



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

1st Session

Day 45

20th Assembly

HANSARD

Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Pages 1845 - 1906

The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Tuesday, February 25, 2025****Members Present**

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland, Mr. Edjericon, Mr. Hawkins, Hon. Lucy Kuptana, Hon. Jay Macdonald, Hon. Vince McKay, Mr. McNeely, Ms. Morgan, Mr. Morse, Mr. Nerysoo, Ms. Reid, Mr. Rodgers, Hon. Lesa Semmler, Hon. R.J. Simpson, Mr. Testart, Hon. Shane Thompson, Hon. Caroline Wawzonek, Mrs. Weyallon Armstrong, Mrs. Yakeleya

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer or Reflection

---Prayer or reflection

SPEAKER (HON. SHANE THOMPSON): I'd like to thank Bertha Catholique for the opening prayer and reflections today.

Colleagues, before we start the day, there's a couple things I'd like to stress. Remember, we have the dignity to be able to speak in this House but make sure we do not bring other people's names into this place or businesses because they don't have the right to defend themselves. We do have some autonomy here but make sure we have the information that we say in this House that it's very clear and as truthful as we can be so that we don't impugn integrity of that.

The second thing is on Friday somebody scheduled it so that we wouldn't be able to do something to him, so I'm going to do it today. I'd to wish our clerk a Happy Belated Birthday; life is good. That red looks really nice on you, Mr. Clerk.

Ministers' statements. Mr. Premier.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 96-20(1):
COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION MISSION
TO WASHINGTON**

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I recently had the privilege of travelling to Washington, D.C., with all of Canada's Premiers, an historic first that underscored our united Team Canada approach to strengthening relationships with the United States. Canada's Premiers went to Washington to help American political and business leaders, and the American public, understand the negative economic consequences of the tariffs being proposed by the United States government. Tariffs would not only affect Canadians; they would also have direct and negative repercussions for American businesses, workers and consumers.

During our meetings with key members of Congress, the Senate, and senior White House officials, we delivered the unified message that a strong Canada-U.S. partnership is essential to addressing shared challenges. Collaboration, not protectionism, is the path to economic growth, energy security, effective border management, and secure critical mineral supply chains.

While the Northwest Territories is not as reliant on U.S. markets as many of our provincial counterparts, we are not immune to the ripple effects of these tariffs. We could see increased costs for goods that would impact all residents, businesses and governments in the NWT, and a changing investment climate could impact our economy. Our government will closely monitor any developments and work with our federal counterparts to address them.

Mr. Speaker, this trip was about much more than trade. It was about ensuring that the North is seen, heard, and understood. The Arctic and the North play an essential role in Canada's future, and Northerners themselves assert our country's sovereignty every day. By living and working here, stewarding the land and building the foundations of a thriving, sustainable economy, we show the world that the North is a vibrant part of our national identity. Our presence is not passive; it is an active demonstration of sovereignty that demands meaningful investments in infrastructure, security, and economic development.

One message I shared in Washington was that, while the North is not for sale, it is a land of opportunity, and we welcome partnerships that respect our land and support our people. To take advantage of these opportunities, Canada must invest in the North, not only for the benefit of Northerners but for the security and economic prosperity of the entire country. Nation-building infrastructure, energy initiatives, and critical mineral development are national priorities that can reinforce our sovereignty and strengthen our economy. We will continue to seek and support the investments that sustain our communities and bolster our role within Canada.

While in Washington, I met with representatives from Alaska, Denmark, and Greenland to discuss Arctic security, economic development, and climate change, and to build relationships. As global interest in the Arctic grows, these relationships become ever more critical. With shifting geopolitical dynamics, the importance of a strong, resilient, and sustainable North has never been more clear.

Mr. Speaker, Canada's Premiers recognize that while we must address today's challenges, we must also unlock tomorrow's opportunities. The conversations we had in Washington, and the relationships we are building, all serve this larger effort. At the same time, federal, provincial, and territorial governments are working to bolster Canada's economic resilience by breaking down our own internal trade barriers and looking to new markets. By combining these efforts with investments in nation building infrastructure, we can assert Canada's place as a global, economic leader.

The Government of the Northwest Territories will keep working with our partners to realize the North's economic potential, support our communities, and strengthen our place in Canada for generations to come. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 504-20(1): YOUTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and my colleague from Great Slave joined me in visiting Yellowknife high schools to hear directly from students what they think about this government's climate change action plan. Mr. Speaker, these young people were well spoken, thoughtful, and passionate, which wasn't a surprise, but what I did find remarkable was how laser focused they are on wanting to see action and measurable commitments to ensure a liveable planet even 10 or 20 years from now, let alone generations from now. They read through the draft plan, and they thought this plan is not speaking to me. Who was it written for? It's full of jargon and language about processes.

For example, one of the so-called actions listed in the plan says to update a climate change risk and opportunities assessment to inform the development of future frameworks and action plans. So to me, that says process piled on top of process.

There's a lot of emphasis in the plan on monitoring, but young people want to know what's the purpose of all that monitoring. How will that feed into decision-making? How will all this help us when we have low water levels and thin ice and caribou disappearing and forest fires at our doorsteps? How are we changing our energy systems to get off fossil fuels?

Youth are experiencing a lot of anxiety about climate change and the future, and so much is outside their control and even outside our control in the NWT. Political winds are shifting around the world, and chaotic and destructive decisions affecting the climate are being made without any of our input. It's worrisome how extremely dependent the GNWT is on federal funding to action most of our climate change and energy goals.

Now, the best remedy for anxiety is to take back control into our own hands. Yesterday the young people we spoke to named specific kinds of climate action they want to be part of that will also build community at the same time. For example, more community greenhouses, volunteering at the farmers' market, making our streets more walkable and bikeable, which also creates more traffic to our downtown businesses and boosts our local economy. While lots of things are harder in the North, the students notice that some things are easier. Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

MR. SPEAKER: There is a nay. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 505-20(1): NORTHWEST TERRITORIES SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, our pets are Members of our families. We welcome them into our home the where we love and care for them in return only for their unending companionship. All pet owners recall fondly of how their bond WITH their pets was first made, and for many that connection is made at a local shelter where dogs and cats are housed and cared for by staff and volunteers in preparation for the day they find their forever homes. Those animals may have nowhere else to turn at first, but thanks to the hard work of animal shelters, they soon find their place in this world, and in turn, those animal shelters find a valued place in our communities because we can't get enough of the compassion and humanity they inspire.

Unfortunately, while the NWT SPCA has that cherished place in our communities, they have no place in our territorial budget. Instead, they

must rely almost entirely on donations from citizens and businesses to fund their operations which can top off as high as \$700,000 annually. Donations are always appreciated, but they often require fundraising efforts and may not be consistent yearround, and larger donations may be narrowly dedicated solely to animal welfare alone and cannot be spent on administration or employee wages. In fact, the NWT SPCA only receives stable funding from the city of Yellowknife thanks to their work housing stray animals that bylaw apprehends.

Mr. Speaker, the NWT SPCA is not the Yellowknife SPCA. They serve the whole territory taking in cats and dogs as close by as Behchoko and as far as away as Gjoa Haven. They run clinics across the North treating dogs and providing crucial work spaying and neutering them. Mr. Speaker, the SPCA also provides services that can't be accessed in small communities by flying in teams of vets from southern Canada. Everyone in our territory, both human and animal alike, benefit immensely from the work of the NWT SPCA but they need to have territorial funding that fits them. They don't meet the criteria for NGO funding. They cannot access ITI funding as a non-profit. And MACA insists funding won't be made available to them unless communities apply for it themselves.

Mr. Speaker, the SPCA knows best what they need. Northerners trust them enough to donate thousands of dollars each year. It's time this government does the same and provides them with the stability to get cats and dogs into the homes they deserve. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Members' statements. Member from the Sahtu.

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT 506-20(1):
SAHTU WINTER ROAD RESUPPLY UPDATE**

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Sahtu winter road season is critical to the region's resupply. Trucking schedules must be maintained. More importantly, the winter road itself must be supported by sufficient resources for efficiencies, trucking turnarounds, etcetera.

Mr. Speaker, the original truckload estimates destined for the Sahtu were in the neighbourhood of 1,000 loads. This includes essential supplies such as fuel products, not only to our government but the private sector as well, household staples, grocery inventories, and project materials. Mr. Speaker, I know of several projects that have a construction schedule, and they must meet this deadline for their resupply to start the season this spring.

Mr. Speaker, this government and the residents of Sahtu know very well the costly repercussions of costs associated with air transportation and the impacts of low water levels on the Mackenzie River. Mr. Speaker, as of today, there is 35 days left in our season, our affordable season I might add. It's comforting to receive delivery reports from the Minister of Infrastructure which eases the comfort of knowing we are all pulling together.

Mr. Speaker, my statements in sharing these concerns is to meet the deadline of March 31st for the affordable winter road season, and I must emphasize the need for attention and additional resources as I've received several concerns already this morning on the rough sections which is extending the trucking turnaround. Just to give you an example, Mr. Speaker, it takes the fuel truck from Enterprise to Colville Lake six days and four days to Fort Good Hope. So you can see the length of travel time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Members' statements. Member from Hay River South.

**MEMBER'S STATEMENT 507-20(1):
SECOND ANNUAL COMMUNITY SPIRIT
AWARDS**

HON. VINCE McKAY: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend I had the privilege of attending the Second Annual Community Spirit Awards in Hay River. These awards provided a valuable opportunity to unite the community, celebrating the qualities that make our town truly special, particularly in light of the challenges we faced in the recent years.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge the remarkable individuals and the organizations recognized at this event.

- Heather Coakwell was introduced into the Hay River Sports and Recreation Hall of Fame, her exceptional contribution to figure skating and a variety of sports.
- Donovan Rogers was named as youth volunteer of the year.
- Bobby Hamilton was honoured as a senior volunteer of the year.
- The Soaring Eagle Friendship Centre was honoured both in the arts and cultural awards and the community spirit award.
- Super A Foods received the good business award in recognition of their local support.

- Kia Carter was named the outstanding athlete of the year, and
- Gerald Dumas was presented with the Trailblazer of the Year Award for the outstanding work to the west channel ice road and the vital trails in Hay River.

I'm also proud to share that Tara Boudreau was named citizen of the year. This honour was well deserved as Tara dedicates herself not only as a principal of two schools, but she also plays a vital role in promoting youth programming and volunteering beyond her classroom.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all nominees and award recipients and nominees, and I offer my greatest gratitude to everyone who continues to work tirelessly to make our town a better place. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Hay River South. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. No, okay. Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 508-20(1):
DEHCHO FIRST NATION 30TH ASSEMBLY

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Colleagues, this past summer, the Deh Cho First Nations celebrated its (audio) the 15th. I had the honour of being invited to the Assembly. It was great to see them work together in how they included youth and elders with the leadership and decision-making. I can tell you the 30th Assembly for the Deh Cho Nation marks a significant milestone in its journey of Indigenous self-governance and cultural resurgence in Canada. Established in 1990, the First Nation -- Deh Cho First Nation represented a collective of ten communities in the Deh Cho region of the Northwest Territories, each with its unique heritage and tradition. This Assembly not only celebrates the past achievements of the Deh Cho people but also serves as a platform for envision of future grounded in self-determination and sustainability. Over the past three decades, the First Nation made remarkable strides in asserting its rights and preserving its culture. The Deh Cho process of land claim negotiation framework has been pivotal in advancing the region's interests. This process emphasizes importance of land stewardship, reflection of deep connection between the Deh Cho people and their ancestral territory. As the nation navigates the complexity of modern governance, it remains committed to integrating traditional knowledge with contemporary practices, ensuring their cultural identity remains at the forefront of decision-making.

Moreover, the Assembly serves as a reminder of the ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous communities, including climate change, resource extraction, and the need for economic development aligns with traditional values. The Deh Cho First Nation has been proactive in addressing these issues and advocating for sustainable practices that honour the land and its resources. Initiatives focused on renewable energy, wildlife conservation, and community-led economic projects illustrates the nation's commitment to a balance of development. As Deh Cho First Nation celebrates (audio) Assembly, it also looks to its future of hope and determination, legacy of the past combined with the vision for resilience and self-sufficient regions with the guidance of the Deh Cho people as they continue to navigate the complexity of modern society while honouring their traditional culture. I'm looking forward to the 31st Assembly. Thank you

MR. SPEAKER: Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 509-20(1):
LABOUR SUPPLY AND POPULATION
GROWTH IN THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to talk about population growth today. Mr. Speaker, as I talk to employers, they talk about their struggles of getting anyone to work. I had a great conversation the other day with the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, and they are fearful about what's actually happening with the nominee program because their membership, including our community at large, is struggling to find people to fill jobs. They don't care where they've come from, Mr. Speaker; we're dying to have anybody here with a pulse in these jobs to do these jobs, Mr. Speaker, because we're struggling.

We all talk daily here with the proverbial challenges of lack of nurses, lack of doctors, and lack of teachers. But we cannot let it go unforgotten that we have people such as the construction workers, the landscapers, and even the restaurateurs who are struggling filling positions. Now with the nominee program being pulled from the carpet of business, and our population is fearing what will happen next. Mr. Speaker, we cannot let this upcoming nominee program create chance as their business model for success.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, the GNWT cannot be the singular salvation to our population growth by saying, in other words, GNWT jobs will bring them here. Well, as fact, it doesn't. We need a new strategy. Population

growth is a barrier to our success. In other words, it isn't being done. It's the wall that we can't seem to get past.

Now, the GNWT is number one in a few areas. Allow me to remind this House. Well, our power bills are probably number one, and if not, number 2. Our unemployment, well, again, in the range of number one as in worst. What more factors of disaster flags do we need to raise? We need action on getting population here in the Northwest Territories.

I don't know what it will take to wake this government up from its sleepy slumber of saying if we don't have people, we can't fill the jobs. If we can't have jobs, we can't have growth, etcetera, etcetera. It's a vicious circle, Mr. Speaker.

Population growth will underpin our success. We're seeing the struggles here in Yellowknife. I can only imagine the struggles in the regions and in the communities. You know, often, we forget that the importance of the sustainable population growth will be key to our federal grant. So if we have people here, we'll get a federal grant. We have people here working, we have taxation. We have people who happy and doing things. Mr. Speaker, we can only sell our fresh drinkable water so long. We need a strategy that puts them on the hook, reels them in, brings them here. Whether they come from Alberta, they come from Nova Scotia, whether they come from the States, because they're probably looking for places to go there, or they come from overseas, whether it's Europe or Africa or Asia, I don't care. We need good people to bring their families here, and we need a strategy from this government.

