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The Honourable Frederick Blake Jr, Speaker

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Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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Unedited Hansard

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Monday May 29, 2023****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:31 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Frederick Blake Jr.):

Colleagues, before we continue with our business before the House, I'd like to recognize Grand Chief Jackson Lafferty who is with us today. He was first elected in the 15th Legislative Assembly in July of 2005, re-elected in the 16th and 17th Assemblies, where he served as Deputy Premier; Minister of Education, Culture and Employment; Minister responsible for Official Languages; and, Minister responsible for Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission. He was acclaimed in the 18th Legislative Assembly and was elected by many of us as Speaker. Thank you for all you have done with the House here, and we've had unveiling of his portrait here today. And thank you for all joining us. Mahsi cho.

I would like to recognize Mr. Ryan Yakelya from Tuktoyaktuk. We all went to Grolier Hall. I'm sure Diane and Paulie remember him as well. Hope you enjoy the House today. Mahsi.

Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Justice.

Ministers' Statements**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 358-19(2):
INDEPENDENT LEGAL ADVICE AND
REPRESENTATION PROGRAM**

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, with funding from the federal government, the Department of Justice is enhancing access to free legal advice and legal representation for survivors of sexual assault and intimate partner violence through the establishment of the Independent Legal Advice and Representation Program.

In 2019, the Government of the Northwest Territories commissioned the Aurora Research Institute to conduct an evidence-based study to use as a guide to better support survivors of

intimate partner, gender-based violence, and sexual assault in the NWT. Concurrently, researchers contracted by the YWCA NWT completed a study on the experience of victims applying for emergency protection orders. Both studies highlighted the, sometimes, dizzying complexity of the systems encountered by survivors.

The findings from these studies were also consistent with the final report of the National Inquiry of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which calls on governments to provide vulnerable individuals facing the threat of domestic violence with to independent legal services and advice.

The department has completed jurisdictional research and consultation with a variety of stakeholders, including other independent legal advice and representation programs in Canada, the YWCA NWT, RCMP, health and social services, the Public Prosecution Service of Canada's sexual violence team, and the NWT Legal Aid Commission to support the design, development, and the implementation of an Independent Legal Advice and Representation Program in the Northwest Territories.

The department is excited to be working with the YWCA NWT to deliver this program. The addition of free legal advice and representation to the existing NWT-wide delivery of emergency protection orders will ensure people are informed about whether they should obtain one, the ramifications of obtaining one, and how to access help in dealing with existing ones. The program also expands access to free legal advice and representation for survivors of intimate partner and gender-based violence and sexual assault to support their navigation through the criminal justice system and make informed decisions related to their unique circumstances.

The Independent Legal Advice and Representation Program supports service delivery with an independent legal advice coordinator who receives and coordinates program referrals from a range of service providers. Survivors may also self-refer into the

program through a 1-800 number. The program has a panel of lawyers to provide survivors with up to four hours of free legal advice and representation.

The program coordinator receives the initial referrals, conducts client screening and intake, and matches survivors with a lawyer, and will conduct public awareness and training sessions to support program referrals, uptake, and information sharing. The goal is to increase informed decision-making and understanding about legal decisions.

Mr. Speaker, the Independent Legal Advice and Representation Program is now in place, and my hope is that it helps improve the safety, security, and access to justice for survivors of intimate partner and gender-based violence and sexual assault. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Environment and Climate Change.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 359-19(2):
2023 WILDFIRE SEASON

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, wildfires are a natural part of the northern landscape and are important for forest health and renewal. However, we recognize that wildfires can pose a significant threat to our communities, our infrastructure, and other values at risk.

I want to start by recognizing the challenges faced by the K'atlodeeche First Nation and the Town of Hay River during a historically early start to our wildfire season. Our hearts go out to everyone who had to evacuate their homes and to those who had lost homes from this wildfire. I would like to thank the fire crews and wildfire management teams who have worked so hard on this fire and continue to work on protecting these communities.

Mr. Speaker, we have a tough wildfire season ahead of us. Temperatures are expected to be high and our forests are very dry, increasing the wildfire risk in the southern half of the NWT. We are still very early in the fire season, even though the events near K'atlodeeche First Nation make it feel like it has been a full season already.

Mr. Speaker, our government is well prepared for this year's fire season. Our team of wildfire professionals work all winter long to be ready to go once the fire season started. A huge amount of work goes on behind the scenes to support our field operations. Like we do with flooding, our communications team put out a lot of proactive wildfire messaging in advance of the

season, and we work with municipal and community affairs and the emergency management office who are ready to activate on any emergency, including fires, at any time.

As soon as we received the weather forecasts for the 2023 fire season, it became clear we should have an early start to the season. We brought on more resources and started them earlier than we have in the past. There are 34 fourteen crews positioned across the territory this year ready to fight fires on the ground, an increase of two from last year. We updated contracts to bring our long-term aircrafts on several weeks earlier and added some additional tankers to be added to the response to a hot, dry season. When the fire near K'atlodeeche First Nation and Hay River started, we already had air tankers and helicopters on the ground, brought on strength several weeks earlier, that were ready to respond the morning the fire started. We had an Electra working out of Hay River as well as helicopters bucketing water on the fires. Two other tanker groups were scheduled for an earlier startup for May 15th and started working on that fire that day. There were a number of days when aircraft could not land at the Hay River Airport due to smoke but the Electra continued to operate out of the Yellowknife as the next closest air tanker base. This proactive approach allowed us to have aircraft and crews on-site to immediately respond to our first big challenge of the season.

So far this summer, we have had 17 fires with a total of 18,364 hectares burned. Of these, eight have been human caused close to communities. The 10-year average for this time is three fires and 17 hectares burned. Our season started several weeks earlier and is way ahead of what we normally expect to see in terms of timing, numbers, and human-caused fires.

Mr. Speaker, despite this challenging start, I am proud to say that we were prepared and ready for this season and our teams have responded quickly and effectively so far. Going forward for the rest of the summer, we have 100 people working in our fire program, from remote communication specialists to clerks to logistics personnel, to ensure firefighters on the ground have the supports they need every day. We also have a pool of approximately 200 extra firefighters we can call on to help mop up fires and take on other critical fire operation activities.

Throughout the K'atlodeeche First Nation-Hay River fire, we have seen extraordinary skills and dedication of our wildfire team in action as they start work around the clock. People from across

the territory have come together to help limit the fire's growth and impact to our communities. Fire crews and other wildfire staff from every region in the NWT have been coming together to provide a coordinated, effective, and tireless response. I want to reiterate what I have heard from many members of the public and extend a heartfelt thank you to all of our wildfire staff for their incredible work to keep our communities safe.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with communities to strengthen their protection against wildfires. With \$20 million in investments leveraged by the NWT Association of Communities, work is going ahead to complete fuel breaks in communities at an unprecedented rate. Community wildfire protection plans are in place in all 29 forested communities. Our government will continue to provide advice to communities and work with them to increase their resilience and reduce the risk of damage from future wildfires.

Mr. Speaker, we are also making investments for people to get the tools they need to reduce their own risk at home. One important tool is the promotion of FireSmart practices around people's homes, cabins, and businesses. Taking steps ahead of time to remove things that burn around your home and property will help reduce the risk of damage when fires hit close to home. With much of the season still ahead of us, we want to remind people it is never too early to take these steps.

You can start by cleaning under your deck, removing firewood away from your home, keeping your gutters clean, and getting rid of bush and debris from around your yard. I encourage residents to search FireSmart NWT to learn more and follow the guide to FireSmart your property.

Given the hot and dry conditions we expect for the southern NWT this summer, it is critical that people take their role in preventing fires seriously. We will continue to do our part to provide public information and updates regularly to help people make good choices.

Mr. Speaker, I want to be very clear when I say this: Wildfires like the one near the K'atlodeeche First Nation can happen to any NWT community below the treeline. With dry forests and lots of natural fuel, it will only take one spark to start a wildfire. It then takes just a bit of a strong wind for it to spread and become a real problem for communities, for the people who live there, and for the firefighters trying to protect us.

Everyone has a part to play in preventing wildfires. During the K'atlodeeche First Nation

and Hay River fire, the impacted communities stepped up to play a large critical role in coordinating the response, and we commend them for their work and will continue to be there for their support. Individuals can do their part by not starting campfires or any other burns when the danger is high or extreme, as it has been for most of May, and will be for some time to come. Choices, like never leaving fires unattended and always soaking them, stirring them and soaking them again until they are cool to the touch before leaving. It is also important to be spark aware by cleaning out mufflers on ATVs, never park on dry grass, and checking your chains before taking your trailer down the highway.

