying them to the years of schooling in the NWT. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Bonnetrouge): Colleagues, we'll take a short break. Mahsi.

---SHORT RECESS.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I call Committee of the Whole back to order. Member for Nunakput.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Before I get started, I'd like to welcome in the House today Shannon Steen, daughter of former Member Vince Steen and former Minister, and back in the day my uncle. He's my uncle also, Uncle Vince Steen. Did an awesome job representing the people in Nunakput and he's passed on now. But Shannon's down here visiting me. So I'm really honoured to have her in the House. And hi, Shannon.

Then I have Ms. Mavis Adjun. I grew up with her back home in Tuk and she lives in Kugluktuk. She's Shannon's auntie. Her husband, former fiddler extraordinaire Colin Adjun, and played a lot of music all of the country and awesome fiddler. And she has a son that -- Gustin now that took over his dad, and he's travelling around doing a lot of good things for the people in the communities that he goes to play. And so I'd really like to welcome her in the House too.

I got nine minutes and 11 seconds, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Of ECE on income support, income security. Okay. Welcome, and go ahead, Mr. Jacobson.

MR. JACOBSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, Madam Chair. I just want to really congratulate the Minister and staff in regards to the increases that we're giving to the income support across the territory. That was in my Member's statement today so it's really good news to see. And I just want to keep -- like, if we just keep working together to try to do betterment for the people that, you know, are less fortunate, that don't have jobs and just keep working and plugging away for them, and let them know that we're working for them on their behalf, and I'm working with the Minister that really wanted to do good for that. So I'm really thankful for that, Minister Simpson. And for that, I have nothing else to say, Madam Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Member for Nunakput. And thank you for the comments. We'll move on to Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, I don't have much question too for the Minister. I mean, other than that -- actually, it's actually great working with the Minister and your office and your staff as well. The only one that keeps coming up is that -- is the fuel subsidy in my riding. And I went through your policies really quick. I understand the zones and one, two, and three, and the levels, etcetera. The only thing that sometimes I get calls on is that sometimes the subsidy doesn't go far enough in terms of going over the amount or whatever it may be coming towards the end of the year. So I'm assuming case-by-case basis -- I'm assuming that your department probably will work with individuals and that kind of thing just to get through the year? Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So if someone -- a senior needs assistance with their seniors home heating and they run out of their seniors home heating subsidy, they can always apply for income assistance and there's the chance that they're -- they could be topped off. I've seen that a number of times. As an MLA, I've had a number of constituents who they used all of their senior home heating subsidy and income assistance was able to provide them support. I've had -- as Minister, I've seen that come across my desk from every region in the territory and for the most part, they're always provided with support. We don't want anyone's home to freeze up. That being said, not everyone is going to be eligible for all the programs but we -- between income assistance and the seniors home heating subsidy, we do

manage to support many, many seniors. Thank you.

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

MR. EDJERICON: Madam Chair, anyway thank you for your response Mr. Minister. I was going to also just say that I put out an invitation a few weeks ago in the House here, tabled it, and I just want to know if maybe you want to make a time I'd like to see if you could come along in maybe May or April, May sometime into our -- my riding just to meet with the chief and council and the Metis council just to meet and greet and maybe listen. And so I just want to put that out there. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I know that -- I think I'm travelling every week after session for maybe a couple months. But if we're talking -- if the Member's talking about Fort Resolution, that's an easy day trip for me from Hay River when I'm in town so I'm happy to find the time to do that. Or if the Member's talking about other areas, then we'll work that into our schedule as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh, did you have any further questions?

MR. EDJERICON: I have one more question. And thank you for that. And I really appreciate that. And my last question would be is that I know coming in here a year in my term already and I'm trying to throw some luggage on the train, and I mentioned this to the Premier the train left the station back in 2019 and -- but anyway, it's something that -- when I go to the community of Dettah, one of my home communities, they always talk about a new school. And I was apprentice back in 1981. We were still doing the maintenance on that building. So I'm just wondering maybe it's something that we could probably get a chance to also meet with local DEA even and when we meet with the chief and council, this issue's going to come up. So anyways, I just want to put that out there. And I don't have any other questions on the budget. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I think that's probably the next section but I'm very well aware of that issue. I've spoken with the DEA chair about that. It's been raised by the leadership as well with me. So we'll continue