Mr. Speaker, this territory is in dire need. We need people now more than ever. We need contributors who will help the North and its fabric grow strong, and I intend to push harder for this because we need them now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 510-20(1):
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL BURIAL SITES IN
FORT RESOLUTION

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we know too well how Indigenous children were failed by Canadian government, were separated from their families, their communities, and their culture, and put them into residential schools where they were exposed to trauma, injury, and illness. Many are dealing with physical and mental

consequences to those experiences to this day. Whether through the experience or through intergenerational trauma, tragically many are who also passed away at those schools, we are still searching for their unmarked graves, so their remains are still -- we're still looking for their remains to this date. Unfortunately, some policies are still standing in the way of the acts of reconciliation because some of the remains of the Indigenous children who passed away at residential school have been unjustly classified as archaeological artifacts, and therefore, their rights returning to their families has been prevented.

I want to share the story of a young girl named Alma today who is one of many victims of residential school whose remains have been blocked from returning home due to these erroneous policy interpretations. Alma died at St. Joseph's School at the age of 5 years old. In the late summer, Alma's mother went to meet the boat from Fort Resolution at the dock in Fort Smith. When Alma didn't get off the boat, Alma's mother asked the other children why Alma wasn't there, and she was told that the nuns said that she has gone to heaven. The cause of the death at residential school are most often listed as TB by the nuns or priests recording the death. Even the child because of injury, Alma's mother never stopped grieving and was later hospitalized. Alma's now 88-year-old sister had promised her mother that she would find Alma and bring her remains back to Fort Smith to be buried beside her mom.

A rotting cross with Alma's nameplate was found in the Fort Resolution cemetery along with other children's crosses and nameplates. Alma's sister was informed and immediately asked when Alma could be brought back to the burial site of her mother.

The coroner's office had offered assistance, and the Coroner's Act has provisions for the exhumation of a human remains; however, the archeology department classified residential school burials as artifacts. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my Member's statement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, colleagues. There are two branches of government that are clearly at odds in which other on how to proceed. There are currently investigations into the cause of the death of these children and why they were buried. But in the meantime, Alma's remains must be returned home. We need to make exceptions so that Indigenous children and culture and traditions are upheld, and the remains of these children are treated with upmost respect. I hope to get a clear commitment from the Minister

later today to help bring Alma home to her family in the community. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. Members' statements. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Range Lake.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize my constituent Nicole Spencer. She is the executive director of the SPCA for the Northwest Territories, does great work with animals, and is also a neighbour. So thank you for being here today, Nicole. It's lovely to have you watching our proceedings.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Member from Hay River North.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to welcome Bronwyn McVale who is joining us in the executive hallway as an executive -- sorry, the executive administrative coordinator for the chief of staff. So I'm happy to have her in the House here in her first week. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to your chambers. I hope you are enjoying the proceedings. It is always nice to see people in the gallery. And remember, this is -- you put us here, so thank you very much.

Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Replies to the budget address, day 7 out of 7. Replies to the budget address. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

Replies to the Budget Address

MR. RODGERS' REPLY

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity today to address some concerns around the budget, Mr. Speaker. It's maybe a little more of an elongated Member's statement but certainly, it certainly ties in closely to the items that we're reviewing in the budget this session.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt we find ourselves in some challenging times. The current budget, I think, and I feel, doesn't offer a lot in the way of reduction, nor does it move us away from basically a status quo budget, Mr. Speaker. The supplemental appropriations we passed in the House to offset the challenges of transportation due to low water, the continuing issues with road deterioration on the Dempster Highway and other road systems in the territory

basically, Mr. Speaker, ate any surplus we had budgeted for 2024-2025. And of course Forced growth has also played a contributing factor. I anticipate, Mr. Speaker, that there may be difficult decisions ahead that may affect programs, services and staffing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to speak a little to the economy.

In my address to the budget last year, I spoke about how between 2011 and 2017, we missed the boat on a major gas development opportunity. We had an Indigenous-led pipeline group that were forced to sit helplessly as the regulatory regime slowly choked the life out of what could have been a monumental game-changing project for our territory. I spoke about all the wellness and housing projects we could fund together, the jobs we could create for our residents, the influx of others wanting to move to our amazing territory to work in these industries, bringing with them spouses and partners that may be nurses, teachers, doctors, or early child care workers, any many other professions that we so desperately need. Again, a year later, Mr. Speaker, we still find ourselves resource rich and cash poor.

If the current polls are any indication, we may be looking at a change in our federal government. The leader of that government, if he indeed becomes our next Prime Minister, has been speaking publicly about repealing Bill C-69 and once again fast-tracking LNG projects, restarting the ring of fire mining industry, and making Canada an energy powerhouse. I understand, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of political rhetoric here but as a territory rich in resources, we have to be prepared in this budget to engage and indeed incentivise to ensure that we are tracking those national and international companies to our territory.

Our economy must be key, Mr. Speaker. My fear is that with no meaningful economic growth in any sector other than the government, much of our talent will leave or have already left. We must streamline our regulatory regime so that national and international businesses do not look at us as a place with too much regulatory burden that require too much time and the costs that come with that burden.

Mr. Speaker, on energy, the GNWT energy action plan is set to have a significant 5-year review and update to the overarching energy strategy. The current energy action plan, Mr. Speaker, focused exclusively on renewables and reducing emissions. Exclusively. How is that, Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive energy plan?

I agree we have to have a path for renewable energy and emission reductions, but we need to step back and look at the big picture, Mr. Speaker. Biomass and solar is great but what is it doing to the grid in the communities that rely on non-renewables? The town of Inuvik is putting in a massive solar array to power its Midnite Sun Complex. That's the pool, hockey rink, curling rink, and community centre, 100 percent federally funded to the tune of \$5.5 million -- and great for the town of Inuvik -- but what does taking such a large user from our current NTPC grid mean for the cost of power production in Inuvik? Has there been any analysis or even engagement on significant projects of this size? Has Northwest Territories Power Corporation kept up with the technology to have the proper integration of such large-scale renewable energy systems, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, the answer is no, we have not.

In my response to the budget last year, I also pointed out that In April of 2021, the Government of the Northwest Territories completed a report entitled Mackenzie Delta Liquefied Natural Gas, or MDLNG Project. In this report, it studied the up to 19 trillion cubic metres of natural gas in the Mackenzie Delta that could be developed for export and will provide economic benefits to the Inuvialuit settlement region, the Northwest Territories and Canada. In short, the MDLNG report stated that project is technically feasible. Natural gas production facilities and associated pipelines have been operating safely in Arctic climates such as Alaska and Russia for over forty years, Mr. Speaker. Russia has shipped LNG in the Arctic waters since 2017 using LNG and condensate ice breaking carriers. The ice breaking carrier technology proposed in this pre-feasibility study is based on Russia's operating experience. These are the kind of projects that change the direction of our territory, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Inuvialuit get it. The \$293 million Inuvialuit-led M-18 well project involves the construction of a new plant to produce natural gas and synthetic diesel to secure a supply of fuel for energy, heating, and transportation.

The project will reduce reliance on transporting liquefied natural gas and synthetic diesel from southern regions thereby enhancing local energy security, reducing transportation emissions, and providing economic benefits for the region. The well will provide a stable supply of natural gas and synthetic diesel to meet the energy needs of the ISR for over 50 years, Mr. Speaker, and that's based on current consumption rates.

Mr. Speaker, the project will reduce energy costs for households and businesses. It will

create much needed employment opportunities, and Mr. Speaker, it is expected to reduce up to 40,000 tonnes of emissions annually. These are the shoulder to shoulder projects we must be working on to find a path to develop our LNG, Mr. Speaker. The benefits would reach all of the residents of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, transportation. I spoke earlier about the additional funding required to offset the cost associated due to the inability of MTS to complete its barging season in the Sahtu. We are all keenly aware of the dire consequences and effects it has had on the residents. This is not the first time we have had additional cost due to low water levels and cancelled service. In previous Member statements, I have encouraged this government to re-evaluate the current structure of MTS. I appreciate the long history it has in its current location and by no means am I suggesting it no longer operate in Hay River, but Mr. Speaker the reality is such that it would make sense to also have infrastructure in Inuvik or Tuktoyaktuk. This infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, that can service upriver as far as Fort Good Hope, the Inuvik region, and the coastal communities in the Inuvialuit settlement region. This work needs to happen immediately, Mr. Speaker, to ensure our supply chain does not continue to see residents without essential fuel, building supplies, and consumables, as well as supplemental appropriation costs that cost the GNWT millions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I have worked in finance for over half of my career. I have worked with corporate tax, personal tax, I have completed business plans and feasibility studies, I have created companies and prepared budgets and cash flows but, Mr. Speaker, after a little over a year as an MLA I am still often mystified with how the NWT housing corp budgets and forecasts its spending.

We have all agreed that housing is a priority for this government, likely the number 1 priority for most. What we need is a detailed plan of exactly what we intend to spend, what we intend to build, broken down by region, and we need to ensure that the regions with the most need are prioritized, and that the communication is clear on what we intend to spend and what we intend to build.

Mr. Speaker, we need to ensure the existing inventory of units are maintained and that the repairs are planned, scheduled, and completed so we can finally address the long waitlists that I know every community has.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that the Members that we elected to Executive Council are

working hard. I know they care just as much as myself and my colleagues about the state of affairs of this government. But Mr. Speaker, we need to start thinking outside the box. We can no longer afford these cost overruns on projects that continually show after the fact that they were not properly managed or had proper analysis completed. Maybe its time we start to look, Mr. Speaker, at economic working groups that utilize the expertise we have in the regions. We have many long-term residents, Mr. Speaker, that have worked across many sectors and have a vast amount of knowledge to share. In energy, transportation, information technology like the Inuvik satellite station in Inuvik, and other major projects that have happened in regions outside of Yellowknife as well, there is a wealth of business expertise out there, Mr. Speaker, that if given the opportunity to be part of a think tank could provide ideas that we as a government may not have considered.

Mr. Speaker, we need to further engage our Indigenous business community. The Indigenous development corporations are doing some amazing work in the NT. They are partnering with long established Canadian companies to foster economic growth. The private sector has the expertise and experience that often governments do not. Any economic plans we produce must, again, be less about statistical overviews and more about strategic roadmaps to prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, again, I appreciate the Executive Council that we elected in this House; I know how hard they're working; I know it's a difficult time, but I know if we continue to working together and we put the economy first and make sure that we are creating jobs, we're creating opportunities and we're building industry in this territory, Mr. Speaker, that will take us to prosperity. That will solve the issue we have around social issues, around housing issues. We need to find a way to generate revenue, Mr. Speaker, and I know working together, working with this group, we can get there. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Replies to the Budget Address, day 7 of 7. Member from Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA'S REPLY

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance delivered the second budget of the 20th Assembly on February 6th. The proposed 2025-2026 Budget forecasted spending of \$2.7 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the government needs to plan and budget for emergencies and

unexpected natural disasters. There were lower water levels across the territory and more fires again last year. In my riding, my constituents have seen communities devastated by wildfire and flooding. Some residents are still waiting to return and rebuild.

Mr. Speaker, I represent four small Indigenous communities established and governed uniquely. But what is common to all communities in my riding is the striking difference between the economic outlook in small communities, Yellowknife and regional centres. There is a divide between those who have, who are living in bigger centres and communities, and those who have not in the small communities.

Mr. Speaker, I don't see enough emphasis on improving the lives of residents in small communities in this budget. I would like to see more emphasis on building the economy in small communities. It is a mandate of this Assembly to strengthen the economic foundation of the NWT. The government has committed to grow and enhance a northern workforce by investing in skill development and by attracting skilled workers to the NWT, increase investment certainty, and create opportunities for the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot achieve this unless we improve education outcomes and heal past traumas associated with the residential school system. We need better options and workforce training in our small communities.

Education is a treaty right. We have recently heard in the House that Aurora College is closing 19 community centres across the territory in June. This includes a centre in Fort Providence as well as one in K'atłodeeche in my riding. Mr. Speaker, these closures unfairly target Indigenous communities and will make education less accessible for Indigenous learners. They are adding to disparity that is already present in small communities. Our people need more learning opportunities at home in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I understand Aurora College has a board of directors to make decisions about the college programming, but the GNWT currently provides nearly 80 percent of the college's revenue. The GNWT allocated almost \$64 million in grants and contributions in 2024. I feel we need to look at this and reduce the amount of funding for the college if they are going to cut programs and jobs in small communities. Small communities cannot afford to lose these learning centres, Mr. Speaker.

I also see great opportunity in our small communities to increase small businesses,

entrepreneurship, and tourism. This is part of the 20th Assembly's economic mandate. I would like to see more lending, financing, and business service offered through the GNWT public agencies. We need more support through industry, tourism and investment to support business development, entrepreneurship, and tourism development. We should be moving jobs to the communities or at least getting ITI into the communities more often.

Communities appreciate regular consistent visits from department heads. People value the leadership of departments that show community support, that they will take the time to understand people in their region and understand their challenges. Learning from each other is the only way we can be successful in meeting our goals and funding programs. There needs to be more emphasis on increasing awareness of tourism, promoting the benefits of tourism, and developing tourism training, especially in small communities.

People in small communities also need good business advice and guidance to make their idea a reality. Small communities need consistent regular visits from business experts who will work one on one with them to develop their concept and to support them through their business development process. Mr. Speaker, tourism is a natural opportunity. People want to visit. We can show them the Dene culture, our land, our way of life. We need more support in tourism to help people in small communities to make a business idea into a reality.

Mr. Speaker, I know the department has been supporting business development for years. But how effective are these programs? Are they delivering the results we want to see in the small communities? Are these business development programs reducing the reliance on income support? Increasing entrepreneurship helps people pay their bills.

The cost of living is a struggle for many residents, and these costs are only going to go up. But even a small home-based side business can help people pay their bills. Many residents in my riding are on income assistance support. How are we supporting people on income support to start a small business as a means to become financially independent? How does this budget help us break the cycle of dependency, Mr. Speaker? There needs to be more reporting on the results of business development programs as well as income assistance reporting. What economic development programs or services are helping residents get off income support and participating in the economy?

Mr. Speaker, the government should be putting money towards actions that will improve the lives of residents in small communities and improve the capacity of local communities because this strengthens the territory overall.

An unfortunate reality facing my riding in the territory, Mr. Speaker, is homelessness. There are many people in my riding who do not have a home to live in. And as I have stated in this House before, housing is a human right, and we need to be making progress to uphold the right for everyone in the territory to be housed.

I see increased investment in the transitional housing addictions recovery program and more funding for the Yellowknife shelter and sobering centre. But how will these benefits be extended to small communities?