Mr. Speaker, as leaders, we have the responsibility to make good decisions and be models for this behaviour. I call on everyone in this House to take these messages to your communities to help reduce the alarming number of person-caused fires we already have seen this season. We will all be safer for it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Ministers' statements. Minister responsible for Industry, Tourism and Investment.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 360-19(2):
UPDATE ON THE GREAT SLAVE LAKE
COMMERCIAL FISHERY REVITALIZATION

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, the revitalization of the Great Slave Lake commercial fishery has been a goal of the Government of the Northwest Territories since it was first proposed in the 2014 NWT Economic Opportunities Strategy. This goal continues to be supported by our own government's mandate to increase food security through locally produced, harvested, and affordable food.

Central to our efforts has been the construction of a new fish processing facility in Hay River capable of processing and packaging Great Slave Lake fish for market. I am happy to advise Members today that this new plant is now in the final stage of construction and commissioning. I can confirm that the building envelope is complete and all processing equipment is installed. Plumbing, painting and electrical elements are being finalized, including freezers and filleting equipment.

Meanwhile, specialized technicians are setting up and calibrating processing equipment using various species from the Great Slave Lake and training for plant operators and fish processors is anticipated to begin this month. Notwithstanding delays due to fire evacuations,

the plant will be in operation for the 2023 open water season. The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment will be collaborating with the Freshwater Fish Market Corporation and relying on their expertise to move things forward this summer.

An agreement is in place that will see the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation operate the plant for a three-year period of transitional training and capacity building with the intention that the facility will ultimately be run as an independent, northern-based business. In order to arrive at that goal, we need to start strong. Therefore, the immediate goals are to ensure the plant gets operational, to hire and build local capacity, and to operate the plant with a plan for systematic-phased transition.

To ensure the plant receives sufficient product volume, there are several actions that have been identified under the revitalization strategy and are being implemented to support increased production. The strategy includes plans to open remote receiving stations in the North Slave region, the training of new fishers and helpers, investing in new technologies, as well as in summer and winter fishery development, and also in longer-term recruitment efforts for new fishers.

A winter fish training program was delivered in March, both in Hay River and Yellowknife. The program gives new fishers the skills and knowledge to have successful winter harvests and presents an opportunity to expand fishing operations year-round once fishers get established. Summer training programs are scheduled in June for Hay River, Fort Resolution, and Yellowknife.

Mr. Speaker, once certified, the Hay River Fish Plant will increase the reach of territorial fish products to southern markets in addition to being a local and secure source of nutritious and culturally significant food within the territory. The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment is also working on a plan to generate higher returns for fishers. This will include finding viable markets for by-catch such as fish fertilizer, roe, collagen, and canning. In the short-term, increasing fishing production levels will be the essential driver of the plant's long-term profitability.

That means supporting fishers. So importantly, we also continue to work with the Tu Cho Fishers Cooperative and have recently identified a list of action items to support our shared goals around fish production and towards raising the price of fish for Northwest Territories fishers including opportunities to speak with one Northwest Territories voice to another key player in the success of this

industry - the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

During this transition period, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment and Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation continue to monitor operating costs, revenues and expenses, to ensure that maximum value is returning to Great Slave Lake fishers.

The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment is also currently revising the Commercial Fishery Support Program and considering additional programs that might contribute to the growth and modernization of the Northwest Territories commercial fishery with funding and incentives.

In all of this, Mr. Speaker, the development of the Hay River fish processing plant is representative of the commitments that our government has made to addressing concerns about food security and economic development. I look forward to seeing the Hay River processing plant eventually support the sustainability of the fishing sector, improve the livelihoods of fishermen, and increase local food production and economic value for the territory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 361-19(2):
ADVANCING TREATY, LAND, RESOURCES
AND SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENTS
WITH INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENTS

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Mr. Speaker, settling and implementing treaty, land, resources, and self-government agreements is a key priority for the Government of the Northwest Territories within the priorities of the 19th Legislative Assembly. Advancing agreements with Indigenous government partners supports reconciliation by moving us closer to recognizing and affirming Aboriginal and treaty rights and empowering program and service delivery by Indigenous governments.

Mr. Speaker, reaching agreement on matters of such profound importance to Indigenous peoples, and to the whole of the Northwest Territories and Canada, takes time due to a number of challenging issues faced by all parties involved in negotiations. Given these challenges, I am pleased to let you know today that we are making meaningful progress in our attempts to settle treaty, land, resources, and self-government agreements.

Over the past four months, the Government of the Northwest Territories, Canada, and three Indigenous governments have initialed milestone agreements signaling our shared commitment to move forward. We have initialed a draft Reconciliation and Process Agreement with Canada and the K'atloodeeche First Nation, a draft Agreement in Principle with Canada and the Akaitcho First Nations, and a draft Final Self-Government Agreement with Canada and the Tlegohli Got'ine government of the Northwest Territories.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has a legal duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous governments and organizations whenever it considers carrying out a government action that has the potential to adversely affect asserted or established Aboriginal or treaty rights. Consultation is necessary to ensure that Indigenous people have the opportunity to provide input and have their concerns addressed before decisions are made that may impact their rights and interests. With the signing of these draft agreements, the Government of the Northwest Territories and Canada have initiated consultation with other potentially affected Indigenous parties and have invited them to conduct internal reviews of the draft agreements.

Following consultation and internal reviews, negotiators for the parties will address any issues that arise during consultation or internal reviews before finalizing the agreements. I would like to express my gratitude to all of those involved at each table for their hard work and dedication to advancing these agreements, making it possible for each party to get to this point in their respective processes.

The initialing of these agreements reflects our government's commitment to strengthening relationships with Indigenous governments and demonstrates our sincere interest in meaningful partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, another example of the Government of the Northwest Territories' commitment to strengthening relationships with Indigenous governments and cultivating meaningful partnerships is our collaboration with the Intergovernmental Council. Together we have worked hard on developing and implementing the Intergovernmental Council Legislative Development Protocol, which has guided the last two years of unprecedented, collaborative work on land and resource legislative initiatives. We have also worked closely with Indigenous governments to establish the NWT Council of Leaders and modern treaties to build

collaborative tables to discuss shared issues such as health, housing, and the economy. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my Minister's statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

The work at the Council of Leaders to draft the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Implementation Act, which is currently being considered by the Legislative Assembly, is something that I am particularly proud of during my time as Premier.

It is also important to mention that to promote transparency and support the negotiation tables, this government published our negotiating principles and interests and negotiating mandates summary. The negotiating mandates are key to informing the government's participation in the negotiations of Aboriginal rights agreements as they set out the interests guiding the negotiators in concluding agreements.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of how this government has changed its approach to work more collaboratively with Indigenous partners, to listen to their concerns, and to be flexible and accommodating as we work to advance negotiations. In this regard, I believe we have set a positive example for others to follow throughout Canada.

I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm this government's commitment to work toward settling and implementing treaty, land, resources, and self-government agreements. Just as important, this government will continue to develop the relationships we have built with Indigenous governments. This collaborative approach advances reconciliation, recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and treaty rights, supports program and service delivery by Indigenous governments, and sets the stage for further economic development in the Northwest Territories.

Mashi cho, Mr. Speaker.

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

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1527-19(2): FIRE RESPONSE

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the last two weeks for many residents of K'atloodeeche and Hay River has been emotional and traumatizing. Residents of K'atloodeeche had little time in which to evacuate as the fire approached

quickly. As well, Hay River residents were also asked to leave in the early morning hours.

Mr. Speaker, many have expressed their appreciation for the work done by firefighters and emergency measures personnel throughout this distressing ordeal. They are the ones on the frontline, and I would like to say thank you to all of them.

Mr. Speaker, it is also important that we acknowledge, and must not forget those many volunteers, communities, NGO's, evacuees, and residents who stepped up to provide immediate supports to those displaced from their homes and communities. This included financial and moral support, gift cards, temporary accommodation, transportation of people and supplies, meals, clothes, bedding, and boarding for pets. And I say thank you for everything you did for all the evacuees, firefighters, and emergency personnel throughout.

Mr. Speaker, this is an event where we need to analyze what we did and find solutions to do better. This includes:

- Identifying risk factors;
- Actively fire smarting our communities, property, and homes;
- Having an effective evacuation plan;
- Identify transportation requirements for evacuees;
- Identify evacuation routes, centres, and accommodation;
- Fair and equitable compensation package for evacuees; and
- Providing relevant information to residents routinely so they are prepared.

Mr. Speaker, during flooding and fires, we as government must do more and that more needs to be done prior to, during, and after such an event. We as government talk about what will be done to prevent damage to communities but tend to soon forget what we promised and revert to doing little or nothing at all. When, in reality, we can, in cooperation with residents, communities and Indigenous governments, identify and implement preventative measures to minimize or eliminate any disaster.

Mr. Speaker, homes and community infrastructure has been lost; however, we have been fortunate that there has been no loss of life in the fire and flooding that occurred over the last two years. But our luck will soon run out

which is why it is ever so important we review our processes for addressing disasters, update our emergency plans, and develop a communication plan that provides timely and relevant information. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1528-19(2):
TAR SANDS SPILLS AND DISCHARGE
REGULATION DEVELOPMENT

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. It's great to see one of our Ministers working to protect the environment. I am aware of some activity by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change on transboundary water issues with Alberta and Canada since we last met.