those conversations, and we are going through the capital needs assessment process where all of the DEAs provide their requests for capital and then they make their way through the process. So we are working on that. But I'm happy to have further conversations. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you. And then I would like to say the same thing too. Congratulations, you guys did a good job, especially with the student finance assistance program, lifting the cap for the Indigenous students, because that's good. That's going to help a lot of our students in the small communities because usually the first year that they leave, you know, after graduating high school, they spend their first or second year upgrading and that's not -- it's a concern for a lot of parents. I'm not discrediting the teachers or anything because we have a lot of good teachers. We have a lot of good Indigenous teachers as well. They're doing good. And the only thing that's lacking, the reason why they're going through all this or going to upgrade, is because you know that -- I've said it many times too that we need a lot of programs and services. We need more resources to help so that -- so we can improve our education system.

So I think that's where -- and, like, even with the speech and language pathologists, and we need that. And then even for multigrades or for, you know, elementary, even some junior high, there are -- you know, like, it's a multigrades, you know, like, where -- one teacher's for two or three class -- or grades, you know. So that's a disadvantage, especially in the small communities. So this really helps, this lifting the cap for the Indigenous students compared if our students were living in the larger centre, you know, where the education system is good, you know, like in Yellowknife, Hay River, Fort Smith, Inuvik or, you know, larger regional centre where they have more resources.

And we don't hear much of those young people going into upgrading program unless it's an Indigenous student, you know, because of the residential school, there's a lot -- still a lot of them are still affected by the trauma. You know, they're still affected by what happened in the residential school. So that has an impact on them, you know. So we cannot dismiss that. So I am very grateful and thankful that you guys did that because a lot of students were asking about that, you know, because some students they use up their student finance assistance program by taking two or three, four access

program, you know, at one time, so. And by the time it came for their career choice, they have no more money or not enough money to carry on to finish their studies so that's good, you know. Like, I'm -- I'm happy about that, which I was against that cap too myself because it's not helping our young people, our students coming from the small communities. So I'm sure a lot of parents will probably be happy, especially in the small communities. So I just want to say thank you for that. I'm happy with that.

But on the other hand, I just wanted to ask can we get a -- is there a data available about how many of these students, especially from the outlying communities, from the regions, are accessing student finance assistance program?

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Minister of ECE.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Yes, thank you. So in 2022-2023, there were more than 1,650 applications. And of those, 49 percent were from Indigenous Aboriginals or Indigenous residents of the Northwest Territories, 51 percent from non-Indigenous. Students from the Beaufort Delta make up 14 percent of those students, 3 percent from Deh Cho, 4 percent from Sahtu, 16 percent from the South Slave, 58 percent from the North Slave. And I know that the Member likes to have the Tlicho region broken out and so in addition to those, there's 5 percent from the Tlicho region. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, I'm glad you came prepared. So yes, well, thank you. Well still, you know, I mean we could do better. You know, like, I mean -- and it's good there's 1,650 applicants -- our applications received. But how many of those were successful -- or not successful but how many of those -- because I know that at the list minute a lot of those young people who applied, you know, if there's always a backup plan. So how many of those did actually left the North or actually went to post-secondary?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I don't have that information. We do try to track that. I can provide the information that we do have to committee. But I don't have it on hand here. But the Member makes a good point. That's important. Data collection is always difficult in all the areas that we do our work, which makes it difficult to design and evaluate programs. But we are getting better, and I believe we do have

some information that the Member will find useful and we will share it with her. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah, well, that's good because we need that too as well because in the region, like, so we can, you know, do better or try to do something that's going to help benefit our young people because maybe this, A, is not working, maybe B will work, you know, whatever it is that, you know, we're trying to do to help our young people. So I'm glad.

And then another one too is that here I see income support. So there's a huge increase. I just want to ask our Minister what are they doing to help the income support assistance client to get off income support to become more self-sufficient?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So ECE offers a number of different programs that employers can access and that individuals can access. We also have the Student Financial Assistance program. So someone might need income assistance but perhaps they might decide they actually want to go to school and with the increases that we're proposing for student financial assistance, that makes that a possibility as well.