Mr. Speaker, access to health care and addressing the effects of trauma is a priority of the 20th Assembly. I want to see an increase in health promotion and reporting. As we know, small communities are fighting increased violence, drug use, and crime. Mr. Speaker, health promotion is a real way to fight back against addictions. If children understood the consequences of smoking, drinking, and drug use, would they be easily influenced?

Mr. Speaker, I am concerned that the public health promotion is not being delivered effectively. The government is planning efficiency improvements through the health system sustainability unit. They are proposing \$9.1 million cuts across all departments. My hope is that this won't impact health care in small communities. I believe many elders could better manage their health with increased education and home visits. Investing in health promotion is preventative. The money we put into health promotion today will save our health care system over time.

Mr. Speaker, our people should be empowered to live the most healthy active lifestyles they can, free of addictions. Our people are worth the investment. It is an investment that will bring savings over time. And these are my concerns for the 2025-2026 Budget.

There are many challenges to overcome in small communities, and the only way we are going to overcome the economic problems, social problems, violence and crime, is with healthy people. I want to see an increase in health promotion for the NWT. I want to see our people make healthy choices. Our people are worth it and deserve it. We need to work together to build up the North and make changes that will empower our residents. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Replies to the Budget Address, day 7 of 7. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO'S REPLY

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today would like to respond to the Budget Address for this fiscal year by this Government of the 20th Assembly. I am not just looking out for the best interests of my community, my riding, but I am concerned about the Northwest Territories as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, when I took the oath of office of this 20th Assembly, I took this oath very serious because I personally know the state of what our residents of the NWT are facing and what challenges they will have to endure in the near future. We as MLA's set priorities for this government to implement, to ensure the residents can live in a place of hope, a place of safety, and a place of prosperity. The residents of my community of Tetlit Zheh, Tsiigehtchic, and Aklavik, along with the non-government organizations and the Indigenous governments, have also echoed these priorities for this government to act on. To date, into our second year of our mandate, we have very little in terms of implementing the priorities.

Mr. Speaker, housing is the foundation of every community, every family, and every individual. Without a solid foundation our communities and families will not have a secure future. Prior to the 1970's, the Indigenous Peoples of the North were very strong and independent then the government came into our communities and stated that they will build us houses and make our lives easier. Well, some 50 years later we are no longer strong nor are we independent; we are more reliable on the government.

Mr. Speaker, for the past 50 years the Government of the Northwest Territories have been focusing their efforts on public housing, some of their units have passed its life span two times over, and yet our Indigenous population are subject to live in these units that should have been replaced 25 years ago. In each of my communities within the Mackenzie Delta, we have a waitlist anywhere from one to three years long.

Mr. Speaker, housing has been set as the top priority by the Members of this 20th Assembly and all levels of government, but we have witnessed very limited implementation into the living conditions of our NWT residents. Homeownership and market housing should play a bigger role in our smaller communities. Options should be made available to our Indigenous population. Believe it or not, not all of our Indigenous residents are dependent on

the government but want their independence back. But with policies and procedures, we have to struggle, living within public housing and the polices that govern our lives.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard stories of our great Chief Julius from Tetlit Zheh. He signed our treaty in 1921 because he wanted a better and secure life for his people. One of the major clauses of this treaty is education. Chief Julius wanted a school built in Tetlit Zheh because he did not want any more of community children taken away to the residential school system. This treaty was signed to ensure that the community's children would receive the best education that is available today. This treaty is being breached and not upheld by the federal and territorial Governments.

Mr. Speaker, the education system of today is failing our students. The system is setting our students up for failure in life before life even starts in the real world. Today the students, particularly in the smaller communities, are graduating without any credentials. The graduating students are not able to pursue a post-secondary education for the mere fact that they are not given the proper education to pursue a career.

Mr. Speaker, when I was going to school, we would await our report cards to see if we were ready for the next grade. If not, some would have to repeat the grade again because we were being prepared for life after high school. In today's system, the students don't even wait for their report cards; they already know they are being promoted, not because they have reached their academic level but because of policies and procedures that the educators must follow. Socially promoting our students is a practice that this government must revisit and make the system right, make the system prepare our students for life after high school, not life on income support.

Mr. Speaker, the income support system in the NWT as a whole is used by 70 percent of the population. In the Mackenzie Delta riding we have 15 percent of the population, most of these recipients are young able adults. As you are aware, I have been advocating and trying to find a way to get these recipients off this program and to be viable partners in the workforce and help build our economy in the Northwest Territories. But we have a majority of recipients of this program making this as a livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, I am aware that this program should assist the select few, the elders and the disabled, because it is these recipients who really require the help because of their inability to work for themselves. But this government,

and past governments, are enabling the young residents to make this a way of life. I would like to see the productive choices brought back to the program. Make the people work for the program, not the program work for the people. I don't know what else to say about this program that I have not said in my Member's statements on the subject - maybe give the program to the Indigenous governments to administer; maybe have the recipients be eligible for eight months out of the year; I really don't know.

Mr. Speaker, attending adult education was once considered a productive choice when an individual was on income support but attending Aurora College within the smaller communities may no longer be an option. The board of governors of the Aurora College made a hasty decision that has or will have a negative impact on so many resources within our community learning centres. It is understandable to close or suspend funding to certain learning centres that are not being adequately utilized by the respective communities, but there are few learning centres that are trying to promote adult education.

Mr. Speaker, this government has to be advocates of all the community learning centres and seek public input from each of the communities to see how they can play a role in their respective learning centres. I believe the local organizations can administer their local learning centres because they know their membership and will promote education within the communities. Education is very important for the benefit of the individual and the community.

Mr. Speaker, the health and social services department has been identified as a priority of this government, the Indigenous government and non-government organizations throughout the Northwest Territories. The health of our Indigenous population is another treaty right that is not thoroughly being upheld. We have our residents expressing their concerns about medical travel, escorts, and accommodations on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, although the government is only administering the non-insured health benefits on behalf of the federal government, there is room for improvement. The biggest obstacle that the department is having to deal with is a dental team to set up a practice within the Beaufort Delta region. It is putting a strain on medical travel, medical escorts, and especially accommodations. Having our dental patients travel to another jurisdiction and be fully covered by the NIHB would alleviate the demands on the department.

Mr. Speaker, aging with dignity within our respective communities is a major concern for our aging population. Ours elders would like to stay in familiar surroundings with their families for moral support. Most family members are in the workforce and can attend to their parents or grandparents after working hours. Having our elders move to another community, even though it may be only an hour drive, puts a strain on everyone involved.

Mr. Speaker, sending our residents of the NWT who are battling addictions to a southern institute should no longer be a viable option. Keeping our people in the North, in their own culture, will make the process of the healing journey a success. The resources are right there within the communities. We know the needs of our people and they would be receptive to share their hardships with a local concerned person who will be there throughout the process. Resources should be made available within the communities, like it was in the past. We have seen results and it is still evident today.

Mr. Speaker, alcohol and the influx of hard drugs is in every community in the Northwest Territories. We have our own people killing our own people by selling alcohol and drugs within our communities, and the authorities are not acting on tips from the concerned residents. We need the cooperation of the local RCMP to help us fight this ongoing illegal activity. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to hear that this government is initiating a task force to combat bootlegging and the drug trafficking within our communities. Most of these illegal activities are taking place within Housing NWT public units. The local housing authorities are not following through with the terms of the lease agreement that both the representative and tenant signed.

Mr. Speaker, the SCAN legislation that is being proposed to help control the alcohol and drug sales both in the public units and private homes, I would welcome and support this long-awaited legislation. The majority of the community members and resource people know who are conducting these illegal activities and yet there are policies and procedures that are protecting the criminals. For the safety and health of our communities, we need to expedite the SCAN legislation and the inception of the task force to combat the alcohol and drug activity within our communities. The court system also has to play a big part in this process by prosecuting the criminals to the full extent of the law. The bootleggers and drug traffickers cannot hide behind their children; therefore, we must set a precedent and imprison these criminals so that they do not continue to kill our law-abiding citizens.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice should assist the communities in setting up justice committees to give courts recommendations on the outcomes of a verdict and proposed jail terms. The justice committees can also ask that the courts do not allow repeat offenders from re-entering our communities if the community would be put at risk for their safety.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I believe that the small communities of the Northwest Territories do matter and will play a major role in reshaping the economy of the NWT. This government and this budget should start investing in its greatest resources. No, it is not precious metals or oil or gas, but our people of the North. This government has to start consulting with the general public on issues that will impact their lives in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, with the collaboration on the Cabinet, MLAs, Indigenous governments, and the residents of the Northwest Territories, we can have a territory that will be safe, healthy, and prosperous for today and the next generation. Keep investing in our small communities to make a big difference. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Replies to the Budget Address, day 7 of 7. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID'S REPLY

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when I replied to the last year's budget, I started with a quote. This year I will simply say, the race is not always to the swift.

Mr. Speaker, that is the moral of Aesop's fable of the tortoise and the hare. For many years, if not decades, the GNWT has been criticized for being too slow and not doing enough. It's a criticism rooted in a truth, which is that this government does tend to move slowly. This is why this criticism is continually repeated. I think there is nuance within that truth, Mr. Speaker. First, however, I want to talk about what I have heard and seen in my time here as a Member.

In this House, I have heard that communities and residents do not have enough to make do. I have seen families, often led by single moms, trying to make things work in apartment buildings that are dangerous due to the drug trade and buildings in dire need of repair. I have taken the Premier and the Minister of housing to meet some of these folks, to see their day-to-day reality. I have been in communities where buildings are falling apart but people are expected to live in them and make it work. I have seen and I have heard a lot of frustration, Mr. Speaker.

To make meaningful change in the time we are allotted, Members want to see more investment into what we decided collectively needs to be improved in the territory. It is why Regular Members keep circling back to housing and demanding more. In my constituency, I am happy that Housing NWT is taking positive steps with the renovation of Aspen Apartments, slated for opening this fall. But I've also seen an encampment pop up next door to that project, because we don't have enough shelter, transitional, and supportive living spaces in our capital. This budget begins to address those issues, but there's always room for improvement and expediency.

In his reply to the Budget Address, my colleague from Frame Lake spoke about his constituent Emily. And he has told me that since he gave that reply, people in the public service have reached out to him and said I can understand the need for cuts if it means folks like Emily and her disabled child have a safe place to live. For something more nebulous like fiscal sustainability, it's not particularly an easy sell.

Emily's story underlies why we must action and fund core functions like housing more expediently, and indeed, with equity issues in focus. Restoring balance for fiscal sustainability is important, but social stability and social investment are important too. Divorcing one from the other is a recipe for slow-moving disaster.

When we talk about good debt of investments by government, I argue that we need to be talking to the good debt surrounding social investment; in other words, what debt we take on to house and support folks directly stemming from our priorities.

Due to the continual cost pressures that climate change impacts are having on our territory, we have reached a point of perfect storm of lack of dollars for social investment because we are desperately working to cover the basics. Water levels mean that barging of basic necessities doesn't happen, and costly airlifts begin. It means we burn diesel and safeguard residents against massive electricity bill jumps. Extensive snowfall means unexpected expenses to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars spent on clearing highways. Continued wildfire evacuations, well, almost all of us know how bad those can be. I applaud the GNWT for pivoting to handle these challenges financially, but as of right now it means less dollars overall for the extensive social needs of our territory.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know my colleague's constituent, Emily, but the outlines of her story are familiar to me. I grew up with intense family

budgetary pressures, so much so that there was a time in my life where it seemed like the bank might repossess our family home. I was young enough to not know all the particulars but old enough to know it was bad. I see people reaching that point right now, and it's why my Member's statements are focusing more tightly on the everyday cost pressures and anxieties of my constituents. I know exactly how it feels to wake up every day in dread that one unexpected cost may break everything you worked so hard to build for yourself and your family.

Mr. Speaker, I know it's tough to balance sound policy decisions with the speed that people want to see the problems that dog us get addressed. I do not envy Cabinet at all in this regard. I also know that move fast and break things might be a great mantra for people who work in tech, but it is not a good way to govern and make choices where the ripple effects of decisions can easily negatively impact residents without foresight and critical, data-based decision-making.

I do not want to be a part of a government that cuts without foresight of the impacts of lost services that can harm so many. Action for the sake of action is hollow and empty and can hurt our territory for generations. To Cabinet's credit, there is not overwhelming doom and gloom in this budget, which I think many folks expected to see. As the Finance Minister said, Restoring Balance is part of shifting the culture of how we deliver programs and services to ensure that we maximize the value from the budget available.

Mr. Speaker, I very much want to see that culture shift realized in the 20th Assembly. However, an underlying problem slowing down that shift is the fact that we don't have extensive, foundational evaluative data on most of our programs and services. I would like to see tangible human resource investments in the government renewal initiative, or what GRI is becoming, as it becomes a responsibility of all departments. The evaluations that result from such an investment would mean that all MLAs, but especially Cabinet, could make better data-driven informed choices. Those choices will remain hard choices but there will be evidence to back them. And that's how I want to talk about effectively investing the dollars we have. I have had these conversations with the finance Minister over many months and given her a suggestion that's fairly cost neutral. I hope she is taking it to heart.

In my reply to last year's budget, I spoke about what good governance looks like when we relate it to those who have the least, Mr. Speaker. I want to expand on that today.

Government culture shifts based on financial choices are admirable, but to make them lasting, sustainable and socially-driven, requires a larger shift in how we approach decision-making and governance. We have started to talk a little bit in this Assembly about ESG, or environmental, social and governance indicators or frameworks, that are most associated with investment and corporate sustainability. I am interested in what approach to governance we can take for regenerative sustainability.

Although I might not agree with my colleagues on what option is best to take, I do support the core concept about talking about improvements to government and decision governance, and decision-making is always a good conversation to have.

As I've said before, we need to stop saying that Northerners are resilient. The goal of government should be to prevent people from being put into situations and circumstances where they need to be resilient to begin with.

To shift our perspective on that, Mr. Speaker, I argue that we must look through a new lens. Almost all systems in our western world are hierarchical. They are rooted in scarcity, domination, exploitation, greed, and prize the individual over the collective. What I love about consensus government is that it prioritizes the collective over the individual. It makes our community of the North its priority. In practice, it does fall short when it comes up against hierarchical, patriarchal ways of acting and thinking that we practice as a western culture in almost every other facet of our lives.

I want us to recommit to prioritizing what puts balance, regeneration, and the health of communities and their people that make those communities vibrant first. I think all of us want to strive to realize those ideals in one way or another. I am uninterested in my own power or domination of making government bend to my individual will, Mr. Speaker. I am interested in a government that puts community care as its ultimate goal.