The Minister met with the Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas on April 19th to discuss the continuing failure of the Government of Alberta to comply with the transboundary water agreement following two secret spills from the tar sands. Our Minister of Environment and Climate Change appeared virtually before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development on April 24th as a witness on their study of the toxic leak of tailing ponds, and I watched that proceeding recently. And it was very interesting, Mr. Speaker. He also met virtually with the federal Environment and Climate Change Minister Guilbeault the same day. It appears there may have been some commitments made towards better communications and compliance with the transboundary water agreement. These may include:

- Notifying our government of any spills as soon as Alberta is aware of them;
- Discussing improvements to communication and notification between Alberta and the GNWT on the new notification and monitoring working group;
- Being supportive of the inclusion of the Alberta-NWT bilateral management committee of Indigenous representation on this new federal working group; and
- Briefing the GNWT on findings of knowledge gap reports.

I would also like to know whether there was any progress on opening up the secret processes of developing discharge regulations. I will have questions later today for our Minister of

Environment and Climate Change. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1529-19(2):
CABINS

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would really like to leave this Assembly with changing our approach to cabins. Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to address concerns around pricing. It's impossible to have any stakeholder engagement on cabins without the first thing you're hearing about is the complaint that cabin fees went up 600 percent about five years ago, Mr. Speaker. And we still have not done anything to address that. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, our pricing and taxation, it does not make sense. Right now under the taxes, a squatter is paying the same amount of tax as a million-dollar mansion on the Ingraham Trail as is a remote cabin in the middle of nowhere used for hunting and trapping purposes. These are three different things. Clearly, they should be paying different taxes and be in different categories. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make some progress on rights-based cabins. I believe these also need to be put in a separate category where there are different fees, different rules, and different types of tenure. Next, Mr. Speaker, I believe we need to have a path for title where appropriate. Next, Mr. Speaker, we need to sort out the rules around leases. We have hundreds of people illegally living in their recreational leases. We all know we are not going to kick hundreds of people out of their home inside a housing crisis. So let's do something about this and legalize them living there and figure out who is actually allowed to live in a cabin out in the woods and why we're making that illegal in the first place. Next, Mr. Speaker, there is insatiable demand for cabins. We know this. The last lottery had hundreds of applicants for every single lease out there. We know there are hundreds of people who have decided since they can't get a cabin, they will squat illegally. On one hand, we're trying to kick them off but there is nowhere for this pent-up demand to go. It is instead increasing the price of a cabin to an absolutely ludicrous price. We have artificially inflated the cost of leases in this territory. We need to review all of this. We need to implement our Public Land Act, and we need to do it before this Assembly ends. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1530-19(2):
ADDICTIONS AND TREATMENT CENTRES

MS. NOKLEBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week I met with the RCMP to discuss concerns that my constituents have been raising with me. There is a fear to walk downtown or on the Frame Lake Trail in the evenings with residents reporting an escalation in property crime radiating out from the downtown core throughout the city.

I belong to two neighbourhood groups from my riding on social media and in both, I see an increasing number of posts and comments regarding people casing out their neighbourhoods, rifling through vehicles for loose change, or brazenly stealing from their yards in the middle of the day. The RCMP told me that in one month, they average about 1300 calls in Yellowknife; of those, 500 are in the immediate downtown core.

While this may seem like the others are not a result of the growing social issues in the downtown, this is not the case. Often these are reports of groups of thieves that are targeting specific neighbourhoods in order to find enough easy cash, or items to sell, to feed their addictions, whether that be alcohol or crack.

Mr. Speaker, crack is an epidemic in our territory but you rarely hear the Minister, or the government, speak of it. They will talk about drugs tainted with lethal opioids and issue emergency warnings for that; however, where is the acknowledgement of the crack crisis we are facing? Where is the action plan to deal with the crack that is ravaging communities?

A friend recently pointed out that for the first time ever during the spring community cleanup, they found numerous broken crack pipes around the downtown and in the forested areas around it. Crack and alcohol addictions are destroying our communities. Mr. Speaker, not just in Yellowknife.

On Friday night, I witnessed an extremely disturbing situation involving a young child, barely a toddler, on the streets at midnight and in the company of some people very obviously in the throes of addiction. It broke my heart and I have to question what is going on in this territory?

Mr. Speaker, this should not be happening, not in Canada and not in the 21st century. When is this government going to stand up and start taking treatment seriously and stop making decisions based on money? One only has to look at the loss of the Poundmaker's contract to know where their priorities lie. Saving money

and asserting control, Mr. Speaker; that is the priority of the government. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1531-19(2):
DISASTER RESPONSE POLICY

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for my statement today, I want to speak once again about the Disaster Assistance Policy under the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, last May the Government of the Northwest Territories completed a comprehensive review of MACA's Disaster Assistance Policy following the NWT flooding in 2021. I initially agreed with that review primarily because the policy was outdated and needed to be modernized to account for the changing nature of natural disasters within the context of climate change. I hoped that the review would produce new results addressing some of service gaps that the old policy did not cover. But I was disappointed with the end result that came out last May.

First, Mr. Speaker, I suggested to the Minister of MACA on many occasions that the updated policy must be expanded and eligible to more people during unique natural disaster occurrences. I urged that the new policy must account for novel and extraordinary events that may occur in our communities, especially given the ongoing effects of climate change that brings a greater livelihood of extreme events. However, Mr. Speaker, I was disappointed when I read the updated policy which did not go far enough to help victims of natural disasters.

The first red flag was the definition of disaster, which read: An emergency caused by a natural phenomenon of unusual proportion affecting a large number of people which threatens loss of life, injury, property damage, and economic disruption.

The second red flag was the list of emergencies that may be eligible for assistance, which had no reference of tornados, which was odd because by now I'm sure everyone recalls the tornado that struck Fort Smith four years ago.

The third red flag was a section on excluded situations where disaster assistance is not eligible, which includes an event affecting a single sector or property. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to state that I believe it's been both MACA's policy, and lack thereof, combined with ineffectual policies within Housing NWT that have indirectly contributed to the housing crisis which is only being compounded by recent natural disasters in the NWT. Because if a wildfire burns down only one home in one community, then under the disaster policy they will not be eligible for disaster assistance. And the same goes for replacing or repairing a home built in a designated disaster-prone area and help will only be provided to a single property a total of three times.

These are facts that most people do not know about and should be aware of, and the Government of the Northwest Territories needs to make that very clear to communities and people who experience multiple natural disasters. I will have questions for the MACA Minister later today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1532-19(2):
TLICHO ADMINISTRATION REGION

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Tlicho Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement was signed in 2003 by representatives of the Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the Government of Canada. Through the Tlicho Agreement, the Tlicho gained the tools and resources to strengthen our economy and protect and promote Tlicho culture, language, heritage, lands and resources. Currently, the Tlicho Community Services Agency delivers a number of programs and services including from the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, the 19th Legislative Assembly set out 22 priorities, including advancing regional decision-making authority. According to the February 2022 and January 2023 annual status report, this priority focused on empowering regional and community staff through providing training to ensure staff are aware of their decision-making authority. This priority has been marked as fulfilled but it did not go far enough.

Mr. Speaker, in 2016, Deline Got'ine government signed their self-government agreement. Currently, there are a number of other Indigenous groups that are negotiating self-government agreements. As more and more self-government agreements are signed

and Indigenous governments draw down jurisdiction for programs and services, the government of the NWT needs to adapt and reevaluate the current administrative region.

To better serve Tlicho residents, the Tlicho needs a new and separate Tlicho administrative region that serves the communities of Behchoko, Gameti, Wekweeti, and Whati. The regions need to be consistent within all the departments so there are no confusion. This is real regional decision-making authorities. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the development of a Tlicho administrative region aligns with the spirit of the United Nation Declaration on Indigenous People to, quote, "freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development."

Mr. Speaker, a Tlicho administrative region would provide Tlicho greater financial authority to provide additional programs and services that respond to the needs of Tlicho and for the people in the Tlicho region. Additional employment opportunities would be created with positions in the region. A Tlicho administrative region is more accountable to the Tlicho people.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to make corrections with reference to population I said on Friday, May 26th, 2023. According to Stats Canada 2022 the population in Tlicho region is about 3,200. Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Premier.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1533-19(2):
HOMELESSNESS IN INUVIK

MS. SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to bring attention to the homeless shelters in Inuvik as I have many times in this House. Early on in this Assembly, I raised the concerns of the emergency warming shelter and the issues that they were having and having to close its door due to internal issues just as the temperatures were dropping. Mr. Speaker, the Minister's response at that time was to assume control over these shelters, and both shelters were dissolved -- the shelter boards were dissolved. I have asked the Minister what is the future plan of these shelters in Inuvik, many times since then. What will happen with the current staff that are now government employees? What is her department doing for a long-term plan for

the residents that utilize these shelters? Mr. Speaker, there was a request for proposal at one point to have a non-profit organization run the shelters. Nothing has come of that. And her department is still running the shelters. The Minister also met with leaders in my community. Did they come up with a plan? I'm not sure.