So, with the unlimited semesters, it's possible that someone could, you know, do their best to pursue their post-secondary education and if they have difficulty or if they take a longer time, we're supporting them in that way. We are not -- we're taking a bit more of a hands-off approach with the income assistance program. We are proposing to eliminate the productive choices. And I know that that's one program that clients would sometimes use to -- you know, to perhaps advance their education to do volunteering that could lead to a job and things like that. But what we are doing is we're providing clients with the opportunity to retain more money so that they can go out and they can earn money on income assistance and the government won't be clawing it back the way they used to. Right now, if you earn more than \$200 the government starts reducing your income assistance. They start counting that against your income assistance. We're increasing that to \$500. So there can be \$500 earned per person as well as 25 percent of whatever else they earn. And that will not be reduced from income assistance. As well if you get a job and you do your best; you know, say you are -- you get fired because maybe you

were relying on someone to give you a ride to work and that ride fell through and then you get fired, under the current program you would be cut off from income assistance. What we're proposing is that if you work and you try to work and it doesn't work out, we're not going to cut you off. So those are the types of things that we're doing. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah, thank you. Another one too is that, okay, Yellowknife, I know they have income counsellors because I heard about them. And I think we don't have any in Tlicho region, you know. So I just wanted to know why Tlicho region does not have income counsellors when we have a lot of people who are on income support that are unemployed? I think we need something similar to what Yellowknife, North Slave has, or headquarters, yeah, regarding employment counsellors.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So, again, with the changes to the income assistance program, we want to make the reporting less onerous so that it frees up time for the clients and for the client service officers so that eventually we hope they will have more time to work with the clients. I know that the Tlicho region is a very busy region when it comes to the workload for the CSOs and because of that, they don't have time to spend with the clients. So we're looking at increasing the number of positions there as well at some point in the very near future. So the Member can look forward to that. And the whole idea of -- like I said, of income assistance, these changes, is to move towards a more integrated way of delivering these services. So eventually down the road an income assistance client will be able to get that assistance from the person that they're working with. That's the ultimate goal. So we are going in that direction. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Are there any further questions under this section from Members? Seeing none, please turn to page 48.

Education, Culture and Employment, income security, operations expenditure summary, Main Estimates 2023-2024, \$66,723,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. We'll now go to junior kindergarten to grade 12

school services, beginning on page 52 with information items on page 53 to 55. Questions? Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to reiterate that, you know, in the South Slave I'm very proud that my community is a leader in education, and education is extremely important to the South Slave. And a couple of things that I want to talk about today is, you know, I always -- when we're always talking in AOC or other places about the small communities, we used to have a leadership program that was run by -- in Fort Smith, where they had an extra teacher and they had house parents, and it was only based only for the small communities. Very successful.

We got lawyers out of there from the Tlicho. You know, I know that the former Commissioner's daughter was one of the people that was in that program. There was a lot of success with that program. And everybody -- a lot of those people that were in those programs, including the now grand chief of the Gwich'in, they all went through this leadership program. And a lot of the -- I'm just wondering if the Minister would consider, you know -- I know it's late in our mandate but education is probably one of the most important things that you could give a child, not only as family but as a government. And we have to think about that again to ensure that the small communities that we have, you know, children that go there and they have house parents, they have their meals there, and they have programs that are extra, they have tutors at night, they have a teacher at night on staff, and we start mentoring some of those leaders -- the future leaders of the small communities.

And some of those future leaders were also -- that went through those programs became Premier, became Ministers, became MPs. I think that's extremely important that we start looking at that whole concept again.

The other concept that I really want to talk about is the Phoenix program. The Phoenix program in Fort Smith has got to be expanded to the small communities because I think that -- I know that the teachers in Fort Smith are very dedicated to this Phoenix program. And in the last few years, the Governor General medals were granted to students who took the Phoenix program. It wasn't the people that all graduated from grade 12 but it was people that were from the Phoenix program. And I'm very proud to say that, you know, when students go back to school and achieve that, the Governor General's award from the high school, it's a big feather in their hat. And I'd like to see that

expanded to other schools. I think it's extremely important.