When I was in Australia with you last November, Mr. Speaker, I had the great pleasure to attend a presentation by Ms. Jennifer Nadel, from the UK group called Compassion in Politics. One slide of that presentation caught my imagination. It was titled old versus new politics. In this presentation, old was assumed to mean Westminster politics. Key words for old politics are conflict-based, discriminatory, triggering, aggressive, one upping, compartmentalized, winner takes all, short-term advantage drives agenda, simplistic,

divisive and rewards lying and stoking division. The qualities or key words of new politics are collaborative, promotes psychological safety, value led, respectful, builds for peace, protects the needs of most vulnerable, holistic solutions, generative, consensus building, inclusive, nuanced, and kind.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's a shock to anyone that I am drawn to the qualities of compassion and generative, nuanced discourse in politics. When we lean hard into divisive approaches, people with the least are those who suffer. Seeking solutions for those who have the least is exactly why I entered politics to begin with. Instead of seeking common ground, I want us to create it. It requires an active effort and intention to focus on what unites us rather than divides us. Passively waiting for that common ground to show up isn't working.

Mr. Speaker, I entered this role with my eyes wide open. I spent nearly a decade and a half in the public service before running for office. I know that culture shifts take time, that change management is a struggle for everyone, and that due to our push and pull between consensus and hierarchical systems in the Northwest Territories, change is slow.

Mr. Speaker, I did not think for one second that I was coming into a time of ribbon cutting politics. I knew from day one of the 2023 wildfire evacuations that the 20th Assembly would grapple with just keeping the train on track, and perhaps thinking of ourselves as custodians or janitors of all the problems that keep dogging us year after year since 2020. I also hope that all 19 of us speak in caucus of regenerative change to our systems, so they work better for the residents of the NWT.

My dream is one day, perhaps in my lifetime if not in my tenure, that we can have a government that prizes the qualities of new politics, of consensus, and less about how we structure ourselves to look like a Westminster system. What I know in my bones is that the only way we can become and stay healthy as a territory, in all meanings of health, is if we prioritize community over self-interest.

Mr. Speaker, you could argue this is a pretty wild tangent to go into when we're talking about money. But if we aren't talking about how we invest our intention and leadership along with our money, I am not sure we are having conversations that challenge us to do better in every aspect of how we govern. And those are the conversations that seem most crucial to me in this time of great uncertainty that pervade almost every facet of our lives.

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I am inviting the Government of the Northwest Territories to formally expand its focus on investment to include how we are creating systems of intangible wealth for our residents; systems that do not exclude dignity, autonomy and a healthy environment. These are things that have no dollar figure because they are invaluable. They require our investment with no expectation of a 'return' beyond social prosperity. Economic and administrative efficiency cannot be the only criteria that budget expenditures are measured by just because they are quantitatively easy to measure. Qualitative and mixed methods are wonderful tools that can help us take bold new steps.

Mr. Speaker, if I could leave this on a note that wraps it all up, it would be invest wisely. Invest in initiatives that help us make good choices. Invest in the priorities we have all identified, especially housing, but also in how we address trauma. If we don't address trauma, we can't make nearly as much headway into all the priorities of the Assembly as they do interlock.

Mr. Speaker, if we invest in social good and health of our territory, it will pay dividends. The nuance of our situation is that taking steps to do that thoughtfully and sustainably takes effort. This must be balanced with urgent issues like increasing our housing stock. For cultures to shift and endure, however, it takes time. And so yes, Mr. Speaker, we are the tortoise, and I am confident we can win the race. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Replies to the Budget Address, day 7 of 7. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN'S REPLY

MS. MORGAN: Mr. Speaker, when people have asked me what do I think about this year's operating budget, I've been describing it as a status quo budget. The government describes it as providing stability. It reminds of a lesson I've learned while paddling some of the beautiful rivers of the Northwest Territories, especially whitewater rivers. So when you're in turbulent waters and the boat feels like it's about to tip, your instinct is to grab the gunnels of the boat and to try to stabilize yourself. But the problem is that that doesn't work and sometimes it makes you even more unstable. You can't control the waves underneath by holding onto the boat, and you have to let go of our paddle to grab onto the boat. So you lose control of where you're going.

Anyone who's ever taught white water paddling will tell you over and over again, whatever you do, don't grab the gunnels, keep your paddle in the water. And yet almost everyone grabs the

gunnels, and I've grabbed the gunnels more times than I care to admit. Because it's just our instinct. When things get turbulent, we reach for stability, the status quo. We hold on tight to what we already have, and we resist change. But what I hope that we can do as an Assembly is to keep our paddle in the water no matter what, to keep focused on where we need to go. That is the only way towards real stability and safety.

Most of the spending items that the government has highlighted in this budget as evidence of achieving this Assembly's priorities so far are really just signs of us barely treading water, or to use my previous analogy, barely keeping the boat afloat.

For example, we're highlighting that we've spent -- or we're spending \$12 million to dispute to ratepayers to mitigate impacts of the general electricity rate increase. But that's not a sign of a robust economic foundation. That's a sign our power system is in major trouble.

We've got hemorrhaging health care costs. We're showing that we're spending an additional \$64 million on health care. But that's mostly a sign of a population that is sicker and failing to get the preventative care and the primary care earlier on to prevent more serious illnesses. So that's not a sign of success. We're spending more, but we're not necessarily getting better results.

So we can't be both pointing to those things as the source of our fiscal crisis but then turning around and bragging about spending money on those things like electricity bailouts and health care costs to demonstrate that we're working on our priorities. You can't have it both ways, Mr. Speaker.

I do want to acknowledge that this government has taken a few major steps in positive directions. The health care system sustainability unit represents a significant investment in trying to make our health care system work better. The establishment of a new unit within executive and Indigenous affairs to create a strategic approach to homelessness, including the creation of new transitional housing units, represents a notable commitment to help our most vulnerable community members. But by and large, what's been missing in this era of fiscal sustainability is a positive vision of what we're building, where we're going, what difference we want to make in people's lives. The message coming through is that we need to tighten our belts, do more with less, just hold on with our fingernails.

Now, we don't always need to be on this march towards progress and change, getting better

and better and better year after year, but we do need to show that we're making positive impacts. We need to nurture the seeds of where there's positive energy, grow the momentum where there's initiatives that are working on a local level, things that are motivating people. And what I keep hearing from my colleagues here is that people in NWT communities need to feel more sense of ownership over their lives, less helplessness and dependency. And so we need to seriously rethink how we deliver housing and income security and education.

For a long time, we've thought of government money as coming from this bottomless well. So if it gets wasted or spent on silly things, people often joke and say, whatever, it's just government money. But we're realizing now that the well is not bottomless and that attitude can't be sustained. So what if we used public resources and spent government money as if it was our own money, our own family's money, not as if it's government money.

When it's our own money, we want to see results. It's not enough just to show that money was spread across various communities and processes were followed, and boxes were checked. When it's our own money for our family, we need to make sure that money gets us meat on the table at the end of the day, wood in the stove, that our home is fixed up nice and sturdy and cozy, and that there are trained health care practitioners and emergency responders to keep us healthy and safe, that our children are well cared for and learning everything they need to know to ensure our communities continue on over the long term. When it's our money, we spend it on the things that really matter at the end of the day.

The common theme here seems to be accountability, that we all need to take more care with the precious resources that we have, to make wiser choices, and that people in each community need to take more ownership over what's happening there. Residents need to feel a sense of ownership over their own homes, and that's not all on the GNWT, obviously. But we can start with what we do have control over, such as helping more residents in public housing take ownership over their units.

To circle back to where I began, Mr. Speaker, as we sit in this boat together on turbulent waters, as the waves start to crash over the sides, we have to remember we're not going to steady the boat by holding on tight to the status quo. We have to keep our paddles in the water, keep moving towards where we need to go, even if it's slow, even if we're fighting against wind and currents, and most of all, we have to all paddle in the same direction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Replies to the Budget Address, day 7 of 7. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG'S REPLY

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker [Translation] Masi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about the -- I'm talking about the -- the federal government is -- what happened -- (audio) using a lot of million dollars of our -- so the 19 of us in here, each and every -- each and every one of us, there's a lot of things we need for. We know that it will be hard and difficult for us at times. So right now, we are in the deficit. We're in a huge debt. So -- so the -- so -- so at this time, at times, when we have a bill, we have to pay our House, power bills, grocery bill, our vehicle bills, snowmobile, boat, you know, the things that are very useful for us. When we have a lot of bills, and at times you are -- you feel uncomfortable. Sometimes that's why people get into because they want to -- they used to think about how they can get out of the deficit. That's the way -- that's in each of our community. So -- so people that live in the communities, so there a lot of things that all that money we get from here, we know that we're not getting enough money as we should. But still I know it could be -- I'm pretty sure we can make a lot of change, so if we can make a budget work really well, so -- so what I'm talking about now about the Budget Address for 2025-2026 Budget. Masi Mr. Speaker. [Translation Ends].

Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to the 2025-2026 Budget. The government has proposed a budget projecting \$2.7 billion in revenue, \$2.5 billion in operating expenditure with the \$170 million surpluses being used for infrastructure or to pay off debt. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Finance and government for tabling a sustainable budget. It is important that we live within our means while providing programs and services for the residents of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that we are treading on dangerous ground as we are within 2 percent of the debt limit of \$1.8 billion. It is good that the GNWT requested an increase. Hopefully, we will get a positive response from the federal government in April.

Mr. Speaker, this government is in a difficult spot. On the one hand you want to have enough borrowing capacity in case an emergency situation comes up. On the other hand the solution to our fiscal problems isn't to just continue to borrow money; money that someday will have to be paid back by our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, on a personal level. I used to live my life like the GNWT, when I ran out of money I borrowed. I borrowed from the banks, I borrowed more money from the banks. This is a bad long-term financial strategy. One day I woke up under a pile of debt that had to be paid back. There is no easy way to do this except lifestyle adjustment which is something this budget is trying to accomplish.

Mr. Speaker, using credit in an irresponsible way leads to financial ruin. I would like to see the GNWT borrowing capacity be reserved for infrastructure projects that are in the public interest that contribute to the economy and ultimately pay for themselves. Mr. Speaker, we need to find ways to reduce our debt levels so that our children and future generations are not negatively impacted by the decisions we make today. We should be investing in their future not borrowing against it.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the Minister of Finance in her commitment to discuss the topic of creating a Tlicho administrative region. It is good to see that the GNWT and the Tlicho government will address this topic at their bilateral meeting in April 2025. Mr. Speaker, in the meantime, it is important to have information on revenue and expenditures for the Tlicho region. I will continue to ask for this information to be provided. Tlicho financial information should be distinct from Yellowknife/North Slave region.

Mr. Speaker, in 2005 the Tlicho Agreement came into effect, we have our own 39,000 square kilometres of land and communities. The residents of the Tlicho region should know what programs and services are being delivered by the GNWT and what those programs cost.

Active positions. Mr. Speaker, there is a proposed reduction of 4 positions in the Tlicho riding while the rest of the North Slave and Headquarters will gain 20 positions. There are no significant program changes. It is disappointing that my region must provide essentially the same services with fewer positions.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister and Department of Finance for all the work and effort that went into creating the budget. While the budget does not have everything that that we want, but we must continue to work together as elected MLA/leaders by the residents of the NWT to provide the best programs and services possible that help the residents of the NWT. We must always remember who we do this work for and that this will have an impact on all our people.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that this budget is responsible, sustainable, and the first step towards reducing our debt so that our future generations are not burdened with it. I look forward to working together on future budgets that will get us even closer to reaching our collective goals. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Replies to the Budget Address, day 7 of 7. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Returns to oral questions. Acknowledgements.

Colleagues, realizing that we've been talking for an hour and a half, to give the translators a break we will take a short break.

---SHORT RECESS

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 517-20(1):
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL BURIAL SITES IN
FORT RESOLUTION AND FORT SMITH

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier I talked about bringing a young child that was buried in Fort Resolution home to Fort Smith. But, Mr. Speaker, right now in our community, the family has reached out to the chief in Fort Resolution to help do that. But we ran into a little bit of a problem now as we went looking into this whole situation about how we're going to exhumate the body of the baby and bring him home. But we understand that the GNWT has a policy on archaeological artifacts dating back over 50 years, and I'm not really sure if that applies to cemeteries. So I just want to ask the Minister does that apply to cemeteries? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member first and foremost for raising this very important intersection of legislation and how it impacts the lives of Northerners. And I think that's really very important that we always take a look at, we always keep in mind, and making sure that our legislation is responsive is incredibly important.

Mr. Speaker, under the Archaeological Sites Act, Justice has provided a legal opinion that this legislation does include ancestral remains of Northerners. Mr. Speaker, I think it's incredibly important to note here that this is a

piece of legislation that was mirrored off federal legislation post-devolution and that we are in the process of updating that through our Intergovernmental Council process, and I look forward to updating this House on that work. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As well as you know, in the 19th Assembly, I think it was Bill 85 on the -- where we worked on the UNDRIP file, and we did that for about a year and a half and we finally brought it to the House in the 19th Assembly, and we passed it, and that legislation. So that legislation recognizes and respects the Indigenous governments' culture and values. So I just wanted to ask the Minister now that there's a chance where we could go back and revisit to make -- to modernize this agreement -- or sorry, this new legislation so that we are able to exhume further remains that we have buried in the graveyard. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Member and had the privilege and honour of working with the Member on that legislation from the other side of the House. And this -- the work there really is to determine what pieces of legislation are prioritized and go first and as identified within the legislative priorities of this Assembly, this piece of legislation has been identified as needing to be updated and be reflective of where we're at in the territory, be reflective of what the Member did bring up, Article 12 from UNDRIP, and making sure that our legislation is in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. That's incredibly important to this whole House. And so that work will be done through the Intergovernmental Council, and that work will be done in concert with Indigenous governments. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Short supplementary. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I just want to briefly talk about that little 5-year-old boy that we want to bring home to the family and Fort Smith. And I just wanted to ask the Minister now that we know what needs to get done, what can we do now to bring that little boy home? Like you got to remember, this little boy was buried, had no family around, died of probably TB or whatever at the time, but the family wants to have a proper burial now in Fort Smith. I just want to ask the Minister what can we do now to work together in collaboration to bring this little boy home? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, that is what is ultimately the most important here.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to the entire legislation, ECE is working in consultation with Indigenous governments, and that work and the speed of that work will really be determined through the protocols with Intergovernmental Council. Specifically for this individual case here, you have the absolute commitment of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and myself to work as quickly as possible through the decision points that do remain but also with the associated consultation that needs to take place not only within Deninu Kue but also with other Indigenous governments across the territory. Because as we know, children across the territory were removed from their homes, and so the children who are buried there may also be from other traditional territories as well, and we need to ensure that we're respectful of that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 518-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES OUR LAND
FOR THE FUTURE PROJECT FINANCE FOR
PERMANENCE

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have questions for the Minister of ECC, who I endearingly used to call him the Maytag man, waiting for questions ever so patiently and loyally. My questions will be about the financing for the PFP project.