Mr. Speaker, the residents, staff, and the community of Inuvik want and need to know what is the short and long-term plan.

Mr. Speaker, according to the information I have, the staff contracts are until August 31st, 2023. That is also the beginning of fall when the temperature begins to drop. If we don't have a plan now, we'll be making drastic decisions again come August. And I want answers, and I will be questioning the Minister responsible for Homelessness. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Members' statements. Member for Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1534-19(2):
KOSMOS 954 CRASH

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in March 2023, I rose in the House to bring light to the Kosmos 954 incident, a disaster that left deep scars on our lands and the people in the Tu Nedhe-Willideh riding. Mr. Speaker, to recap the benefit of those listening here today, in the winter of 1978, Kosmos 954 and its nuclear reactor crashed over Great Slave Lake. The crash scattered radioactive debris over 124,000 square kilometres over the frozen lands and lakes and recovered pieces emitted the radiation level of 500 rad tonnes per hour, enough to kill a person in a few hours.

Mr. Speaker, it takes more than 700 million years for uranium to fully decay. Exposure to radioactive material can pose serious health risks. Depending on the level or duration of exposure, it can lead to acute chronic illness, including cancer, genetic mutation, organ damage, and in the NWT rural and remote communities our people have limited access to health care facilities making it difficult to detect and treat radiation related to health issues. Radioactive contamination can have long lasting effects on the environment. It can contaminate soil, water sources, vegetation and wildlife, disrupting ecosystem and food chain. This contamination can persist for many years making it difficult for Indigenous people to use their natural resources for agriculture, fishing or hunting.

Mr. Speaker, I must stress that the radioactive contamination can create a sense of fear

stigma within our communities. People may experience anxiety, stress, and mental health issues due to the concerns about their safety and the future of their community. For decades, this has been the case. And the literal fallout from Kosmos 954 has continued to affect social relationships and the psychological well-being of individuals and communities.

Mr. Speaker, prompt and effective management include monitoring, cleanup, and community support is crucial to mitigate the impacts and facilitate recovery of rural and remote areas affected by the radioactive contamination. While initial efforts were carried out swiftly during their operation Morning Light, there are still strong concerns about the drastic spike in cancer in the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh riding around Great Slave Lake in the early 1979. That continues today.

Mr. Speaker, 45 years after the crash, there are still questions, and later today I hope the Premier will be able to provide further answers to my questions, so I gave comfort to -- to give comfort to my constituents in the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh riding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Members' statements. Member for Kam Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1535-19(2):
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
REGULATIONS

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Wednesday is the deadline for getting feedback to the GNWT on the student financial assistance regulations. The regulations call for an increase to unlimited semesters for Indigenous students, and this is great news. But why stop there? The draft regulations maintain the six year or 12 semester basic grant cap for non-Indigenous students. Mr. Speaker, this does not keep pace with post-secondary or labour market trends or make sense given how SFA is used today.

Today, the average time to complete a bachelor's degree is almost five years, and the NWT labour market needs predicts the most in-demand jobs as management positions. The GNWT's own recruitment calls for master's degrees for these positions. The NWT also needs lawyers, specialized health care workers and veterinarians, among other positions, professions, all of which require education past a bachelor's degree. In addition to limiting semesters, the regulations also set a \$60,000 cap on the total student loans.

Mr. Speaker, SFA needs the ability to respond to labour market demands and allow funding

beyond the current cap on a discretionary basis. Graduate studies, aviation and medical school are all in demand, cost more, and have demanding workloads which limits student ability to self-fund their education. This policy limitation also doesn't make sense when held against SFA's own usage trends. The program is not fully subscribed. Over the last decade, the number of SFA students has declined while funding for students has remained constant. Less than 10 percent of students access more than four years of funding, and only 4 percent of SFA recipients are graduate students. So increasing the cap for all students schooled in the NWT does not stand to drastically change the cost of SFA. While the SFA regulations will continue to limit semesters for some NWT students, the regulations now remove one of the NWT's strongest population retention tools for the remissible loans in one sentence, quote, "eligibility will no longer be based on whether the student was schooled in the NWT", end quote.

Mr. Speaker, every week I hear from families that SFA is what keeps them here in the face of a high cost of living. The NWT has too much to lose by changing the eligibility requirement without a post-graduation residency requirement. But the NWT does, however, absolutely stand to benefit from increased education levels of NWT students and increased incentives to return North for loan forgiveness from extending remissible loan limits. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 1536-19(2):
RETIREMENT OF PAT ROWE

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the House to talk about the village of Fort Simpson's deputy fire chief, Pat Rowe, who retired from the volunteer fire department after 40 plus years of service. Upon returning home from his tour with the army, Pat joined the department in the 1980s. As he said, it was a natural fit, especially after being trained to fight fires in the Armed Forces. As well, it was his way to give back to the community. As he has been quoted in several news articles, it's a job that needs to be done; I just happen to have enough training to make a difference. That's a pretty good feeling when you're able to help.

Like most things in life, you start working your way up the ladder and before you know it, he went from being a firefighter and up to the top as a fire chief. It was a position he held until 2013 when he had some medical issues, that

all the diagnosis was him moving into the role of deputy fire chief and keep on serving our community. As he would say, you have to live every day for what it is or if you stop, life stops.

Mr. Speaker, Pat grew up in Hay River, Northwest Territories, but moved to Fort Simpson with his family when he was a youngster. It's a community he cares a lot about and whether it's volunteering or donating to a cause, it is home. Pat said the decision to step down as the chief was hard, but the department supported him.

Pat is very proud to be part of the NWT firefighter family. He has told me numerous times it's a good group of people whether you are from Yellowknife as a full-time firefighter or from one of the communities' volunteer firefighters. Volunteer firefighters of the North is a unique experience, and people need to be thankful for them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to use some quotes from his best friend and fellow firefighter to describe Pat: He's always led by example. He is an inspiration to everyone and has done a lot for this community. Pat must have responded to thousands of fires and ambulance calls during his 40 plus years. Biggest void for the fire department is all the years of knowledge and experience that goes away with his retirement.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank Mr. Pat Rowe for all his hard work and commitment to the village of Fort Simpson and the residents. Please join me with thanking him. Mahsi cho.

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

RECOGNITION OF VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier today I did a Minister's statement on the Independent Legal Advice and Representation Program, and so I'd like to recognize some representatives from the WYCA here today. We have Hawa Dumbuya-Sesay, the executive director of the WYCA; Nomazulu Khumalo, the organizational development manager; and, Farah Rajan, the independent legal advice and representation coordinator. So we're happy to have our partners in the gallery with us today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Hay River North. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member for Thebacha.

MS. MARTSELOS: I'd like to recognize Dr. Sharma's Indigenous and global health research group with the University of Alberta. They're doing community visits in the North. And especially my friend of that group, Rachel **Austry**, Indigenous community project lead. **And I'd like to say hi today.** Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Thebacha. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

I'd just like to take a moment to recognize two of my pages from Fort McPherson, Brody Alexie-Benoit and Brenden Vitrekwa; they'll be here for the week. And, also, I'd like to thank Desmond Benoit for being the chaperon. It's always good to have lots of help in the Chamber here. Mahsi.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member for Hay River South.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 1524-19(2):
FIRE RESPONSE

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and bear with me. It takes a disaster to spur government to action which, at times, there's a play book and other times there is none. A question being asked is could we have done better? The answer is almost always yes. However, when we are dealing with a disaster as it unfolds, we need to rely on those schooled to the type of disaster at hand, who have firsthand information of what is actually taking place on the ground as with this fire that happened in the South Slave. Having a front row seat to the fire on the K'atlodeche lands, I was impressed with the responsiveness of the department to placing personnel and equipment on the fire at the outset. Without it, damage could have been much worse along with potential loss of life. Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of ECC, were firefighter and emergency personnel, equipment and aircraft in place and ready to be deployed at the time news of the fire was received by the department? Were contracts in place and certification of personnel and equipment completed? Thank you.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, before I answer that question, I have to thank the Member from Hay River South, Hay River North, the Deh Cho, as well as Chief Martel and her council and Mayor Jameson and her council. They showed strong

leadership. There was a number of volunteers that helped here in various other communities. So, again, I thank them very much for this.

In regards to the questions, given preseason forecasting for high conditions in the southern NWT this summer, the GNWT took a number of actions to be prepared for an earlier and challenging fire season. We brought on more fire crews this year and testing and training for fire crews in the south NWT has been completed by the time fire had started. We added additional aircraft support for this season and had them start two weeks earlier.