I consider Fort Smith a leader with the education system, and we're the education capital of the Northwest Territories. I've always said that. And education is the one thing that all of us want to push on our children no matter where they are. Whether they're from -- we've had people even from -- like, a lot from the smaller communities and from the larger centres that come to Fort Smith, and we really appreciate when they come. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I appreciate the Member's comments about the leadership program. And I have spoken with people about programs like that and, you know, what it -- sort of what happened in the past, why we don't have it, and what we can change to do going forward. So, you know, I'm definitely not opposed to that. It is late in the government, as the Member mentioned. And it is on the department's radar. I think that once we get into our discussions with Indigenous governments about the future of the education system and governance and how it all works, you know, that's one of the areas that could be explored.

And in terms of the Phoenix program, you know, the Member's correct that it's a valuable program. There are other programs in the territory like that Phoenix program. And they are available to small communities as well. It is something that the local education authorities would initiate, and we have supported smaller communities to begin programs like that.

There's a lot of different things happening around the territory in terms of education. The education bodies have a lot of initiatives that they've come up with on their own, and there is sharing of that information among education bodies. But I think this is one example of where perhaps we can highlight that a little better and share that information with the other education bodies so that they become aware that perhaps they can access funds to provide these types of programming in their small communities, because it is a possibility right now. Thank you.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: I just want to recognize the dedication of the staff of PWK and of the elementary school in Fort Smith. You know, a lot of that time and effort, even in the Phoenix program, they can bring their children there at

night. And a lot of the programming is done at night. And, you know, the staff are very dedicated to what they do at both schools.

And the one thing that is outstanding, of course, is the replacement of the 65-year-old school with -- the elementary school. There's got to be a start at some point. And, you know, I don't want to take away from any other school. Any school that's built for the betterment of students in the North is a plus. I'm not going against any other place except that that was a federal day school that -- and there's a link to the residential school. I was part of that; I went to school there also. And I just want to make sure that we keep those things in mind, and I'm sure that the Minister has a good overview of what happens, and it seems like he does. I will tell you when you're not because that's just the way I am. I've always been very honest about what I feel because I'm very happy about what's happening with education. And it's up to the whole community to make -- to make sure that the child is developing in the right way. And we all have to take part in that.

And a lot of my volunteer work was at the high school because everybody likes to volunteer for the elementary school. So all through the years since 1995, my volunteer work was with the high school, and everybody says oh, the kids are older. So I always did a lot of volunteer work with the high school, and I just want to commend the people that are there. And I know this coming year we're going to lose an important person at that school, and that's Al Karasiuk, he's retiring. And that guy, I mean, you know, he's -- he'd go around the clock with the students if he had to, to make them successful. And I really appreciate that.

And education is the most important thing you can give. You can have everything else in the world but if you don't have the grounds for -- and the background for the education, it could be a big, big problem. And education's the most important department, I think, for the future of the NWT and the economy. And I just want to thank the Minister for all the things that he said in the last little while, even with the other things that we just discussed. I didn't go into because everybody else was involved in that. And I think this is a well thought out department. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Sure. Well, I appreciate the comments from all the Members. And the Member's correct, it takes the whole community, needs to be involved and engaged in education. The government can't do it alone, absolutely not, so. And I will say that the

