

**THE HONOURABLE ROBERT C. MCLEOD
MINISTER OF FINANCE**

NO.: 156-18(2)

DATE: March 3, 2017

Co-operation on 2017-2018 Budget

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide an update on the progress to approve the 2017-2018 Main Estimates. Since the Budget Address on February 1, 2017 we have seen significant debate on specific elements of our annual budget and an extensive review of the Main Estimates in Committee of the Whole.

It is fair to say that all Members of the Legislative Assembly are passionate in their desire to address the challenges facing the Northwest Territories. Our reality is that we need to take action in a fiscally responsible manner and we are operating in an environment of limited revenue growth and an uncertain economic future.

Cabinet has listened carefully to Members and to the concerns of our constituents, as this budget has been debated. As a result, we are committing to the following adjustments to the 2017-2018 Budget.

- We will increase the budget for homecare by \$2,500,000.
- Funding of \$500,000 will be provided for a Youth in Crisis program.
- The funding available through the Anti-Poverty Fund will be increased by \$500,000.
- There will be an increase in support for freight costs associated with the fishing industry by \$225,000.

- We will increase the funding available through the Mineral Incentive Program by \$600,000.
- We will increase funding for the Community Access Road Program by \$500,000.

Mr. Speaker, we have also heard the concerns about the reductions related to the Teacher Education Program and the Social Work Program at Aurora College. While we believe these were appropriate decisions, given the cost of delivery and program outcomes, we also recognize that a more fundamental review of Aurora College is an important and necessary step to guide our actions. Minister Moses will be speaking about this in greater detail.

We will, however, make the commitment at this time to defer Aurora College reductions related to the Teacher Education Program and the Social Work Program identified for 2017-2018 pending completion of the review. There will be no additional intake for the Social Work Program or the Teacher Education Program while the review is taking place.

I will follow through with these commitments in the Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 1, 2017-2018, which will be Tabled in this House within the next few days.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Members for all their input and discussions around the 2017-2018 Budget. Our debate in the House is only the most visible part of a lengthy process of engagement and discussion with Members to establish each year's Budget. Throughout the process, beginning with three weeks of business plan reviews last fall and review of the draft Main Estimates in Standing Committees, Members have provided feedback and suggestions that have led to the final budget we hope to pass shortly.

Based on what we heard from Standing Committee in discussions on the Business Plan, Cabinet agreed to make \$15.4 million in adjustments before the budget was even tabled. Changes included eliminating some of the proposed expenditure reductions and identifying investments in priority areas like fully-funded Junior Kindergarten, 911 service, more money for small community employment programs and homelessness.

We have added to those early adjustments with the additional changes announced today, Mr. Speaker. We are confident that the final package of investments and ongoing spending we have settled on through our discussions is in the best interests of NWT residents, and look forward to receiving the support of MLAs.

In the Sessional Statement, we heard that staying true to the spirit and intent of consensus is a challenge that all Members of the Legislative Assembly are responsible for, Mr. Speaker. Meeting that challenge does not always come easily, particularly when we are asked to give and take on issues that we care about personally. We have faced that challenge during this Session, and I am convinced that we have found a path forward based on the commitment of all Members on both sides of the House to doing what is best for the people of the Northwest Territories.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.