When the KFN and Hay River fire started, we already had an Electra air tanker and helicopter on the ground in Hay River to begin the work on the fire on that first day and brought in additional helicopters from Fort Smith and the second Electra aircraft from Alberta. A second ECC contracted NWT-based Electra and four Fire Boss air tanker, which had also been brought on strength earlier this year, started working on the fire that next day. As well, we had crews that were on the reserve with Evergreen. There was four of them, and we were able to -- the next day, we had six crews there right away. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister confirm the department was prepared to immediately action the fire on the K'atloodeeche lands; and, how long did it take to mobilize upon receiving word that there was an active fire that was becoming out of control; and, how effective was the response using ground crews and equipment, helicopters, 802s, Electras, and I understand they were even considering bringing in C215s. Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said previously, ECC was prepared for a possible early start to this fire season and had crews, helicopter and air tanker on strength in Hay River. ECC staff were able to respond to the fire on the morning it started with the information of the smoke. A helicopter and initial attack crews responded from Hay River immediately. Another Electra from Alberta arrived mid afternoon to assist. But the evening of the day the fire started, four crews and three helicopters were also working to contain the fire. Crews from Wood Buffalo National Park also assisted early in the response. An incident management team, additional crews, and additional air tankers were also on site the next day. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ROCKY SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this fire is still being actioned although it's being held. We know

personnel time out and replacements are needed. I ask the Minister, did the department bring in replacement personnel equipment from other regions or out of territory; and, what is the department's long-term plan for personnel and equipment considering the potential for fires this season? Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first transition of overhead and crew have already occurred and allowed firefighters to have some much time needed off. Overhead and crews from around the territory serve as the original responders and 24 extra firefighters from across the NWT have been hired and are assisting.

As member of the Canadian Interagency Firefighters Centre, ECC works with other federal, provincial, and territorial wetland fire management agencies to coordinate resource sharing to help with wildfire responses. Early in the KFN and Hay River fire, we brought in an extra Electra tanker from Alberta to assist and brought in 20 firefighters from Nova Scotia last week to assist with this ongoing response. The wildfire season across Canada has been extremely busy, which means all jurisdictions may face other challenges getting additional resources to support wildfire suppression and operation depending on national fire situations at the time. We've also reached out through SWIFT that we look at trying to get international firefighters as well across the northwestern part of the states, Alaska. And, again, we look at across internationally as well to make sure if we need the resources, we get them. 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, knowing that we have had an early start to the fire season, I ask the Minister what plans are in place to help communities with fire smarting, such as building fire guards around the community, or is that responsibility placed squarely on the shoulders of the community governments and who would fund such initiatives? Thank you.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the responsibility for fire smarting in NWT communities is shared by all. And you heard me in my Minister's statement here, it includes the public, homeowners, local, territorial, and federal governments. All 29 forest communities in the NWT have community wildfire protection plans that help guide them in preparing and responding to wildfires. ECC has worked with communities to make sure their plans are updated and continue to provide ongoing advice and assistance to

help them implement their plans. The NWT Association of Communities recently received \$20 million in federal funding which can assist communities in implementing part of their community wildfire protection plan.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before, it is a collective group approach to it and so we all need to take responsibility to make sure our communities and our residents are safe. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1525-19(2):
TAR SANDS SPILLS AND DISCHARGE
REGULATIONS

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. My questions are for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Can the Minister give us any further updates on the secret spills and compliance with the transboundary water agreement by the Government of Alberta? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since the spill and seepage were reported, Imperial Oil has been providing regular updates to the GNWT on its mitigation and redemption work. The Government of Alberta has undertaken monitoring near the spill and has not found evidence the drinking water sources in Lake Athabasca have been affected.

I met with the Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas in April. The Minister agreed to notify the GNWT on any spills as soon as Alberta is aware of the spills as agreed in our transboundary agreement. The federal Department of Environment and Climate Change and Alberta established a notification and monitoring working group to discuss and improve spill notifications. The GNWT successfully advocated to become a member of the working group along with NWT Indigenous governments and representatives. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that. As skeptical as I am about whether there will be any real changes, I do appreciate the efforts of the Minister to resolve this important matter.

Can the Minister tell us what discussions he had with either or both the Alberta and federal ministers about the secret processes of

developing tar sands discharge regulations? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Member for the question. Both Alberta and Canada are considering the development of regulatory guidance or regulations to allow for discharge of treated oil sand tailings water to the Athabasca River. Alberta's conducting scientific studies to support the development of regulatory guidance which will outline requirements for oil sands and operations to release treated oil sands tailing water.

As I've stated previously, the GNWT -- I repeat -- the GNWT will not support the release of oil sands tailings affluent unless rigorous scientific science demonstrates a safe way for it to be done.

I met with the Alberta Minister of Environment and Protected Areas in April. I've asked the Minister how GNWT's comments on the key knowledge gaps reports will be addressed. I also continue to advocate that Alberta engage and consult with NWT Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations as well as the public on the development of any regulations. Officials have met with Canada to receive an update on their regulation development process. Canada's planning to release a discussion paper and conduct consultation with NWT Indigenous governments and organizations this year. The public review period for the federal regulations is anticipated in 2024.

Mr. Speaker, I can also tell you that it's not the only thing Alberta is looking at. They've looked at a variety of things and, again, we weren't able to get the concrete information what they were doing, but they did say that they were looking at other alternatives as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. I want to thank the Minister for that; I learned a lot. When we develop significant environmental regulations or review and license proposed developments, our public and Indigenous governments have come to expect that these processes are open and transparent. I see no reason why our government cannot make its reviews of documents and submissions on the development of discharge regulations public, especially when it's public funds paying consultants to do the work.

So can the Minister commit to make our submissions and reviews related to tailings discharge regulation development public for the residents of the Northwest Territories? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can advise you that Alberta has asked we keep the key knowledge gap reports in our review confidential at the time while they complete their analysis. Noting that transparency is our interest, we've asked Alberta when they will be making the reports public as well as how they will be dealing with our comments. As I mentioned, we will also continue to advocate that Alberta engages and consults with NWT Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations as well as the public on the development of regulations. And I can honestly tell you, Mr. Speaker, I've made it very clear that we want to be able to get this information out publicly as soon as we can. 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. And I hope we get the Alberta government's permission to release information that our citizens should get very soon. I'm worried, though, Mr. Speaker, that there may be some important events or milestones that are going to pass with the development of these discharge regulations during the upcoming territorial election.

Can the Minister commit to keeping the public informed of any significant events on tar sands spills and discharge regulation development during the upcoming election, and how would he intend to do that? Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, should there be any significant incidents upstream or advancement of regulation development, the GNWT will inform the public as part of the caretaker's role during the elections. So if there's information that needs to be shared, we will make sure we get it out there. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1526-19(2):
DISASTER ASSISTANCE POLICY

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, under the new Disaster Assistance Policy, if a home was built in an area after it was designated as disaster prone, unless mitigation measures were taken to reduce the risk then disaster assistance is not eligible.

Can the Minister explain how many NWT residents live in a disaster-prone area? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, disaster-prone areas are those that are identified as susceptible to certain risk. For example, flood risk mapping identifies area that are increased risk of flooding. MACA does not keep account of residents living in a disaster-prone area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Mr. Speaker, if the home experiences two different types of natural disasters and sustains damages in both times, does that still limit that household to accessing disaster assistance one more time? For example, the people of KFN experienced a flood last year and now wildfires this year. How does this policy apply to situations like that, especially in non-reserve circumstances? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The intent of the disaster program is limited to the number of times a property is eligible for disaster assistance through mitigation. Disasters are more and more common and very costly. This limitation is to ensure that mitigation is undertaken where possible. Emergency recovery assistance for KFN is provided under the federal government Emergency Management Assistance Program and not through the GNWT Disaster Assistance Policy. Individuals on KFN Reserve, whose homes were affected by the flood last year, will still be eligible for assistance under the federal program that is specific to on-reserve disastrous events. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think the Minister answered about the second part of that question; I'd appreciate an answer. It was especially in non-reserve circumstances, was the ending of the question. Mr. Speaker, could the Minister explain why under the new Disaster Assistance Policy, eligibility for assistance is excluded for an event affecting a single sector or property? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Disaster Assistance Policy is a government-funded assistance program that may be implemented after a widespread disaster to ensure essential community functions and cover the essential basics needs of residents and businesses. Events affecting a single sector or property are not widespread, nor do they impact essential community functions.