Member's correct. In Fort Smith, they do value education. They have a lot of long-term educators who are able to mentor a lot of the younger educators that come in and so they don't run into the same issues that you might see in the smaller community where your whole staff, you know, has one or two years of experience. So they are -- you know, they're lucky that way and then they foster that environment so I have to agree with the Member there. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. And I see here at Indigenous language and education, okay, it's the same all the way across, and it's good, because it is important to have Indigenous language or education. This is -- compared to the early years of residential school, it's good that we have that. That's the only way that's -- that's another way of keeping our language alive and support it. And it's beneficial. I know that it is beneficial. But I just wanted to ask the Minister in general, because I did miss the other one, but I wanted to know if the Indigenous language funds can be transferred to Indigenous government because they are the authority over language and culture. I think it's appropriate to do that, you know, and I just wanted to know what the Minister thinks of that.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And there are funds that are provided to Indigenous governments, both from the federal government through the GNWT and from the GNWT. This funding right here is specific to schools. And the reason it's broken out in its own line item is because we provide the schools with essentially a lump sum of money. We provide the education bodies with a lump sum of money and we say, you spend this however you need to spend this. There's very strings attached. There's two strings that are very attached, though. We say that this portion, you have to spend on Indigenous languages and education. And this other portion you have to spend on inclusive schooling. And so we do that because we want to earmark the lump sum that we're giving these education bodies for Indigenous languages and culture. So I don't want to remove that component from here and take, you know, \$10 million out of the -- \$12 million out of the education system and that -- especially the money that funds that cultural component. So that's my answer. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: No, I am not saying that remove this because we do need this in schools. In the early years in residential school, it had an impact on a lot of our people, you know, because a lot of them lost our language and way of life. And so I will not ask, you know, to get rid of this in school. But I'm just saying that in general, like, here Indigenous language and education secretariat, you know, some of these cultural and heritage, why not transfer some of those to the Indigenous governments so that they can run their program or, you know, like, that they see fit based on -- you know, according to their culture and needs. So that's what I'm asking for. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I know if we go back into the culture section that we've already passed, that's where those funds are. And the Indigenous governments, you know, we provide them with funding for language and culture. But we also want to do something as a government. I mean, if we gave them that money, the next call would be why aren't you doing anything for languages and culture; put money in the budget for languages and culture. So that's the money that we have there for languages and culture. I will say as we, you know, work on modernizing the education system and the governance system, we can have -- we will have those discussions with the Indigenous governments about how language and culture are incorporated into schools. So what the Member is bringing up are discussions that will be had. Thank you.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah. No, no. As long as they're going to be having that discussion, that's okay, that's good, I'm happy. I hope we make some progress in this area because I strongly believe that, you know, Indigenous government running, operating some of these programming and services is good, you know, because they are -- our language is important to our people. So that's why I was just suggesting that. So thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, my first question is in regards to education renewal and innovation. This line item appears to have come down a little bit. And my concern is that in the

following fiscal year, hopefully the 20th Assembly which will be part of that fiscal year, will be able to dive right into the education renewal. And so I'm wondering if the education renewal, in fact, some of it comes out of here or is it largely centered within the corporate management section? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the budget is here, and it is decreasing because this -- education renewal and innovation was a fund used to try different things, to try to renew and innovate. And so a number of those projects have become permanent, and now they have funding elsewhere. So things like northern distance learning, that's no longer funded out of here; that has its own pot of money. So as they move from being sort of experiments, they move into getting their own permanent streams of funding and that's why we see this dwindling. And this was also a ten-year strategy I guess, and we're -- must be in the last year of that strategy now, or very near. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm wondering why we wouldn't maintain a consistent value -- or dollar value in this pocket so that ECE, especially, you know, given what we just heard from MLA Martselos in regards to the importance of education, why we wouldn't, rather than having a ten-year strategy innovation, just be constantly innovating in the way that we are delivering education in the Northwest Territories. And so I'm wondering why that's not a fixed amount that is constantly there for us to continue to do better. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I think that speaks to the need for why we don't need this, because we are constantly innovating. We don't just need this sort of project-based innovation fund; that's what we do. I heard someone the other day saying that, you know, the government doesn't acknowledge the negative issues or the, you know, problems with the education system and they're not doing anything about it. And I looked at what we had ten years ago and what we have today. We didn't have junior kindergarten. We didn't have northern distance learning. We didn't have career and education advisors. I have a whole list somewhere of these things that we didn't have. So there has been massive changes in

the last ten years. And, I mean, I see what's happening on the horizon. There's going to be massive changes in the next ten years as well. So there's constant innovation. And that's also, you know, why I do appreciate the system of governance that we have where education bodies have the freedom to innovate on their own. When you travel to different regions and different schools, they are doing -- they are innovating in ways that are supporting their students. They're very tailored innovations. And so that still does occur. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm sure that a lot of the changes that happen from here on in for a few years in regards to education will be largely driven by the Education Act amendments. And so I'm wondering where that funding is coming from; is that found in corporate management and not here? And I'm wondering if the Minister can provide clarity on that one. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So there was funding for that, like in this current fiscal year but that is sunsetting. Originally, this project was supposed to be completed by the end of this term and so that funding is sunsetting. But going forward, from what has been learned during this process the department has a better handle on how things work and will be able to fund that work internally going forward. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And thank you for that clarification from the Minister. I just don't want to leave the 20th Assembly without dollars to do the work that needs to be done for that one.

