

**Ongoing Service Delivery and Operation
Improvements COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat**

Mr. Speaker, when the Government of the Northwest Territories established the COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat, we committed to bringing our pandemic services under one roof to improve our services and seek cost-efficiencies.

I am proud to stand here today and say we have done what we said we would do.

Jurisdictions that established travel restrictions, and made early efforts to protect their residents, have shown the most success in limiting the number of COVID-19 cases as the second wave has forced many jurisdictions into lockdowns, and implementing stricter measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, we have not.

Despite a record high number of cases around the world, a surging second wave, and recent new variants, our territory continues to successfully contain COVID-19, due in large part to residents and businesses doing their part and following the orders of the Chief Public Health Officer.

Our government's proactive move to establish the Secretariat has also played a significant role in our ability to limit the spread of the virus in the Northwest Territories.

Consolidating the government's pandemic response has allowed the Secretariat to view operations through a wide-angle lens. The result, Mr. Speaker, is coordinated and improved pandemic services that thousands of residents have relied on during the pandemic. This has allowed us to protect the health and well-being of our communities and the integrity of our health care system.

The Secretariat has been able to expand services, purchase in volume for efficiencies, and more effectively support communities and the health care response led by the Chief Public Health Officer.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to share some examples of the operational efficiencies, coordinated services and communications expertise the Secretariat has brought to the GNWT's pandemic response.

The GNWT amalgamated our Compliance and Enforcement Operations into a single entity from what used to be three departments. This allowed us to move to dedicated, full-time officers, which has increased the effectiveness of Compliance and Enforcement functions.

Our ProtectNWT and 8-1-1 Info Line operations have been combined into one business area to deliver more efficient and consistent services, greatly decreasing the wait time for individuals requesting services. Expanded software and technological capacity now allow us to route telephone calls to employees whose skillsets and expertise are most relevant to questions.

In November, we announced that we would change our approach to who pays for isolation centres. We heard from Indigenous leaders, community governments, the business sector, and residents that we needed to find a way to reduce these costs, which made up half of the Secretariat's budget.

The new policy, which came into effect in January, requires residents to pay for isolation centre stays resulting from discretionary travel. Since this change, we have seen a significant decrease in isolation centre stays, which in turn means a considerably reduced expenditure for taxpayers.

We recently completed a transparent public tendering process and awarded 76 Standing Offer Agreements to NWT businesses provide lodging, transportation, food services and

security to isolation centres. These agreements will allow us to better serve guest needs and involve more northern businesses in delivering our services while reducing costs.

Mr. Speaker, the people and businesses of the NWT are resilient and have found ways to adapt during the pandemic. The Secretariat has positively contributed to our government's ability to better protect NWT residents and safeguard our economy, while allowing other departments to focus on their mandates and continue to deliver on the important priorities of the 19th Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.