The Disaster Assistance Policy is not an insurance program or a compensation program

to recover all losses or to be applied to events affecting single properties. Property owners have a responsibility to protect their own property and obtain insurances where available and if they are able to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. MARTSELOS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If a natural disaster occurs but only one house sustains damage from it, does the Minister believe it is okay to exclude the household from recovering any disaster assistance funds? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not going to give you my opinion but what I can tell you is the Disaster Assistance Policy is not designed to assist from recoveries from all events. It is designed to protect against those widespread events that affect many individuals and properties in a community. Across Canada, disaster assistance programs are not applied to events affecting single properties. The intent of the Disaster Assistance Program is to ensure the continued functioning of a community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1527-19(2):
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE
REGULATIONS

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. I'm wondering, point blankly, Mr. Speaker, will the Minister increase the total number of eligible semesters for all NWT students given that what we're seeing as far as trends of who's accessing SFA. The students that are accessing beyond a bachelor's degree for graduate students is less than 4 percent of all of the students, and students that are accessing even more than four years is limited to under a total of 9 percent. And so I'm wondering if the Minister is willing to look at expanding who can apply for additional funding for SFA in the territory? Thank you

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So we haven't even rolled out the first set of significant changes yet, and the Member's already asking for another set. So I can't commit to doing that. What I will say, as the

Member has noted, you know, the SFA program was undersubscribed and so we looked at what new money we can find, what money is available internally, and what we could do with those funds. And so what we did is create a program that we could afford in that envelope. I do recognize what the Member is saying. There are still barriers that exist for some people to, you know, advance their education, especially when you're talking about getting a master's or similar degrees like that. So I am live to that but right now we are sticking with these set of changes that we are currently in the process of implementing. And in the future, we can look at even further enhancements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I wanted to save the Minister some printing and get those changes in before he printed his new rules.

I think there's a lot more focus that's needed on this one because I think that there's something that can be done here in order to include more students in this in the Northwest Territories without it meaning more money from student financial assistance in big dollar amounts given where we're at.

Mr. Speaker, back when I was a student using student financial assistance, I was walking around with my flip phone, I was TI89 texting or whatever you used to call it, and so times have changed since then and now we can do a lot more on our phone, we can do a lot more from our computer. But SFA is still using the forms they used back when I was using them and still requiring people to go in with a paper copy to their university and then come back and bring it in to student financial assistance. And so I'm wondering will the Minister work with SFA to move more services online for students so they can spend more time studying and less time doing administration. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So actually you can apply for SFA online. That is an advancement that has happened in the past few years. I think what the Member is referencing is that there is one form, the student enrolment form that needs to be filled out by the school, and so that is still a paper form. However, we have been -- and in terms of the ability to check your loan balances online, we don't have that; we are working with the Department of Finance to see if there is a way to make this happen. But I'll say that, you know, we don't have the IT infrastructure that you might see in some other jurisdictions. It is -- you know, it's quite expensive and instead of investing in that, I guess we've been investing actually into the programs and that's why we're

able to have the most generous student financial assistance program in the country. Thank you.

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yeah, there's also the travel form that students need to fill out online and share there.

So, Mr. Speaker, in addition to the online services, what students are also looking for -- and it's not just students; it's potential employers, post-secondary institutions across Canada, as well as even the polytechnic here in the Northwest Territories, people are always looking for information because information allows us to make strategic decisions, it allows us to know what's going on in the world, and especially with our own students here. And so I'm wondering if the Minister will commit to doing a little bit more data sharing when it comes to student financial assistance and putting out an annual report that speaks to who is using student financial assistance, where they're going to school, what they're taking at school, completion rates, and also the number of students who are returning to the North to come back here and work. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a long list of things to include. So I can say yes, I will commit to annual reporting and I will commit to seeing how many of those items that we can actually get on the list. But I think it's a great idea, and I'm happy to action the Member's request. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister for that. I very much appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, the last change that I highlighted in my Member's statement today was the change for remissible loans. It added that for the eligibility requirement of students, I would like to understand why the GNWT wants to remove the eligibility requirement of students being schooled in the Northwest Territories for remissible loans without adding a return to the North clause for non-NWT schooled students. This has been one of the strongest retention tools that the NWT has, and I'm wondering why ECE is choosing to remove that. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So by linking the number of years of schooling to the remissible loan program, I'm not sure if that is necessarily a retention tool because you have to go to school first before you get the SFA. The remissible loan actually is remissible if you move back to the territory. So a resident,

and I know some people who moved here when they were 17, 18 so they didn't actually do school here, but now they have families here. But, you know, they've made comments that I would have liked to have been able to access some sort of student financial assistance. So this is an opportunity for those individuals as well. But make no mistake, the idea of the remissible loan is that after students complete their education, they come back to the territory. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1528-19(2):
PUBLIC LAND ACT

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to miss questioning the Minister responsible for Lands, but I hear this new Minister for Environment and Climate Change has got some great answers for me.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, I just want to confirm whether we are on track to finish the Public Land Act regulations and get the Public Land Act implemented in the life of this Assembly. I note it's been four years to develop those regulations, and it seems like it's about time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife North. Minister responsible for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you. I think I'm going to give the same answers the Minister of Lands used to give. So we're working with the IGC process. We're working with our Indigenous government. And so it is a process that we need to respect, and it's going to take a little bit of time but we're trying to make sure we get it right. And so, again, what I'm hoping is to have it done but we still need to respect the IGC process. Thank you.

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think central to that question is whether any changes to how we treat Indigenous cabin holders on public land will be changing. Right now, we're still operating under the same approach largely that we inherited from the federal government. I know there's a lot of different requests of how you could do that, changing the fee structure, the tax structure, even the rules about what is and isn't required to have a lease. Are we going to have any policy changes to how we approach Indigenous cabin holders on public land occur in this government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, ECC is working with our

Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations across the NWT on our approach to manage potential rights-based cabins on public land. A new approach must be developed with Indigenous governments and organizations, and those discussions take time. Engagement has started and is ongoing and will continue throughout the summer. ECC is committed to making the improvements, and all this would ideally occur within this life of the government. We need to ensure that we are doing the work respectfully and properly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know also on the list of our policy work for the new department to complete is, you know, figuring out what's going on in the Yellowknife periphery area with our recreational leases. I believe there was plans to, you know, assuming we worked with our partners to get a cabin lottery again for the fall. It's been a number of years, and there was a lot of pent of demand. So are we on track to have a cabin lottery in the North Slave occur this fall? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was hoping that we would have been in a position to have a lottery or ballot draw during the life of this Assembly. However, there are complex issues related to the issuance of new leases in this area that remains unresolved. It is important that we take the time to discuss and make progress on these issues before we conduct another ballot draw. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JOHNSON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, that's probably one of the number one questions I get from constituents is what's going on there. I'm wondering at the very least whether we -- I get there's a consultation process but whether we could get some public information about what we're even considering, how many cabins, where they would be, and kind of the steps of a path forward to whether that could occur. I think there's a lot of demand to know what is going on in this area so any sort of public information would be welcomed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if we can get the information and provide that publicly, we will do that, but I don't want to make a commitment saying we'll get that information if we can't do it legally and that. But we will work to try to get as much information to the Member and now publicly as we can. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

QUESTION 1529-19(2):
KOSMOS 954

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when I previously raised this issue in March of 2023, I was pleased to learn that the Premier was listen to the concerns from the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh riding. I am hopeful that the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, is also listening to the serious concerns raised here today. However, Mr. Speaker, KOSMOS 954 has been around for decades and the voices of the people most impacted have been unheard.

Has the Premier had any discussions with the Prime Minister of Canada since I raised this issue in the House in March 2023? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, at this point, since March 2023, I haven't had any meetings with the prime minister, so this has not been addressed with the prime minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This matter is one that should be major concerns for the Government of the Northwest Territories. Regardless of the status of discussion with the Government of Canada, what will she do to help the serious cumulative impact of KOSMOS 954 in the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh riding? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, when it was first brought to my attention last sitting -- I can't remember if it was March, it was the first I've heard of it in honesty. I stated, I mean, I was here in the '70s, I just wasn't paying attention to the sky at the time. But I did do a little bit more research after that and looked into it. I think that there was a lot of research. I mean, there was a lot of research done at the time. The research found that there was no causal link between the debris from the satellite with cancer incidents, specifically in the Fort Resolution area. The research also stated that the particulate fallout, the dust, was insoluble and lacked some of the more dangerous products thereby lessening the potential environmental impacts.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I know that Indigenous people for many years have been told, don't worry, it's good, and then bad things have come. So I think in fairness to the

Member, if there are concerns from the community, if the Member feels that it would be any benefit, I'd be more than willing to -- if the Member invites me, to go into his community and listen to the concerns of people if that's what the Member would like. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. EDJERICON: Yeah, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, Premier, for your feedback and some of the research you've done. But a lot of that stuff you just mentioned could also be brought out through a public hearing and public inquiry with facts and evidence so that's what -- that's what I'm going to be calling for. However, Mr. Speaker, with new technology available today that could help us detect sources of radiation that could shed light on the real impacts of the Kosmos 954, will the Premier direct her government to pursue a modern approaches to radiation study in the areas impacted by Kosmos 954 in the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh riding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this point, I'm not too eager to jump on that at this point. I think that there should be maybe a follow-up with the prime minister. My understanding, I think, is that this would be federal jurisdiction versus territorial. We don't control the sky. But, again, if the Member would like, I think that I have no problem; I can write a letter to the prime minister asking if there's been any more research or anything more that he could report on this if that would appease the Member. And also, again, I understand -- I empathize, I hear, and I've seen it myself, how people are mistrusting of governments so if the Member feels that there's anything I can do for his community, then I'm more than willing to go in and listen. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Madam Premier. Final supplementary. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And earlier the Premier had mentioned that they did a study and it talks about cancer, etcetera. But I attended a lot of Dene Nation assemblies, Akaitcho assemblies in my -- in the Akaitcho region and over the years and decades, I've been to many, many funerals and a lot of them were cancer-related. We just don't know where and what. So that's why if we were to have a public inquiry, a lot of this stuff will be fleshed out and give a clearer picture.