I'm wondering if the Minister can speak to why there's been a decline in the education operations and educator development fund? It looks like there is about a \$200,000 decrease there.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So the department increased capacity with two employees who worked -- student record employees. So they were responsible for ensuring that all of the requests for day school records were handled. And, you know, they

were very busy and we actually brought in a bunch of other staff from throughout the department to help with that as well. But that -- those jobs, or those funds are now sunsetting as well because that -- the deadline for those -- for that class action has passed. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, my next question is in regards to the inclusive schooling line item. That line item seems to stay quite consistent year after year. And from what I'm hearing from parents, even in Kam Lake, there are a lot of concerns about, you know, where kids are finding themselves after COVID and a lot of kids who didn't receive assessments that they would have received before they aged out of the system, a lot more challenges with kids falling behind in school, and just a real need for more inclusive schooling supports. And so I'm wondering why that line item is staying the same when our need for inclusive schooling supports is only growing. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. That number is relatively consistent because it is based on the school funding formula which is based on the number of students in the territory. And so that number hasn't varied greatly so that's why you see that consistency there. The Member is pointing out that, you know, there's often discussion about the need for more supports for inclusive schooling. And so the department is, early in the new government I understand, going to be undertaking a review of their supports. You know, we've run into a number of issues. And as we face some of the labour market challenges and we can't get certain people in certain -- with certain qualifications in certain positions, we need to rethink how we provide services. And so if we can't get certain people into certain positions into a school, what else can we do? So, yes, we're very live to that, and that work will be happening early in the life of the next government. Thank you.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm very happy to hear from the Minister that they're looking at new ways of doing this. One of the things that I find very frustrating is when you hear year after year after year there's a vacancy, we're waiting for someone to fill the vacancy. How long do you wait for someone to fill a vacancy before

you start looking at new ways to do stuff? And so I'm really looking forward to this review. I think it's really important. I think a lot of kids depend on the services that they're just not getting right now.

I'm wondering if the Minister can tell us about any of the ways that -- and this might be too premature, and I can already hear the Minister's words in my head, but one of the things that some jurisdictions are doing is partnering up with universities in order to deliver some of these services in schools, and departments of education in other jurisdictions are actually taking on the coordination of this so that they are playing a more proactive role in getting rehab services into schools. I'm wondering if ECE is actively looking into that and maybe considering doing that in the following school year? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So there are different ways of providing services in schools across Canada. Some jurisdictions do what we do and they partner with other departments. Other jurisdictions, the education -- the department of education will actually provide a lot of those, say health-related services like the Member might be referencing. And so we are looking at different ways of providing those services.

One of the things that we're doing is renewing the curriculum. And a lot of the services -- I guess, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to hand it over to the deputy minister, a former teacher who can better explain how inclusive schooling and all of these are related. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think where the Minister was going was that because the department and education bodies, as well as the teachers association, as partners are all embarking on the curriculum renewal, that transition is, as you can imagine, very comprehensive and is taking everybody a great deal of effort. You know, things like training of staff, you know, changing systems, records management. It touches on every aspect of a system, including inclusive schooling. So, really, what we're trying to do is get that moved along to such a point that then once we're fully shifted toward British Columbia's curriculum, we're looking at British Columbia's inclusive schooling which really is related to the curriculum. So it's all interrelated but we're really trying to focus on that curriculum and

student assessment transition before we begin with all of those other changes that are naturally going to follow. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. So first I just wanted to start -- and I do apologize, if I'm repeating others. But the healthy food for learning program, great program. I can't say enough about having and helping kids have access to healthy food.

Given that we are seeing a high cost of inflation, which is affecting food prices, grocery prices, etcetera, and I've had actually people reach out about how important and more we need help here, I'm just wondering we're staying pretty stagnant; has there been any sort of assessment of, like, the needs of this program; is there more money that's going to be contributed; is it based on the funding formula, all of those types of things? So a little bit of information there. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And this number has been very stagnant. I don't know if it's changed for the last decade actually. I do know that when I was in school, there was no food anywhere. And now when I go and I tour schools, there is food all over the place. There's apples. When you walk in the door, there's sandwiches in coolers that students can go get. So there is a lot more food. This is one area where schools receive funding. There's also the Breakfast Club of Canada and there's a number of other organizations that all contribute. That being said, I agree that this is very important and I would love to see this increased year after year.