This House had to pass this legislation immediately in November with great fervency and zeal, and there's a lot of talk out there about this \$375 million not being passed on to our stewards who wanted this money to, you know, take care of the North. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister give this House an update where has that agreement gone, when can the Northerners expect the money, and when can we see some action on the ground? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, currently, project finance for permanence is being worked on at the partners' level. There are a number of items that needed to be completed to meet the requirements of the treasury board. And currently the \$300 million that will be provided by Canada needs to go to the House of

Parliament in a supply bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, I think Members, if I may speak for myself or at large -- I'm not sure in this case -- but I think we were given the assurances this was a Cabinet document to be approved through the treasury board, etcetera; it didn't require special legislation to approve. Has something significantly changed that may put this financing at risk? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as we were moving this process through our legislature, unfortunately parliament was prorogued by the federal government, and this has delayed the process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I seem to recall October, February, happened before the January proroguing. I'll check -- let the fact checkers verify that later. So in other words, proroguing of parliament happened after all of this agreement in rush. So is there any way the GNWT can help coordinate and help ensure that this project funding won't be lost given the fact that things may change? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have -- the department and myself have been in regular conversations with Minister Guilbeault's office in regard to this. As well as I said earlier, our partners continue to work forward with the Indigenous governments, the partners at the partner table, and the staff from ECC to advance this project. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 519-20(1):
FUNDING OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES SOCIETY FOR THE
PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I spoke about the important work the NWT SPCA does in the Northwest Territories. Unfortunately, they don't fit into any GNWT box for funding. As an NGO that provides a critical service to communities, they're not unlike NGOs that provide supports to the communities like homelessness, health and well-being. So can the Premier who is responsible for the NGO stabilization through

the executive speak to how -- or why the SPCA's not eligible for funding. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So there is no -- as the Member said, we don't have a policy that the SPCA fits into. That being said, EIA has recently taken over responsibility for working with NGOs, and so we're in the process of preparing to engage with NGOs as well as Indigenous governments about what constitutes a critical service in the Northwest Territories. And that will help outline our funding programs and policies going forward. So that work is going to begin very soon. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, thank you for that response from the Premier. That's exactly what I think the SPCA wants to hear. Mr. Speaker, I said their costs per year or last year were around \$700,000. \$200,000 of that is now staff. It used to be volunteer-driven. That's the kind of range. Is there room in the Premier's budget to provide \$200,000 to the SPCA? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, I don't have \$200,000 free in EIA's budget. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, former Premier Bob McLeod did provide a one-time payout to the SPCA way back in the day when we were Regular Members together. It was around \$40,000. Is there an exception policy that the SPCA can tap into to help them reduce their costs? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I remember the good old days when we were able to fund more organizations than we can now. Unfortunately, we don't have that type of process in place. And when it comes right down to it, Cabinet can do a lot of different things, and the financial board can do a lot of different things, you know, creating a new initiative, but there is a process to go through that and it's unlikely that we would have one NGO core funded through that type of process. What we want to do is create a policy and have it in place so it's clear and so that the people of the territory know where their money is going. We need to ensure that we are funding organizations that are providing critical services to the Northwest Territories. And the SPCA has done many great things. I was just reading about the evacuations recently, and I know that they did a lot of work during the evacuations and they do many good things for the territory.

So this is not a case of us not valuing the SPCA. It's clear the territory does. You can tell by all of the donations that residents provide. It's just a matter of getting a policy in place to ensure that we are focusing our funds where they're needed most. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 520-20(1):
SENIOR ENVOY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF
CANADA

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I was reading the news the other day, including the news release that the Premier had created a special envoy position in Ottawa, and we're hearing a lot of little hoopla about, well, doing things differently is bad. Well, and we're even hearing it from that side of the House. So I guess my question for the Premier particularly, is, is what mandate has he been given by this House or the people to establish a special envoy position, and where is the money coming from? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the Premier generally has a principal secretary, and so the mandate I was given was when I was elected as Premier to have that position.

Looking at the circumstances, I made the decision that that position would be transitioned into a senior envoy to the Government of Canada to help ensure that we have a voice in Ottawa and to help ensure that our Indigenous government partners also have a voice in Ottawa so we can support them. So the principal secretary is a political position in the Premier's office, and I made the decision to adjust that position. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, it has the appearance of being a political appointment as more of a reward rather than a discussion. Is there any reason the Premier changing significant motions by basically allocating public service resources to an Ottawa position -- why wouldn't he bring it to MLAs through the Caucus process to have a discussion and get a mandate from Caucus and the Assembly at large? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Decisions are made about positions across government without going to MLAs for every single decision. We are right now in budget discussions about the budget of the Northwest Territories, and so there's opportunities to

discuss how funds are allocated, but this is an operational decision I made based on the experience that I've had over the past just over a year and how things are functioning in our office and how -- what gaps we need to fill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I don't mind the Premier being a Premier, but this is a significant departure from regular business, especially when Members on this side of the House are asking for action, but he does it unilaterally without any type of consultation. Has he spoken to Indigenous governments that he's appointed his principal secretary to be the Ottawa face of our politics, has he spoken to MLAs? Like, who has he spoken to outside of his own principal secretary and himself? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And of course I spoke with my Cabinet colleagues, and I've spoken with Indigenous leaders, and there is a lot of support, a lot of positive feedback about this decision. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 521-20(1):
CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change following up on my Member's statement on some of the feedback that we have gotten from NWT youth on the climate change action plan. So some of their observations were that most of the actions in the plan are hard to measure, that it might specify we'll continue to do things or have processes. But what is ECC doing to make its actions on climate change more measurable? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to start by acknowledging MLA Reid and MLA Morgan and the students and staff at Sir John and St. Pat's high school for the opportunity to go in and have discussions of the climate change action plan with them.

As we've done our engagement as ECC, some of the key comments that we've received, and which have been independently evaluated

through a process that we're using, have said that our actions need to be more measurable, and this is certainly something that we feel is a critical path forward for us as a department. So what we've committed to doing is wherever possible is we're going to use a smart goal approach so that to ensure that our goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound. Also, ensuring that as we reach milestones through these processes that we're relaying that information to the public so that everyone is aware that we've made specific milestones. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay, so that is good news.

The next question is when will there be plain language materials produced about the climate change action plan and the milestones that are being reached so that ordinary residents of the territory, including young people, can read the plan and think, okay, this is speaking to me. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as a department, we're certainly committed to the plain language approach. I think it's critical that the members of our public in the Northwest Territories have the ability to read and interpret this information.

Right now, currently, each of the annual reports for the last five years has a preface that is a summary in a plain language format. It's a short, plain language summary. We are also -- we've already produced plain language materials that explain the priority, risk, and opportunities facing the territory when it comes to climate change risk, and we've also added areas within this plan that are depicted graphically to help to enhance and engage the public generally on the understanding and to stimulate more discussion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So my final question is how will ordinary residents, and particularly young people, be able to be involved in the actions that the government is taking as part of this climate change action plan, or is the plan designed to be carried out exclusively by government employees? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the NWT Climate Change Strategic Framework describes an overarching climate change goals for the territory and was developed in partnership with

our partners across the territory as well as through engagement with the general public and the public at large. Much of this work certainly involves, you know, engaging with the NWT climate change council, NWT climate change advisory groups, NWT climate change youth steering committee, and other collaborative mechanisms. You know, for the students, I think continuing their advocacy which they showed, you know, within their schools through their green teams, you know, when I was there, it was like question period. You know, they asked some really tough questions of me. So if they continue down that road, I think it's important that they will certainly get to where we need to get to.

While lots of things are harder in the North, the students notice that some things are easier, Mr. Speaker. We're such a small population that we can use our connections to organize ourselves and get things done. Let's follow the lead of those young people and bring more action into our climate change action plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 522-20(1):
FUNDING OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES SOCIETY FOR THE
PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, going back to my line of questioning with the Premier, when the executive does this work of revising its policies -- or sorry, when will that work happen? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The work will be starting in the spring. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Premier commit to including the SPCA or representatives from the SPCA in this work? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you. I'd be happy to. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 523-20(1):
BLOCK LAND TRANSFERS TO
MUNICIPALITIES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the Minister of MACA could give us an update as to the municipal land transfers that they were supposed to be working on for the last year. I thought that we're only making minor headway in some places, in particular Yellowknife. What is actually happening with block land transfers? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am not -- the Department of MACA is not the department for land transfers. But we do part of the work with the communities -- or community governments for their community planning and stuff like that. So might be for another Minister. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: Let's see, can't change the Minister. Has to stay on the question line. I'm old school. I forgot that the land -- Mr. Speaker, with respect to community -- I'm going to waive the question. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife North.

QUESTION 524-20(1):
CLIMATE CHANGE CURRICULUM

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So my questions now are for the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. On a similar theme, so the students we spoke with yesterday noted that in the new BC curriculum, there's no specific course about climate change and its impacts on northern environments or northern people. It's left to individual teachers to find their own resources or partner with non-profits like Ecology North to incorporate that into the curriculum. So that means some NWT students might get to learn about it and some won't. Has the department of education looked at creating a made-in-the North course or curriculum about climate change similar to what we've done with the northern studies curriculum? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, it's an important distinction that while we are adapting the BC -- or sorry, while we are migrating to the BC curriculum, we are doing adaptations to that curriculum to reflect the Northwest Territories, so it's an NWT adapted BC curriculum. Within that curriculum, there are a number of climate

education that intentionally reflect the Northwest Territories that are being implemented. And so first off, Mr. Speaker, there's the new Northern Studies 30 course that -- it was developed here in the Northwest Territories in partnership with Indigenous government, and that directly addresses climate change. It addresses it through a unique and culturally relevant lens that examines not only climate change but also, of course, impact to the land, fostering deeper understanding not only here in the Northwest Territories but also globally. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, some of the new courses that will be offered in the NWT will be Earth Sciences 11, Environmental Sciences 11, Science For Citizens 11, and Environmental Science 12. And those will all have a focus on climate change as well. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So can the Minister clarify whether the content around climate change in those courses has been developed by the department and then distributed to schools or to what extent it's left up to teachers to sort of fill in the blanks or make it relevant to the local context? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, in the context of Northern Studies 30, that course was a made-in-the-NWT course. It was developed in relationship and partnership with Indigenous governments. In regards to the other courses and the adaptation of them from a BC curriculum to an NWT curriculum, so that would be the final ones that I listed off there, you know, environmental science or earth sciences and the science for citizens, those courses there, it has a team of teachers from education bodies across the territory that work on adapting it. And so I've had the opportunity to walk through the halls over at education, culture and employment while they're in the building as they're doing that work and just happen to walk by at the right time. And so they are spending a significant amount of time on it. But there certainly would be opportunity for teachers then to take that work and make it their own and make it relevant to the interests of students in the particular community that they're in, and I think that's one of the special things about this curriculum too, is the ability for it to be flexible. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the department has tried to engage or partner with non-profits, such as

Ecology North, to try to incorporate more northern resources into curriculums, you know, for all the different grades. I know Ecology North doesn't have the resources to create a whole curriculum, but they might be able to add or support and work with communities. Has the department tried to work creatively with non-profits in that way? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, the department certainly is a group of very enthusiastic and creative people. A lot of them used to actually be in the classroom and wanted to move to the department to hold different roles within education in the territory. So certainly creative, certainly looking for other ways. Whether or not they have partnered specifically with Ecology North, I couldn't say. I can say that as a student in the Northwest Territories, had the opportunity to have Ecology North be within our school system in certain ways and other NGOs across the territory.

What I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that there are a lot of partnerships within all of our communities that I would encourage any teacher to take advantage of because I think it also breeds community involvement which is really important. But I hear the Member, and I'm always happy to have conversations about how we work together. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

QUESTION 525-20(1): SOLAR POWER GENERATION IN INUVIK

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in my address to the budget today, I mentioned the \$5.5 million solar ray that the town of Inuvik are currently installing. Good for the town of Inuvik, as I had said, but I wonder can the Minister responsible for the NWT power corp give an update on how that system or what has been done to integrate that system into the current grid and what effects that may have on the power grid in Inuvik. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. Minister responsible for NWT power corp.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's sometimes forgotten that the Inuvik Wind Project also included with it a battery system that allows for greater integration of renewables. And to that end, while there are still some -- there were still some deficiencies over the course of the fall, it

is expected that ultimately the solar array will be delivering up to 1000 kilowatt hours to the grid. Again, just working out some of those kinks, but that is still expected to ultimately be the source of power that's integrated into that system. Thank you.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for that. So is it anticipated, then, obviously pulling that revenue away from the power corp in Inuvik, run our own grid up there obviously, the thousand kilowatt hours that could potentially be put back in the grid, is that going to offset the loss, I guess, of the revenue stream that the town of Inuvik rec complex would normally provide? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the information that -- for this point that I've been receiving and keeping updated on is really on ensuring that the resources available to the community are there in terms of the power generation and, in particular, seeing the benefits of removing diesel. As far as a more detailed analysis of what that output or balance might be one to the other, Mr. Speaker, I'll have to go back and ask for that. But, again, at this point the good news story in my view, Mr. Speaker, is that the battery system that was connected to Inuvik wind is, in fact, providing the opportunity to bring these solar projects into that grid and ultimately remove the reliance on diesel. So, again, happy to bring this back to the House to confirm just what kinds of financial offsets there might be from that as well. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Final supplementary. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that. And, yes, I'm aware of the battery system that's currently in place. I understand we're looking to get quite a larger one in there. And I'll have -- I'll save the -- my wind questions for another time. But there's also I'm aware of, I believe, two biomass applications in for Inuvik as well to look at possibly putting the -- a couple of municipal buildings on biomass as well. Is the -- has the Minister been informed of this and, I guess, is the department aware of that project as well and how that, again, will affect power consumption in the community as it relates to the power corporation? Thank you.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, certainly there's a number of different biomass initiatives underway across the territory. Again, as how they may affect the tradeoffs between costs of diesel for heating fuel or all as well for cost of fuel or diesel in communities that rely on it, that

specific analysis, again, happy to come back to the House and provide that with -- with respect, Mr. Speaker, more generally, I can say that there are power purchase agreements being signed in Inuvik with Nihtat Energy, for example, and can, again, confirm exactly the nature of the arrangements that we may be underway with respect to the biomass projects. Happy to bring that back. Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, reducing that reliance on diesel exclusively will certainly produce some more reliable and sustainable energy system for the long-term. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for NTPC. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 526-20(1):
ENFORCEMENT OF THE DOG ACT

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs how his department supports the administration of the Dog Act in the Northwest Territories. This is an important piece of legislation around cruelty to dogs in our communities. It's the only piece of animal welfare legislation in the Northwest Territories, and the SPCA does a lot of work to promote and protect healthy -- health and wellness in dogs and help their owners out. So how is the department helping communities meet their needs towards the administration of the Dog Act? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs supports local governments in establishing and utilizing their municipal bylaws for dogs in the communities. But I'm not too familiar with the Dog Act as it was raised here, so I'll have to get back to the Member with an answer for his question. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, for example, the city of Yellowknife is contracting the SPCA to operate their pound. That's an additional cost to the SPCA. They don't have staff resources for it. So does the department provide resources to do -- to operate pounds, operate bylaw officers who can enforce the Dog Act? Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like other communities, those are responsibilities for the municipality and that would be an agreement, I'm sure, between the city and the SPCA. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if there is signs of abuse against dogs or, you know, dogs being treated poorly in communities, what are the enforcement mechanisms available to the Minister to prevent that in our communities? Thank you.