Mr. Speaker, the Giant Mine remediation project is the model that could be used to address the impacts of Kosmos 954, including a multi-year project to study impacts and mitigate damages while ensuring the

community and those affected receive through, one, public inquiry, which includes:

An environment assessment and this could include the Canadian nuclear safety commission; compensation for the historic harm done to the land and trappers and communities in the Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh riding; and lastly, is the public apology.

My question to the Premier is will the Premier Cochrane work with the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, to call for a public inquiry and fund a public inquiry immediately and through this environmental assessment process? Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't -- I don't have the ability to be able to tell the prime minister what to do, what to fund, etcetera. I wish I did have that power; we'd be a lot better off in the Northwest Territories. However, I don't. So what I can do, though, is, like I said, I will write a letter to the prime minister. I'll explain the concerns of the MLA, that he's hearing these from his people, and I'll ask the prime minister what new research has been done with this and raise the request to do a public inquiry. We won't do it as the GNWT but I will write a letter to the prime minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as more and more self-government agreements are signed and Indigenous governments draw down jurisdictions for programs and services, the Government of the Northwest Territories needs to adapt and reevaluate the current administrative regions. So I want to ask the Premier what work has been done to date to reevaluate the administrative regions recognizing Indigenous governments as regions. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Monfwi. Madam Premier.

QUESTION 1530-19(2):
CREATING A TLICHO REGION

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the administrative regions actually predate the establishment of Indigenous-rights agreements. And I think that -- like, I heard the Member when she was asking the Minister the other day on this, and I gave it some thought as well. The difficulty is it's not -- the regions aren't divided just by Indigenous governments. If we did that, that would be really cumbersome. I think we need to

look at it but we need to figure out a better way. It's a little bit simpler with the Tlicho. They are one community, one government. But we have some regions that have multiple Indigenous governments. In fact, we have some communities that have multiple Indigenous governments. So to define the regions just by the Indigenous governments, I think, Mr. Speaker, would be probably not feasible to do. And then the other thing, too, is if we're going to do that, it would be a huge consultation process. That should be something that should definitely not be done by the territorial government without consultation. So we'd have to consult with all of the Indigenous governments and the general public on this. So I hear the Member but I don't think it's something that easily done. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Tlicho are unique, you know. They're in a unique situation. And from what I learned, it's the Cabinet's decisions. They can do it, but they refuse to do it to acknowledge Tlicho as a region. So what is the process to create a new GNWT-Tlicho region, administrative region. How long will this take and what does it require? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lot of things are just Cabinet has the control to do but Cabinet very seldom makes decisions without doing the proper consultation, especially when it talks about things that impact the whole population, especially Indigenous governments. So it would not be something that I would support that Cabinet would just go ahead and do on their own. We would need to do the consultations. Like I said, the Tlicho region is a little bit easier. Those communities are all Tlicho people. But I look at your own region, I look at the Beaufort Delta, Mr. Speaker, and that wouldn't be as easy. We have Inuvialuit, we have Gwich'in. So it's not as easy in all communities, in all regions. So I think that it would need to be something that would have serious thought. It should not be done very quickly. It should take the time and the consultation to do that process if it wanted to be. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Mr. Speaker, if it was easier, then why are they not creating a Tlicho region? And the only people or the only regions that's going to have an impact is the North Slave, and North Slave consists of Yellowknife and Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh's riding as well. And it is not her problem or her issues to say what she just said. It's -- I mean, it's up to the Cabinet. The Cabinet can do this. And I understand about other different regions having more than one Indigenous government. And,

yes, in Tlicho we have only one. You know, it's -- we don't have any other government, but we do have only one set. So which is -- that's why I said we are in a unique situation. So can the Premier describe how self-government can become its own GNWT administrative region?

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm just wondering if by any chance that I offended the Member. It was certainly not my intention to offend the Member by stating that it would take a long process. She is right, I mean, Cabinet makes decisions, but the Premier speaks for Cabinet. So it would not be mine, but I am the only member of Cabinet that has the authority to speak for Cabinet. Like I said, it's not as easy as just having a Tlicho region. We have some communities, like I said, the Beaufort Delta has a couple. The Sahtu has seven different Indigenous groups. How do we do that? So it's something that I think, Mr. Speaker, that's a conversation, a huge conversation that would have to be taken with Indigenous governments and the consultation process. It should not be something that the GNWT Cabinet does on their own with no consultation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, all we are asking for is just remove us from North Slave regions, and they are the colonial government is the one that created this, North Slave. They didn't even consult us to be part of the North Slave region. So what policy changes are needed and who makes those policies? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, those decisions were made before the Indigenous government rights agreements were done. That would be something that could be put as a priority, it could be done as a Minister, an MLA could challenge the Cabinet to do that. I hear the Member; I hear that the Tlicho don't want to be part of the North Slave. I'm sure the NWT Metis and the K'atlodeeche and all those might not want to be part of the South Slave. I'm sure the seven Indigenous governments in the Sahtu might not want to be part of the Sahtu. The problem is is that we don't divide the regions by the Indigenous governments. They're defined by borders. So, Mr. Speaker, to respect the Member, I hear her concerns but I think it would be a long cumbersome process to do, and I don't think it would be done any justice to try to do it in a couple of months at the end of a government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 1531-19(2):
HOMELESSNESS IN INUVIK

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the Minister responsible for Homelessness.

Can the Minister tell me if there is a short-term plan after August 31st to ensure continuous services provided to the homeless shelters in Inuvik; if so, what is the plan? Is it a not for profit to take over or is it GNWT for another winter? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question as well. We did have a conversation a couple of days ago regarding this subject as well. We have been administering the homelessness shelter in Inuvik. We did run into some issues with that region and with the NGOs in that region as well too. Right now we are looking at funding provided up to March -- sorry, up to August 31st of this year. And as we go forward, we will have to identify long-term plans for the shelter as well too and I will keep the Member updated as well.

As for our conversation that we did have a couple days ago, I did instruct the department to get back to me next -- or June 9th with a concrete plan on what we will be doing for the rest of the year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, over this last little while I've been doing some more work on these homeless shelters, and what I found is there are positions that have been created in Inuvik and one of the things is -- and I'll repeat this, and we've all said it in the House. Inuvik, for one, is not Yellowknife. So you can't pick up what has been done in Yellowknife and drop it in Inuvik and expect it to work and all the same job descriptions and, you know, and expect that expertise to be in that community.

So can the Minister tell me when her department will ensure that there's a dedicated person on the ground in Inuvik that's located there, either in the regional office to lead this, and support the current structure until longer term plans are initiated in Inuvik? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member as well too. I do see the differences between addressing homelessness in Yellowknife and also in the higher Arctic communities. Right

now we are in the process of hiring a position, and we are in the process as well too as identifying the responsibilities of that position. I would like to see the position administer the northern part of the region, but those conversations are taking place right now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Minister. Mr. Speaker, there are those that are homeless in Inuvik that are homeless because they're in between the emergency shelter needs and living independent in housing. So they are sober, they are -- you know, they are doing things that they need to do to be able to be in their own place, but some are just not able to have that independent living. And so when they do get housing, they end up evicted within months, like a few months. So is there any plan in Inuvik to work with these clients to have more stable supportive long-term care housing because right now we have two shelters, and I believe one is almost kind of acting that way but the funding is coming from the homelessness and not in a collaboration with health. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member. I clearly see and understand the significant need in this region as well too. But we have struggled with non-profit organizations. We also have been in conversation with the Indigenous governments in the Member's riding as well too. So right now, just looking and trying to identify possibilities for the region, one thing that I did bring up to the department is that we do have a number of units that are there in the community and really wanting to engage and navigate with the non-profits that are there currently and looking at suitable services that we can provide. I will have to follow up with my colleague, Minister of health, just to verify what services that we do offer and if there's an opportunity for us to further look at opportunities with the vacant units that we currently do have. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Inuvik is the community with the second highest homeless population in the NWT, or is it? We don't know, because we don't have anyone or any documents that state this. We don't have a designated person that is to do this work. So, you know, to find out what the accurate numbers are. So I'm asking the Minister to have somebody in Inuvik, whether it's this person that she's looking at, that can do

this work in the Beaufort Delta because if we don't know who and how many residents we are serving, how can we solve the issues that they're ending up homeless and come up with a long-term tackle to prevent those issues? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. PAULIE CHINNA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question as well too. And to be honest, we don't have the data collection for the homelessness population throughout the territory. This will be coming forward with the homelessness strategy. But I just wanted to -- just have some numbers out here for the Members that we do provide funding to the Teepee Housing in Inuvik as well too, with that collaboration approach as well, and we did provide significant amount for the homelessness shelters in Inuvik as well. And just for the Members, that over the past ten years housing has invested \$33.5 million into the Member's riding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Oral questions. Written questions. Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

QUESTION 1532-19(2):
KOSMOS 954

MR. EDJERICON: Go back to oral questions again. And, again, I just wanted to stress really important -- how important this issue in regards to the Kosmos 954. When it happened in April of 1978, there was a joint recovery between the Americans and the Canadian Army. And today the research shows that the majority of these people that were involved in the cleanup of this Kosmos 954 have passed on with cancer. And today, again, my riding we have -- I've been to -- like I said earlier, I've been to so many funerals and that majority of them are cancer-related.