What is currently happening is the federal government is looking at a national food program for schools and so we are -- yes, we are basically waiting to see what they're going to do, and then engage with them on that. So I'm very hopeful, and I think that the future is bright for food in schools. Thank you.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know been a very very long week for all of us. That is great. I am not really reassured, though, by waiting to hear what the federal government says and what they're going to do in a national program. To me, again, people speaking to me that, you know -- or telling me, and even my mom's own, you know, history and experience

as a teacher teaching grades 1 and 2, that when kids are showing up to school hungry they don't learn. And given that we're having such an issue in a lot of our sort of social programming areas and wellness areas, you know, in the North, I think this couldn't even be -- like, as much as it might be deemed to be adequate and you are seeing apples and bananas in classrooms, I would -- I can't believe it's adequate for 33 communities and all of the children that are -- that would be affected by this. So I just want to put in a plug for at least some inflationary increases or some extra money being found. And even if that means the kids are taking that extra food home at the end of the day, there's younger siblings at home, there's elders at home, it's not going to go to waste, so. More of a comment on that.

My next question is around the northern youth abroad. I know that obviously during COVID that was very difficult to have -- you know, have that program get executed. But, again, we're still seeing it fairly stagnant at around a \$100,000. Given that we've had a lot of conversations with your colleague from MACA around opportunities for youth and children and really just how much, you know, having a chance to travel and see something outside of your realm, how important that is. I've only heard amazing things about the kids and youth coming out of this program.

Can the Minister speak to whether we can see or expect to see another increase coming there. Are there other areas that they access funding from the GNWT to support this program? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And this is one organization that's receiving those inflationary increases so that's why they get the whole \$2,000 more. And going forward, I expect that will stay. I understand they do receive funding from other departments I think more than we provide. And I agree. I mean, they provide great experiences. I can get the deputy minister to speak a bit more about this but I will say that from the anecdotal evidence that I've seen, that students benefit greatly from this and it is an amazing program. Thank you. To the deputy minister. Thank you.

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

MR. MacDONALD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And certainly lots of experience with Northern Youth Abroad. They're an excellent partner, and they have been for many years both here in the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut as

well. Other than their core programming, which I think most of the Members would be quite familiar with, ECE, with the development of northern distance learning, has partnered with Northern Youth Abroad on what's called a post-secondary bridging experience. So we really rely and leverage their expertise with working with youth, organizing youth to travel. And they take northern distance learning students from our smallest communities to universities to firsthand get a tour experience and get an understanding of what life is like in a post-secondary experience. And that's been done in Edmonton. More recently since COVID, as that's resumed, the experience was in Calgary, and we've heard nothing but good things about it. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I actually had an opportunity when I was in grade 11 or 12 to go to UBC Connect, which was very much the same thing, and even coming from Abbotsford, BC, which is not that small, it was still very overwhelming to come into Vancouver. So definitely I think that's wonderful, and I'm glad to hear it's not just about those specific programs or instances that I see on more advertised.

So my next question comes back around to the funding to the schools. So it's my understanding that due to the high cost or increases to insurance lately that the schools that the GNWT has agreed to insure the YK1 assets, etcetera, because they no longer can afford it themselves. But in the meantime, they have had to sign an MOU because to keep the schools maintained to the same level that the GNWT was already doing, and so that's because obviously the GNWT has a standard that they need to maintain and so the problem with that is that no extra funding has come to the YK1, and I'm assuming other school boards, to help them with this increased level of maintenance costs.

And in particular, in my riding is Sir John Franklin, which is now I understand experiencing huge issues around a pipe that's bursting repeatedly and there's problems there, and it's like a \$30,000 fix, which now has to come out of the general coffers of the school board itself. So, you know, while I understand why the GNWT has made the schools commit to this level, they just financially can't do it. And, again, that comes back to the cut of programming and such is what we understand to make up this money.