HON. VINCE McKAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, a lot of that stuff is related with the community bylaws. But, however, I will get back to the Member with his question and see how much more I can dig into in regards to the Dog Act. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 527-20(1):
BLOCK LAND TRANSFERS TO
MUNICIPALITIES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker; I was worried you missed me.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I'm so old I remember MACA managing the land, so I'll redirect the exact same questions to the Minister of ECC which I'll give him a moment because it looks like he's ready. But I can repeat the question in case he needs me to repeat it. That said, the question was about the block land transfers to municipalities, and I've heard in particular that there's been some challenges in the Yellowknife transfer. Can he bring this House up to speed as to what is being done and what he can do to ensure that we have timely and effective process happening here and ensuring that citizens have access to land such as the city of Yellowknife to ensure we have development, etcetera. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to date, there has only been one request for a block land transfer, and that was from the city of Yellowknife. The Department of Environment and Climate Change has been in constant contact with the city and have been discussing the issue to find a path forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is where I get to be the long tooth of the Assembly. I remember that same message back in 2003. So what is the blockage from some of these initiatives that's stopping this transfer moving forward? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there are a number of challenges with the proposed bulk block land transfer. It is under the -- there's a couple of pieces of legislation that govern that type of transaction, one being federal, one being territorial, and there's a requirement under that legislation for a complete survey which has a significant cost. This has been one of the barriers. But as I stated in my earlier answer, the department is continuing conversations with the city. Our deputy minister met with the city representative last week, and I believe they're meeting again this week and continuing to advance this forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From my understanding, I didn't know we had the federal lands Minister here, so I'll focus strictly on territorial lands and territorial lands that may or may not need a survey. I thought they worked through the cost of the survey issue in order to transfer them in larger quantum rather than parcel them out into small pieces which costs a fortune. So, Mr. Speaker, has any specific headway been gained or made through that type of challenge to ensure that it's an efficient process and doesn't become a cost burdensome to the municipality? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, those discussions are still ongoing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 528-20(1):
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES OUR LAND
FOR THE FUTURE PROJECT FINANCE FOR
PERMANENCE

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Environment and Climate Change more about the project permanence for financing trust that was established by this House. It's a little troubling to hear the money is not actually flowing. There's -- every opposition party, I think it's on record right now, saying they'll bring the government down when the House of Commons resumes. So what is the Minister going to do to ensure that we actually get the \$300 million to put into this fund? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I stated in the earlier question regarding the same issue, we continue to have regular engagement with Minister's office at ECCC in Ottawa. We have been working closely with the partners' table to ensure that all of the work that is required to advance, to be prepared to receive the money when it gets to the parliamentary appropriation that is required continues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the federal appropriation doesn't flow, what will be the fate of the private equity money, the \$75 million? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the private equity money is a matching sum dependent solely on the commitment from the federal government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, is there -- can we start thinking about a contingency plan with the GNWT's resources should there be a very likely situation of this appropriation being defeated in the upcoming session of the House of Commons? Can we have our own money put into this, start talking to the equity partners and see what we can salvage if this does go down? Thank you.

HON. JAY MACDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, we do not have \$300 million to contribute to this great initiative which is going to benefit the Indigenous governments and communities all across the North, as much as I would love to be able to stand up here and make such a commitment. We will continue to do the work, the advocacy work that we've been doing with the federal government. If there's -- as the election process unfolds, we will continue still to do our advocacy work to ensure, to the best of our ability, that those funds flow to the Indigenous governments within the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Oral questions. Member from Great Slave.

QUESTION 529-20(1):
SUPPORT FOR CHARITABLE NON-
GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to my colleagues for raising NGO issues.

I'll be asking the Premier some questions about that as well.

So I believe it was last week or the previous week a public service announcement went out about what steps EIA is taking to support the NGO sector, and in that effort they outline some of the steps they'll be taking, and they referenced the strengthening non-profit and charitable sector external advisory committee report. So that report is something that many constituents have reached out to me about in the past. In that report, though, there are specific recommendations, and I'm wondering if the Premier can speak to whether or not any of those recommendations will be followed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been a while since I looked at that report, so I was just pulling it up. But from what I recall, there are good recommendations in there, they're solid recommendations. Some of the recommendations relate to a policy that we already have in place but just haven't been following, and if we followed that policy, I think there would be a lot of improvement in our relationships with the NGOs. So from what I can recall, yes, I look forward to following some of those recommendations. Thank you.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, those recommendations, in broad strokes, are implementing the full suite of tools in the GNWT's program manager's guide for funding NGOs which was from 2014, update that guide with specific items -- I won't list them here -- and provide additional supports. So I would say the EIA is providing those additional supports. But will EIA be committing to and will the Premier be committing to looking at the suite of tools in that guide and updating that guide? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 530-20(1):
SENIOR ENVOY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF
CANADA

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to return back to the Premier with the earlier question. I did ask how much this establishment of the special envoy office would cost the territorial government in Ottawa. If he could explain that in detail? Because we also know given the reference on the finance

website, on the GNWT that is, that principal secretary's position is -- as a deputy head is one of the most expensive paid GNWT employees as noted in the public service. So I'm curious on how much this office is going to pay, how big is it going to get, etcetera. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll have to take that question on notice. Thanks.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 531-20(1):
TIMELINE FOR INTRODUCTION OF ANTI-
CRIME LEGISLATION

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Members have been eagerly awaiting the Premier's promised plan -- promised suite of anticrime legislation - the Trespass Act, SCAN Act, Civil Forfeiture Act. It's still on the books. My constituents are eagerly awaiting it. My colleagues are eagerly awaiting it. Can the Premier give us a firm time when these bills are going to be introduced? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Trespass Act, the legislative proposal is targeted for the second quarter of 2025-2026, so that would mean within the first six months of the upcoming fiscal year. And after a legislative proposal is created, it, of course, is shared confidentially with our colleagues in the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight. They have up to six weeks to provide feedback on that legislative proposal at which point it comes to Cabinet for a decision, and after that decision, if Cabinet decides to proceed, then the bill is drafted and that can take some time as well. And along that process, there are a number of instances where things could get held up. So in terms of a hard timeline, I don't think anyone should be giving hard timelines on legislation in this Assembly because I've been here nine years, and I don't know how many times I've really seen those timelines strictly adhered to. There's always something happening. There's always new emergencies that are taking resources. And so things move around quite a bit.

SCAN legislation, legislative proposal is targeted for this upcoming year as well. There will be consultation that will be starting in the spring. So the public can expect to hear about that and be able to provide their feedback on

that bill which is very important given the history of this bill and its defeat in a previous Assembly.

And Civil Forfeiture Act, the legislative proposal is again on the same timeline. Hopefully sometime this fall, we should have that in place. But the idea is to -- the goal is to have all of these pieces of legislation passed by the end of this Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Premier for pulling out the book. This is a question I get asked all the time. Our streets are increasingly a dangerous place for our residents.

We passed a piece of legislation in, like, two days using extraordinary force of will from this Assembly. We can move very quickly if we want to. Can the Premier commit to bringing forward all these LPs within this sitting of the legislature. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, no, no, I can't do that. We only have so much capacity in this government. You know, there was the bill the Member was referencing that moved through very quickly. Unfortunately, at the Department of Justice we have a limited number of policy staff who work on all of our initiatives, and then we have a limited number of drafters as well. And so to bring forward all of these items in such a short timeframe, it wouldn't be logistically possible if we want to it well. And we also have a public engagement piece we want to do with things, especially like the SCAN legislation. We don't want to bring forward this legislation if it's just going to be defeated in the House because there's opposition across the territory. So we want to make sure we go out, have conversations, and bring forward legislation that will be supported. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Member from Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've had a year of this government to get a move on on these signature -- I think the Premier's been on record saying these are the signature pieces of this legislation. Again, I'll ask can we get these LPs in place by let's say the May/June sitting so we could actually see all of them passed this year. Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, because of the resources that we have, our ability to go out and consult and ensure that there's adequate time to do those types of things, I can't make that commitment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask a question, not about the money but about the establishment of the envoy, where he got his mandate from, Indigenous governance.

MR. SPEAKER: (audio).

MR. HAWKINS: Fair enough.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to the Commissioner's Address. Petitions. Tabling of documents. Minister of Justice.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 292-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 10-20(1): REPORT ON THE
REVIEW OF THE 2023-2024 ANNUAL
REPORT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES INFORMATION AND
PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

TABLED DOCUMENT 293-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 12-20(1): REPORT ON THE
REVIEW OF THE 2023-2024 ANNUAL
REPORT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following two documents: Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 10-20(1), Report on the Review of the 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Information and Privacy Commissioner; and, Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 12-20(1), Report on the Review of the 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Tabling of documents. Minister of Finance.

TABLED DOCUMENT 294-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 11-20(1): REPORT ON THE
REVIEW OF THE 2023-2024 ANNUAL
REPORT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES EQUAL PAY
COMMISSIONER

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document: Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 11-20(1),

Report on the Review of the 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Equal Pay Commissioner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

TABLED DOCUMENT 295-20(1):
GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES RESPONSE TO COMMITTEE
REPORT 13-20(1): REPORT ON THE
REVIEW OF THE 2023-2024 ANNUAL
REPORT OF THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES OFFICIAL LANGUAGES
COMMISSIONER

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following document: Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 13-20(1), Report on the Review of the 2023-2024 Annual Report of the Northwest Territories Official Languages Commissioner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Tabling of documents. Notices of Motion. Member from the Sahtu.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 47-20(1):
STATE OF EMERGENCY FOR
HUMANITARIAN REASONS FOR NORMAN
WELLS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will give notice that on Thursday, February 27, 2025, I will move the following motion:

Now therefore I move, seconded by the Member for Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh, that this Legislative Assembly resolve that the current situation in the town of Norman Wells is a state of emergency for humanitarian reasons;

And further, that this Legislative Assembly calls upon the Government of the Northwest Territories to communicate this state of emergency with the Government of Canada seeking humanitarian aid for the community;

And furthermore, that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this motion within 120 days. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Notices of Motion. Motions. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills. Minister responsible for Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission.

Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills

BILL 21:

AN ACT TO AMEND THE WORKERS' SAFETY AND COMPENSATION ACT

HON. VINCE McKAY: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Thursday, February 27th, 2025, I will present Bill 21, An Act to Amend the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister responsible for Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Bill 12, Tabled Document 275-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the committee wishes to consider Tabled Document 274-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates, Education, Culture and Employment; and, time permitting, Housing Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for Inuvik Boot Lake. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, committee. We will take a short recess and resume with the first item. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I now call Committee of the Whole back to order. Committee, we have agreed to consider Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates. We will now consider the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Does the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment wish to bring witnesses into the House?

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Yes, please, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses into the chamber.

Thank you, Sergeant-at-Arms. Would the Minister please introduce her witnesses.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, to my left, I have James Fulford who is the deputy minister of education, culture and employment. And on my left, I have the assistant deputy minister of labour and income support who is Nicole Beauchamp.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Committee, we will resume where we left off. The next key activity is income security beginning on page 49 with information items on page 52. Are there any questions? Mr. Morse.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry, I wave off my wave.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay. Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question to the Minister is on the seniors' home heating subsidy. I'm, first of all, glad to see an increase. And the qualifications for this program is really concerning to a lot of recipients; I'm like many other MLAs from the region that hear these concerns. And it's always the fact of the threshold qualification. The recipients are exceeding the threshold qualification by doing something they've always have done in their past by earning extra money here and there as a pensioner and selling their crafts and/or doing part-time work only to find out that they don't qualify. Is there any willingness or has there been any discussion on increasing that threshold within the department so that, number one, we can encourage our elders or support our elders to keep busy by earning other income and at the same time keep physically fit as they've done all their life? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member for the Sahtu. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And thank you to the Member for highlighting this program. It's certainly the program that I hear the most about, both on the floor and also certainly from constituents. It's a program that's meant to -- for low to mid income seniors to help them address

the cost of their fuel. And the policy is to help them up to 80 percent, and then to support them on the budgeting side for the additional 20 percent. And people who have needs beyond that are encouraged, of course, to -- if they meet the criteria, to apply for income support for seniors and persons with disabilities if they require more than that, that 80 percent threshold there. I appreciate what the Member is saying in regards to reviewing the thresholds for income for seniors, and so that is work that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment is currently undertaking. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister. Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. I had to borrow your earpiece there; I think somebody's trying to stop me from setting some demands.

I'm glad to hear that the Minister is open to review that. Like any other efficient policy, it's only good as its periodic or annual reviews. So I shall take that home that -- and tell some of the recipients to the program that, yes, the Minister is going to be reviewing that. We can understandably say that these voices from the recipients to the program are really being addressed on their high costs of living in most of these little communities, and you can understand the remoteness of the Sahtu which really escalates the cost of living. So thank you for that reply. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I don't hear a question in there. Would you like to respond to that, Minister?

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, I appreciate the Member's consistent advocacy for the people that he serves. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Can the Minister explain what this --

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): -- sorry there. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Madam Chair. Looking at your actuals from 2023 up to the main estimates of 2025-2026, every year there's been an increase. Can you give me some information on that as to where it's going to, income support rather than, you know, what they call disabled or people that really need it; where's this money going? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the increases in programming, the bulk of it comes from income assistance, and that is from the review that was done in the previous Assembly on income assistance that separated seniors and persons with disabilities into their own income assistance. And so there was additional funding put in to that and put into income assistance. There was also adjustments made on the market basket measure to ensure that the dollars that Northerners were getting were reflective of the actual costs, for example, of food in the Northwest Territories.