And so this issue, when I brought this attention to the Premier back in March, I was under the impression then that a letter was going to be sent to the prime minister to really look at this. And I'm hoping that we could just get this thing out the door right away and really let people know that this is an urgent issue.

And people need to understand too as well that when the satellite was coming down, some had said, from my riding, that this satellite was also shot down. It's hard to say. But if it didn't -- something didn't happen, it was earmarked to land in New York City. If that was the case, then this thing will -- you know, it's -- it's important to know that because, I mean, then we would have the world's attention. But because it landed in my riding, nothing become of it. So I just wanted to let the

Premier know that the urgency to really get this letter out to the prime minister and say that we have issues and concerns in our riding and then -- and that's kind of -- I want to have your response on that. Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Madam Premier.

HON. CAROLINE COCHRANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually I'd like to get things off my plate too. The more I have on is the more work I have. So I will make a commitment that I will have this done by before the end of June, and probably sooner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Madam Premier. Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Environment and Climate Change.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 933-19(2):
ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS ACT ANNUAL
REPORT 2022-2023

TABLED DOCUMENT 934-19(2):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES SURFACE
RIGHTS BOARD ANNUAL WORK PLAN AND
BUDGET (CORE FUNDING FOR 2023/24

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: Environmental Rights Act Annual Report 2022-2023; and, the NWT Surface Rights Board Annual Work Plan and Budget (Core Funding) for 2023-2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Minister responsible for Education, Culture and Employment.

TABLED DOCUMENT 935-19(2):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 43-19(2): REPORT ON THE
REVIEW OF BILL 63: AN ACT TO AMEND
THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 936-19(2):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 48-19(2): REPORT ON THE
REVIEW OF BILL 68: AN ACT TO AMEND
THE CHILD DAY CARE ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 937-19(2):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 49-19(2): REPORT ON THE 2021-
2022 REVIEW OF THE OFFICIAL
LANGUAGES ACT

TABLED DOCUMENT 938-19(2):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO MOTION
75-19(2): MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE RENT
INCREASE FOR PRIVATE RENTAL UNITS

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following four documents: Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 43-19(2): Report on the Review of Bill 63, An Act to Amend the Official Languages Act; Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 48-19(2): Report on the Review of Bill 68, An Act to Amend the Child Day Care Act; Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 49-19(2): Report on the 2021-2022 Review of the Official Languages Act; and, the Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Motion 75-19(2), Maximum Allowable Rent Increase for Private Rental Units. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TABLED DOCUMENT 939-19(2):
2022 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY UNDER THE
TRANSPORTATION OF DANGEROUS
GOODS ACT

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: 2022 Annual Report on the Legislative Assembly Under the Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motions. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Minister responsible for Finance.

Notices of Motion for the First Reading of Bills

BILL 92:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE PETROLEUM
PRODUCTS AND CARBON TAX ACT, NO. 3

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Wednesday, May 31st, 2023, I will present Bill 92: An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products and Carbon Tax Act, No.

3, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

---SHORT RECESS.

MR. SPEAKER: Colleagues, we will continue. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Member for Kam Lake.

First Reading of Bills

BILL 90:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
ACT, NO. 5

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 90, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, No. 5, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Kam Lake. First reading of bills. Member for Frame Lake.

BILL 91:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE PETROLEUM
PRODUCTS AND CARBON TAX ACT, NO. 2

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le Président. Mr. Speaker, I wish to present to the House Bill 91, An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products and Carbon Tax Act, No. 2, to be read for the first time. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Frame Lake. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in committee of the whole of bills and other matters, Bill 23, 29, and 79, Minister's Statement 264-19(2), Tabled Document 681-19(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, Madame la Présidente. Committee wishes to consider Bill 79. Mahsi.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess and resume with Bill 79.

---SHORT RECESS.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): I now call Committee of the Whole back to order. Committee, we've agreed to consider Bill 79, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act. I will ask the Minister of Justice to introduce the bill.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am here today to present Bill 79, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act.

The purpose of Bill 79 is to bring the Northwest Territories into compliance with the Canadian Free Trade Agreement; and, to make unrelated improvements to the functioning of the Court of Appeal.

The Canadian Free Trade Agreement is an intergovernmental agreement between the Canadian provinces and territories which has replaced the former Agreement on Internal Trade. The Government of the Northwest Territories signed the new agreement in April 2017 and is now obligated to make changes to our legislation which will ensure trade orders of a presiding body or compliance panel established under the agreement have, once filed, the same force and effect as an order of our superior court. This amendment will come into effect retroactively to January 1st, 2019.

During engagement with the judiciary, two unrelated additional changes were suggested that could help improve the functioning of the Court of Appeal. The Act will be amended to provide that a Court of Appeal judge who ceases to hold office may still grant judgment on pending matters within a certain timeframe. It will also be amended to provide that if a judge who has sat on a Court of Appeal panel is unable to continue with a case, the other two judges may render judgment on the appeal if it is unanimous. This will reduce the need for cases to be re-heard should a presiding judge become unavailable to conclude a case in these circumstances.

This concludes my opening remarks, and I will be pleased to answer any questions that committee members may have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. Minister, would you like to bring witnesses into the chamber?

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

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

Minister, please introduce your witnesses.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: With me today, I have Ian Rennie, legislative counsel with the Department of Justice; and, Paul McKenna, legal counsel with the Department of Justice. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. I will now turn to the chair of the Standing Committee on Social Development, the committee that reviewed the bill, for any opening comments on Bill 79. Member for Kam Lake.

BILL 79:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE JUDICATURE ACT,
CARRIED

MS. CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Bill 79, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act, received second reading in the Legislative Assembly on March 29th, 2023, and was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Development for review.

Bill 79 brings the Government of the Northwest Territories into compliance with requirements under the Canada Free Trade Agreement and addresses two concerns raised by the judiciary.

In the committee's review of the bill, no stakeholder submissions were received. The committee had no concerns with the bill either.

The clause-by-clause review of Bill 79 was held on May 24th, 2023, and I would like to thank the committee for its work on the review of Bill 79. And individual Members may have questions or comments for the Minister at this time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you. I will now open the floor to general comments on Bill 79. Does committee agree that there are no general comments?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Can we proceed to a clause by clause we review of the bill?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Committee, we will defer the bill number and title until after consideration of the clauses. Please turn to page 1 of the bill.

Clause 1, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Clause 2, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Clause 3, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Clause 4, does committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Committee, to the bill as a whole, does committee agree that Bill 79, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act, is now ready for third reading?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, committee. Does committee agree that this concludes our consideration of Bill 79, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler): Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the witnesses. Sergeant-At-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chamber.

Member for Kam Lake -- Frame Lake? Frame Lake, sorry.

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Madame la Presidente; I'm glad you got my riding right there. Yeah, there's a lot of lakes in Yellowknife, thank you. I move that the chair rise and report progress. Mahsi.

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? Motion is carried.

---Carried.

I will now rise and report progress.

Report of Committee of the Whole

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

MS. SEMMLER: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 79 and would like to report that Bill 79, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act, is ready for third reading. And Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes. Do we have a seconder? Member

for Thebacha. All those in favour? All those opposed? Any abstentions? Motion is carried.

---Carried

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

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Tuesday, May 30th, 2023, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
5. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
6. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
7. Returns to Oral Questions
8. Acknowledgements
9. Oral Questions
10. Written Questions
11. Returns to Written Questions
12. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
13. Petitions
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notices of Motion
16. Motions
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. First Reading of Bills
19. Second Reading of Bills
 - Bill 64, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, No. 3
 - Bill 90, An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, No. 5
 - Bill 91, An Act to Amend the Petroleum Products and Carbon Tax Act, No. 2

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
- 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

21. Report of Committee of the Whole

22. Third Reading of Bills

- Bill 79, An Act to Amend the Judicature Act

23. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Tuesday, May 30th, 2023 at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 3:51 p.m.

Unedited Hansard