So can the Minister speak a little bit to that. Is there an opportunity to use a trades program

even, something, to reduce these maintenance costs to the schools for the crumbling infrastructure that they are also experiencing? Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. And I know it's a different situation here in Yellowknife where the school boards predate the Government of the Northwest Territories and so they own their schools. It would be simpler if the government just -- oh no, sorry, not that school. You know what, maybe I'll just hand this over to Yellowknife's own Sam Shannon. Thank you.

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

MR. SHANNON: Thank you, Madam Chair. So as the Member alluded to, we are in the early stages of this new situation where the GNWT is now insuring the YK1 and YCS assets. And, yes, there is a bit of a difference in the levels of maintenance and the types of maintenance and just the requirements due to different insurers. So as we're working through this together, we're really learning the experience, and we're exploring ways to improve things to modify things but, really, at this point we haven't gone through it long enough to really know what the solutions are at this point in time. So the lines of communication are open. We're working with our colleagues from both school boards to ensure that the maintenance needs are being met, and we're exploring ways to make sure that our dollars go far as possible. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can I get a commitment from the Minister to help fund this specific pipe burst or pipe issue with Sir John Franklin? And the reason that I bring it up is that I have to wonder that while it's not your department, there was also a break in the main in the parking lot area of Sir John Franklin over this last week which then sent water down 49th Street to then go all the way down in front of a large, like portion of the next street's houses. So I can't help but wonder if some of that is maybe perhaps related. And given the way that the school board is situated and this being a new thing, I think it would only be fair that given that you own the asset that the department pay for the repair on this pipe. Thank you.

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. So I'll have to admit I am not as familiar with this particular issue and school maintenance as I could be. So what I will do -- so I can't commit to anything right now but I will commit to actually talking to the chair about this. You know, I have regular contact with the chairs of the school boards, and I know we have a new chair at YK1, and he's not shy to share his thoughts and concerns. So I will have that conversation with him and then work with the department. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister. Member? Are there any further questions under junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services? Seeing none, please turn to page 52.

Education, Culture and Employment, junior kindergarten to grade 12 school services, operation expenditure summary, Main Estimates 2023-2024, \$200,194,000. Does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

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

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

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

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

Thank you, Minister, and thank you to your witnesses. We'll see you in the future.

Sergeant-at-arms, please escort the witnesses from the Chamber.

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

Report of Committee of the Whole

MS. SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 813-19(2) and I would like to report progress. Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Do we have a seconder? Member for Yellowknife North. All those in favour? All

those opposed? Any abstentions? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Tim Mercer): Orders of the day for Friday, March 3rd, 2023, 10 a.m.

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
 - Oral Question 1343-19(2), Impacts of COVID-19 on Education
 - Oral Question 1404-19(2), Child Care Funding Supports for Teen Parents
 - Oral Question 1411-19(2), Renewable Energy
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to Commissioner's Address
11. Petitions
12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notice of Motions
16. Motions
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. First Reading of Bills
19. Second Reading of Bills
 - Bill 64, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, No. 3

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 60, An Act to Amend the Petroleum products and Carbon Tax Act
- Bill 61, An Act to Amend the Ombud Act
- Bill 63, An Act to Amend the Official Languages Act
- Bill 66, An Act to Amend the Property Assessment and Taxation Act
- Bill 67, An Act to Amend the Fire Prevention Act
- Committee Report 40-19(2), Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on Bill 61: An Act to Amend the Ombud Act
- Committee Report 43-19(2), Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on Bill 63: An Act to Amend the Official Languages Act
- Committee Report 44-19(2), Special Committee on Reconciliation and Indigenous Affairs Final Report: A Northwest Territories Approach to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Negotiating Agreements
- Minister's Statement 264-19(2), Response to the NWT Chief Coroner's Report on Suicide
- Tabled Document 681-19(2), Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 26-19(2): Report on the Child and Family Services Act – Lifting Children, Youth and Families: An All of Territory Approach to Keeping Families Together
- Tabled Document 694-19(2), Northwest Territories Coroner Service 2021-2022 Early Release of Data
- Tabled Document 813-19(2), Main Estimates

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 Friday, March 3rd, 2023 at 10 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 5:52 p.m.