There's also an increase that is seen here under the seniors' home heating subsidy. And so what the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has traditionally done where you see here with the actuals that are different than the main estimates under the seniors' home heating subsidy is because the policy states that, you know, we strive to support elders across the territory up to 80 percent of their fuel costs should they meet the criteria of this program, because of the rising cost of fuel we were constantly having to fund from within and find those dollars in order to ensure that we were supporting seniors. And what we did this year -- and so you'll see in the main estimates for this year there's actually an increase, and that was based on forced growth. We were successful in getting forced growth funding for the seniors' home heating subsidy in reflecting how important that program is for northern seniors and elders. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: So it's referring to the income assistance portion of this document here. From 2023-2024, it was \$36 million, and 2025-2026, it's \$44 million; that's a substantial increase. And, you know, it's disturbing. I've been talking about this since day one when I've gotten this -- started sessions, and the increase is quite big. And, you know, are there, in the future, is there a look at maybe cutting some of these costs or, you know, maybe consulting with the communities on where we can make measures work for the communities. Especially the recipients, I don't think this is helping them. It's helping them with money but, you know, in the long run you've got to give them some hope. And, you know, is there some way we can look at cutting these costs? Maybe consulting with the communities? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So absolutely, Madam Chair, the Member is right, there is a significant increase to the investment from 44 -- sorry, in 2024-2025, it was \$43.8 million, and now it's \$44.6 million there for income assistance in that line item. The actuals were lower in 2023-2024, and that was because of the delayed implementation of the new program. So the increase that you see there is just under a million dollars from main estimate to main estimate comparing those, and that is from the -- the Member is right, it is from the new program. And the other increases that you see there are also from the increases in the collective agreement funding for staff that work within that program.

So depending -- I think what the Member is discussing here is I guess two things. So changes in the criteria of income assistance. And then the second piece would be the ability, for example, Indigenous governments to draw down the administration of income assistance. And that is certainly something that is allowed within the current regulatory framework and legislation for income assistance. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next I have the Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. Can the Minister explain what this senior citizen supplementary benefit represents. It was up in 2023-2024, and it stayed the same, 2024-2025, and to 2025-2026, 3.2. It went down a little bit, but so if the Minister can explain why there's change in this senior supplementary benefit. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, shortly here I'm going to pass over to my left to ADM Beauchamp. But this is a benefit that low to medium income seniors receive. And the number of seniors that we have in the territory are certainly growing. But through yourself, Madam Chair, may I pass to the assistant deputy minister.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): ADM Beauchamp.

MS. NICOLE BEAUCHAMP: Thank you. So the senior citizen supplementary benefit is a benefit that assists low income seniors with the

cost of living. It's associated and aligned with the old age security and guaranteed income supplement. In 2024, we did receive an increase in our budget to address the uptake of approximately 20 percent of seniors now qualifying for this benefit. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yeah, thank you. Yes, thank you for that information.

You know, in small communities with the high cost of living, there's a lot of elders that are -- you know, they're doing part-time jobs to offset their living just like I know there are some in here too as well, and then, you know, like, the higher North, it's more expensive. But lately I've been getting phone calls from a lot of our citizens, senior citizens, in my region, and the fuel delivery -- fuel subsidy for Wekweeti is \$750. For other communities, it's lower. So I just wanted to ask if that \$750, for example in Wekweeti, is that for one time, or is that -- for how many -- like, how long can they use the subsidy within the one fiscal year; how many months?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the \$750 is monthly from September through April.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Well, high cost of living, you know, some of these people, like you said, from -- okay, that's a long time but they do run out, you know. Like, I mean, they use up the subsidy program before the year is, you know, over. Even now, you know, like, there are -- because of the high costs. And so, you know, I know that some of the elders were saying 500 is not enough. 400, you know? Because they already ran out before the year end. And we still have, you know, until April. Like, I mean, we're not -- the cold month is still here. We still have March. And sometimes in April too, especially up North. So that \$750 is not going long ways, and they do run out before the year is up. So that's why there's a lot of concern. And they do part-time job, you know, to pay for extra month. And even that -- because they're doing that, they're being punished by the department. Some of them are not eligible for this fuel subsidy program. There's a lot of them that got denied. So I want to know if -- you know, within this budget for the fuel subsidy, the income threshold, did the department review the income threshold of the

seniors in the regions? Like, is it included in this budget? Because I know that there's some seniors that are not making -- that are living on fixed income, and they are not living on GNWT pension. So some of -- they're making less than \$200,000, but yet they get -- they're denied the subsidy program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, certainly the program's not designed to cover 100 percent of the expenses of seniors and elders across the Northwest Territories. It was designed to cover up to an average of 80 percent of those fuel costs. And so that's why the client navigators will work with seniors to determine what their income is, what money they do have coming in, and can work with them on a budget that would work within their income threshold amount. One of the things that I think is really important here as well, and certainly the Member for the Sahtu asked about it as well, was the review of the income thresholds. And so certainly that's work that is being done right now. And as such, because that work is not completed yet, it's not reflected within this budget. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, well, the fuel subsidy program, the senior home heating subsidy program is very important for many of our constituents, especially in the small communities, so, yes, I would like to see that review. It would be good so that we can send the message back to our elders. And it's important for them because they're working, you know. Like, they're working, doing work, which is good, but because they need to -- they have to live, you know. They did their job of raising their family all these years, and now we're penalizing them, you know, because they're doing extra work just to stay alive, you know, just to have the lights on, the heat on, you know, and buy some groceries. And because of that, they're not eligible for some of the programs that, you know -- if they were living down south, it would be different, but living in the North it's different. The high cost of living. So it's -- I don't like that. I don't agree with, you know, some of the stuff in here. But I'm glad that you said that there's going to be a review. I hope that the income threshold will be increased so that many of our elders will be eligible for the senior home heating subsidy program.

Can we go on to student finance assistance, or are we on that topic yet, or do I still -- oh, okay.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Yes, you may.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Okay, thank you. Student Financial Assistance program, okay, it did went up a great deal. I mean, that's really good. So it means that -- so a lot of students are using the Student Financial Assistance program. So how many of these students are -- it would be nice if we can have a breakdown of the regions and the Indigenous and non-Indigenous and how many are doing -- whether it's Indigenous or non-Indigenous but how many of this is student loan, part of the student loan program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, if the Member would like a breakdown of Indigenous versus non-Indigenous students and also the regions where -- the geographical regions across the territory where students come from, we can certainly pull the data that we have and would be happy to supply it to committee.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Yes, I would like to see that, you know, that data. That's it for this part, this section. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next I have the Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I know the Minister has heard a lot about what our smaller communities are needing for income support, and I'm listening to them too. So in her reply to the Member from Mackenzie Delta, she was talking about market basket measures. And it's a tricky equation to solve for, but I'm thinking if we want to get more people off of income support, we want to have more opportunities for them to get into jobs. And so that ties into my thinking around ECE's annual survey that just went out around the minimum wage.

So the minimum wage in the NWT -- and this is in your business plan, so I hope it's comfortable for the Minister to speak to. The minimum wage right now is \$16.70 per hour and, obviously, you'll be assessing what you hear from employers, employees, and etcetera. But can the Minister maybe speak to how she sees balancing maybe increases to the minimum wage as supporting more people getting off of income support. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, increases to minimum wage are certainly incredibly important. They allow us to stay competitive as a jurisdiction across Canada, and so I think, you know, not only comparing ourselves as far as the formula and to previous years within ourselves but making sure that we're also comparing ourselves to other jurisdictions across Canada is incredibly important. I think what the Member might be leading me towards is conversations on a living wage versus minimum wage, and certainly there is a discrepancy between the two of those, but I do absolutely encourage Northerners to participate in the engagement that we currently are doing. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member from Great Slave.

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. And, yeah, there's an argument to be made if we want more people, you know, participating in the wage economy and getting jobs, you obviously need to build that ability to have good jobs that aren't just minimum wage paying jobs, but I think another part of this equation is moving from minimum wage to living wage. I would note that \$16.70 an hour will not let a person survive with a family here in the capital. I can't imagine what it would be like in our smaller communities. So I'll just leave that as a comment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. We'll go back to Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Income assistance. Income assistance went up. Can the Minister explain why there's an increase from 2023-2024 to 2025-2026, why there's a huge -- well, not a -- a big increase.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the increase in our budgeted items actually goes from \$43,859,000 to \$44,583,000. The difference in the actuals of what we spent in 2023-2024 was even significantly less than what we had originally budgeted in 2023-2024, and the reason for that is because of the delayed implementation of the new income assistance program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: No, even my colleague have been asking about that, you know, like, so I just -- is there a review happening of this program, income assistance? Because we do have an issue, especially in small communities, people are making a living out of it and, you know, it was supposed to be a temporary. Even my colleague from Mackenzie Delta have been asking that and with the productive choice. We need to do something for our young people because as soon as the young people who are unemployed, they go to income support the day that they turn 19, and it shouldn't be, you know, like, we should be providing other avenues instead of going to income support because it's -- it is easy access, and we know what happens in the small community with income assistance program, you know. We see them at Northern Store or we see drug dealers, we see bootleggers, you know, like, so it's like them getting paid. We know not all of them, not all parents are doing that, but it's just that it's becoming an issue in small communities and a lot of parents, they do -- they are frustrated with that because they're living in the same household and they're not contributing to the household, so it is a problem. And then I would like to see -- if there is a review, just like my colleague have said, the productive choice was one good program, but we know that it is a violation. We were told that it is a violation of the human rights, and so it was taken away, but if there is a review, I would like to see a review done to this program to see how we can use the program better to accommodate instead of having young people rely on this handout, then go to school and go to work, you know, like, something, you know, like, something that they can benefit from in the future. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, Madam Chair, absolutely hear the Member, multiple Members on the floor of this House. So there were changes made to the income assistance program in the last Assembly, and one of -- what I think is one of the -- well, two of the greatest changes were, one, the division for income assistance for persons with disabilities and seniors, and so that allowed persons with disabilities and seniors to enter into an annual program, so it reduced the administrative burden. And then within the other program, so the income assistance for adults program, that -- one of the most significant changes there was allowing adults within the program to keep more earned income, and so that provides a type of grace period for people when they're

transitioning from being on income assistance and working their way towards employment and kind of bridging that time, so somebody's not expected to kind of go from one to the other and flip a switch.

The program for income assistance for adults is really designed to be a month to month support to make sure that people are meeting their basic needs, basic living expenses needs, and so that's why they have to go through that administrative process of being evaluated every single month. Because it's not supposed to be something that people are on constantly and all the time. And so in addition to keeping more earned income, there is also the ability to work with client navigators to find access to both pathways to employment, pathways to education. Certainly there there's also the expansion of the income assistance program that allows adult children to remain under their parents' application as well, and that's up to 21 years of age. So ensuring that those youth, really, when they turn 19 aren't turning around and going and establishing their own income assistance but are also granted a bit of a grace period there where they're able to get on their own feet and get going. So even though, you know, productive choices isn't mandatory anymore, applicants are certainly still encouraged to participate within their community and also to grab hold of opportunities that do exist. And I hope that through work that we can do together in this Assembly on both sides of the House that we can further continue to evaluate the implementation of this program and find ways to make it better and find ways to really build healthy communities together. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you for the information and for the changes the department have made especially regarding with the disability. That's good because a lot of -- in my region, some express concerns and frustrations about some of the programs that they were -- that they're using. And I know it's not just others, but there are organizations, a lot of them did say that some of the income support clients, they don't -- you know, they don't want to go to work because it's so easy and that they will be penalized if they're working even to attend some other programs. But I know in my region, Tlicho government and friendship centre, they're doing their best. I know that they're working really hard, working with many of these -- with many of the clients and I think it's -- you know, it's good, it's positive, but we need more for other regions of how we can get some of these young people off the system and to become productive, you

know, citizens within our society. I think that's what -- it would be nice if, you know, the department can be working with the Indigenous government or organizations to see what they need or how they can accommodate them, you know. And, yeah, so that's all I have to say is just that I would like to see a good working relationship with the ECE and the organizations in our regions to get our young people off the income support assistance program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister, would you like to respond to that? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And absolutely, I love the opportunity to respond to this.

I just want to say a huge thank you to the Member for that comment because I think it really drives home that this isn't, you know, one organization or one entity in the Northwest Territories working in a silo and working alone. It really does, at the end of the day, take everybody working together in order to make these changes, you know, from grassroots in each individual community to really build a stronger, healthier North. And I think that really have to recognize that and celebrate it and, as the Member says, work together on it.

ECE has certainly been working specifically with Tlicho government. I have had the opportunity to meet quite regularly with Tlicho investment corporation as well on their training and development plans which I think speaks quite passionately to some of the things that the Member is speaking about as well, and there's also within each of our regional offices very passionate staff working to really take our labour market programs and do exactly this type of work.

So, you know, for example, our skills development program where people who might not have the education or work experience needed can partake in different programs through the employer or through the organization, and ECE will certainly support that with either wage subsidies or even with training dollars. And so bridging those programs to the people is absolutely something that we're passionate about doing. And I would invite anybody to reach out to me because I love being able to talk about these programs and connect people to them. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'd like to ask about the NWT child benefit. It's currently, I think, condensed

into the income assistance line here. Can we have actual -- how much is budgeted for the benefit in detail? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's \$2.2 million.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Is there -- like, how does the department, like, consider this benefit? Because I think most Canadians and Northerners -- let's just say Northerners receiving the Canada child benefit don't see it as income assistance or income security benefit. They see it as a middle-class benefit, let's say. So what is the kind of stated policy here? Is it a benefit to working families, or is this just another income assistance program? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, it's a nontaxable monthly benefit paid to families based on net family income, the number of children, and their ages that they have. I can also just -- the Member couldn't find it here because it actually falls under the Department of Finance, and it's under the Income Tax Act, so it doesn't appear here. And our -- it's very common that our residents don't realize that we pay this benefit because it is provided alongside the Canada child benefit. The Member is correct in that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And I think I spoke to this in the finance budget as well. I just -- it's always struck me as odd that it's administered through here rather than just a tax benefit. Is there any reason why we could raise the income ceiling here to see more -- sorry, let me go back.

Is the \$2 million that's paid out from the benefit, does it come out of what's appropriated for income assistance, or is it -- does it come out of Finance's budget? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much. It comes out of Finance.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Okay, well, then I'll stop. For -- apart from saying it's a great thing and we should be lifting the income ceiling, maybe it doesn't go to everyone as generous as the Canada child benefit, but certainly, it could make a huge difference in Northerners across the territory and is exactly the kind of thing that people are looking forward as they face an uncertain future with costs predicted to increase any day now when 25 percent tariffs are imposed on our country unless another stay of execution or temporary reprieve can be negotiated. I know the Premier's on that, and hopefully Team Canada wins out. But if it doesn't, we need to be able to do something as a territory. We can't just wait for the world to bail us out because they won't be, and that's when we're going to have to look at investing our own resources in our own people and putting Northerners first because if we have to start paying our own NATO defence bill, we're going to have very little money for highways and benefits and entitlements and things like that. So if we're going to do it, let's do it now.

Speaking of Student Financial Assistance, so the northern bonus program was cut out of the last budget. We missed it, I think, or many Members did miss it when we were looking over it. So just to be clear, are there any changes to Student Financial Assistance that are being proposed in this budget that would reduce the amount of money that's going to our kids? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for the question. So in regards to the Student Financial Assistance northern bonus program, the changes that you see within this budget are still reflective of that. The reason being is that we passed the previous year's budget in May/June, so it was different from how we normally do it. And so because the northern bonus program had already had an intake in April of last year, it meant that we had already spent that money. So we were able to reduce the northern bonus program in 2024-2025 by \$360,000, and the remaining amount, the \$240,000 needed to be reduced in this budget. So that's where you'll see it. It doesn't reduce the program any more than what we had committed to reducing it. And so -- but it just had to be broken out into two different main estimates because of where the

intakes landed. They landed in April, and then the second one in October.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: So just clarification, this isn't a reduction. It's an elimination of the program; is that not correct? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: The Member is correct. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. Has the Minister received feedback from beneficiaries of the program or recipients? I don't know what language we're using, but from clients who use the program after its elimination, and can she share some of that feedback if it exists. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, this was \$600,000 that was previously going to people who had completed their post-secondary education and if they returned to the North and they had remissible loans, they were able to remiss those loans quicker, and if they had repayable loans, they were also able to apply for that bonus up to a maximum for both instances of \$10,000 within their lifetime. So for people who had remissible loans, the indication there was that the expectation was they stay and live in the North longer, and people who have repayable loans were expected to then repay that back. In both instances, people who had remissible and repayable, I certainly did hear from Northerners who were not happy to see that program go. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So how many -- I guess I'm pleased to hear that there was some feedback provided. So given that there are people unhappy with this and that it might affect their choices about whether to stay in the North or seek employment in the North or whatever it happens to be, is there an appetite to reconsider this decision? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. To the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the reason that this program was certainly implemented back in the day was in hopes of seeing more students return to the North in hopes of ultimately seeing our population numbers grow. It was part of the strategy for population growth. We did not see, as everybody knows, our population grow as a result of this program. Certainly, if the intent was to see this program returned to the budgets of the Legislative Assembly, I would not have the authority to just start doing it again. I would have to go to -- through regular budgetary processes in order to propose a program like this, fight for the allocation of funding, and then that would be appropriated through the natural processes of this House. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Yeah, and thank you. And thank you for the description of our budgeting process. But, I mean, I think the question was more if there's a need or if students are saying they miss this program and they noticed, like, a material difference in their circumstances since it's been eliminated, is that enough to convince the department to reconsider the decision and bring it forward in a future budget? Is the level of feedback from students such that there's a need to reconsider this? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, one of the things that has happened that has come into play right now is that the Student Financial Assistance program was also improved in the last Assembly at the same time that the income assistance review happened and the income support review. So through -- and the way that the changes happened were increases to basic grants, monthly living allowances, and that also expanded the remissible loan for all residents of the Northwest Territories, and that is a key difference here. Before it was only for students schooled in the Northwest Territories. So unless a change was going to somehow be retroactive, any future change wouldn't cover people who have repayable loans and are expected to repay them to the GNWT because they took them out separately. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I will have the Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to get some further clarification. We're putting our young students, young adults in a very bad situation. First of all, the education system is failing them. They have no place to go then to finish high school. It looks like they wouldn't be able to go to any upgrading for -- that's in their communities, so they'll have to move, and I think these young adults don't have -- haven't been out of their communities, and if they do find work, then they'll be clawed back by housing, so it's just a no-win situation. Is there any update on how the GNWT is ensuring that youth are not accessing income security as a first option following graduation?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, if I understand correctly, the Member is asking for updates on how students access post-secondary from high school within their communities. And so one of the things that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment has is career education advisors, and those career education advisors fill a very important role within our community schools right across the territory. And so they actually work with youth on a one-on-one basis to understand what their career goals are and what it is that they would like to do and ensure that students understand what courses they should be taking for graduation, what pathways there are, so these relationships are also some of the relationships that students are taking in order to access programs like SNAP. And it's also our career education advisors that are forming relationships within the communities in the Northwest Territories to make sure that students interested in SNAP program, so that's the school's north apprenticeship program, have employers that they can form relationships with to really get some of their apprenticeship or student apprenticeship hours with. And it's incredibly important for students to know what courses they need to take, what grades they're expected to have based on what their career goals are, and so I can't stress enough how important our career education advisors are to students across the territory. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Madam Chair. When you witness a recent graduate in the

adult education system as I witnessed, I was getting refreshing in my math and a recent graduate was in the same classroom, but this individual was having problems with simple, simple math, like multiplications and dividing, and you expect that person to go into a trades with those kind of credentials? I don't think so. He wouldn't even make it out the door. And that's where he's going, to income support. So there has to be some kind of mechanism where the government, the community, the teachers, have to find some kind of mechanism to make this thing work, make this education system work so that they're not going to follow this income security and make a living out of it because the majority of these students are making a living out of it. They're staying home. They're still staying with their parents. They're 20, 30 years old. That's not a lifestyle. And probably 90 percent of these people are Indigenous. And that's what bothers me. This government is imposing -- not imposing but giving them this option of living this kind of lifestyle. And it starts with education from kindergarten to grade 12. Is that going to be looked at seriously and make promotional -- socially promoting our students a thing of the past so we can have a viable workforce in our smaller communities? It's the smaller communities that's hurting. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I cannot stress enough how important ensuring access to education is in our territory. You know, every aspect of our lives is directly related to access to education. And access to education, I can say, is incredibly important to me. We're working certainly very hard within the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to address the need to improve the education outcomes of students right across the territory. And I would be happy as well to sit down with the Member and show some of the actions that have taken place over the last, I believe, three years, and not all three years ago, but over time, over the last three years. And, really, what jump started a lot of it was the report from the Auditor General of Canada that really came up to the Northwest Territories and said you guys need to, you know -- you got some work to do. And so certainly, we embraced that report and got to work right away. And so some of that had to do with training classroom assistants. Some of it was access to training for teachers who are doing multigrade classrooms. Some of it was assessments across classrooms. There is also

in the same breath changes being made to the early learning and child care sector within the Northwest Territories and also within the training expectation of people working within that sector because we know that that is what ensures that students are ready when they get to school and they're being -- they're having access to supports before they get there if they are, for example, nonverbal and needing supports in that.

The other thing that's incredibly important as part of this work that is taking place over the course of this term is changes to the Education Act. And I cannot stress enough how important that is because that is a piece of legislation that is going to be done in collaboration with Indigenous governments. And when we talk about the importance of understanding the Northwest Territories, having social legislation that is drafted in partnership, drafted in collaboration, is incredibly important, especially when we want to ensure that everyone in the territory sees themselves in the legislation that's guiding something as important as education. So that is incredibly important work that's being done.

But I hear the Member, and the Member is looking for solutions today, and I think that working together and ensuring that some of the programs that I've spoke of earlier, so whether it's the SNAP program or it is the wage subsidy or working with -- within the community, for example, with modular learning, for example, like Fort Smith and the success they've seen through their Phoenix program. They had 18 graduates in that program in a community the size of Fort Smith last year. And I cannot speak highly enough of the program and being able to accept that we need to meet students where they're at and support them to grow from there and support them to successfully complete their education from there. So there are solutions that -- and frameworks and solutions that the department of education puts together, and it really does take all levels of government and organizations working together to see the success of students across the territory. And I'll stop there, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Mackenzie Delta.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Madam Chair. I try to listen but it's just being repetitive and, you know, going in circles. But the starts to education she stated that there has been some work done in regards to education the last three years, but I haven't seen any changes in the last ten years. And one of my concerns is socially promoting our children. I know there's some students -- I mean some parents who have concerns, and they -- they're more -- they're

willingly -- they keep their children behind or worst comes to worst, they send them to another jurisdiction like the Yukon where they can get a better education or maybe one of the bigger regional centres. But our smaller communities are just not benefitting from this education system. I just -- hopefully this department can maybe take their staff on the road and, you know, get some feedback from the communities because this is really hurting the communities and the individuals. So thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And, Madam Chair, as always I appreciate the words of the Member, and they're words that I definitely take to heart. There is certainly -- while there's work being done, there's certainly more work to do, and there are complex needs across the territory and certainly working with my colleague over at the Department of Health and Social Services to address some of those needs, especially when it comes to therapeutic care and ensuring accessibility of education in the North. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Minister there for mentioning bridging the programs to the people. And I think that's recognizing a gap and here's a bridge to challenge that gap. I see all these unique programs, and I look at what's your Beaufort Delta or Deh Cho or Sahtu regional trades strategy. We can no longer deny that we really need trades. But how we're going to get there, let's think about going above and beyond the budget. Looking at the budget, it's an operational one. Yes, we have these career individuals, but if we're really not doing enough on the promotional side recognizing our weaknesses in trades and the high demand in trades, we're not going to be any further ahead if we deny this budget a regional strategy. So we not only have an operational budget, but we do have a marketing strategy to address the trades gap. And successive planning is in there. You know, we may not have an industry in the Sahtu like we used to 10, 15 years ago, but the Skills 4 Success forecast recognizes the demand for retirement planning and the succession that goes along with the 375 workers we have there.

Now, in addition to that, we have other opportunities to encourage our young people that are probably going to end up saying, well,

I don't really want to move; I'd rather stay home. Okay, well, let's see how we can fix that.

So this budget's going to be approved. Is the department developing a strategy for each region so that we can address the market demands with the programs that we have here? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I believe we have about 320-some apprentices in the Northwest Territories right now, 49 percent of which are Indigenous, and so I'm very happy but, of course, I'm like the Member and certainly want to see more success in that area. And I agree with the Member that marketing strategy and promotion is crucial to that. That is one of the top things that I heard from students when I was talking to them about the SNAP program, both ones that are in it and ones that are not in it, was they want to be able to see more advertising, more information, more ways of getting involved and making sure that their friends have access to that information. So I certainly see that as a critical part of this work forward and one that needs to be done so that I can achieve my business plan commitments which are to increase apprentices and increase SNAP students across the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Members, the next section is income security, so we're not there yet. You can ask the question -- I'll go back to Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll just stop there and reserve additional questions there. But I'm happy with the responses that I've received so far from the Minister on preparations after budget season. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah, no, we are certainly in income security, and then next up is labour development standards. I'm happy to answer any questions.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay, now no further questions. We'll go to page -- turn to page 50. Education, Culture and Employment, income security, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$67,806,000. Does the committee agree -- sorry, it's \$67,608,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Moving on to labour development and standards on page 53 with information items on page 57. Are there any questions? Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can you please clarify if this is where I can ask questions about the NWT nomination program? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to be pretty basic today. I have more things to say about this throughout the coming weeks. But can the Minister please explain how we plan to meet our targets in the business plan with the new limits placed upon us by the federal government? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, certainly the business plans were developed specific to the nominee program with the previous allocations in mind, not expecting -- I don't think anybody across the country expected their allocations to be cut in half, and so we will certainly have to pivot to ensure that we remain in line with the guidelines afforded to us by the federal government.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And, yeah, specifically, I'm interested in the action under access to health care, continue to promote this program as a tool to attract internationally trained health and social service professionals to the NWT.

Madam Chair, will the Minister have anything to pivot to that she is aware of to help us seek out those health professionals in any federal discussions she's had so far? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, our conversations with the federal government have largely been at increasing numbers across the board. Certainly, as other jurisdictions, we have not seen success in that one. One of the things that we are going to do this year, once we do our allocations for 2025 in preparation for 2026, we are going to work with stakeholders to develop a plan of if our nominee program looks the same as it does this year with 150 allocations, then we want to ensure that we're being as strategic as possible, and so one of the pieces of work we need to do is to review our strategy with stakeholders to figure out, okay, what do we do if we are yet again in a position where we only have 150 allocations because we know that there's far more demand, and we want to ensure that benefit retention for the Northwest Territories is certainly paramount in this conversation along with ensuring that we are serving all Northerners that live here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm good.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker -- Madam Chair. Oh, that's not like me. Long night.

I also have questions about the NTNP program. So there's 60 applications that have been held over from the previous fiscal year, and -- or sorry, sorry, from the last intake. Not fiscal, but the last intake. And that leaves 90 new applications. Why -- given the kind of very serious situation we're in where the quota's been cut in half, there's lots of people with uncertainty, why are we not basing the intake on, you know, true equity where there's a level playing field for everyone and then when they evaluate the applications, they base urgency into it? Because we're already doing that, I guess. With the 90 applications, we are basing urgency of permits -- well permits -- of expiring work permits. That's what's getting the most attention after the random draw. But now we have these kind of 60 things that have -- 60 applications that have been grandfathered in because they weren't seen last year. This is not my bright idea. This is a concern that's coming forward from the community, both the worker community who missed out on the window and also businesses as well who would have been more diligent in applying if they'd known they got their applications in, it would have been held

over for next year. So can the Minister explain why this decision was made? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, those 60 applications came in prior to the pause last year. So that was a commitment that was made last year before we paused the program in July. And so, really, the decision to honour that commitment was made to be fair to the people that the commitment was made to and then beyond that, we used the 90 -- the 90 allocations that we had left to ensure that we were focusing on urgency and retention. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you for the clarification. Were those commitments made -- how were those commitments made? Was it, like, on an individual basis for each person who applied from the departmental level, or was it a political commitment? If the Minister can jog my memory. I'm not sure if it was made in the House, but just what level of commitment was this? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. It was not a commitment made on the floor of the House. It was a commitment made to the people who put their applications in because they had applied before the deadline last year and so wanted to honour the fact that they had done that. And I think at the end of the day, it's important to reflect on the fact that no matter how this program rolls out, there are always going to be people that are disappointed and incredibly emotional about this. There are people who are in situations where they're looking for certainty as far as family reunification. There are people who have spent an incredible amount of personal finances to move to Canada and to set up their lives here. And so at the end of the day we're certainly not talking about numbers, we're talking about people. And this is very, very difficult knowing that we, at the end of the day, are not able to make everyone happy with this program.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And thank you to the Minister for that. This is absolutely about

people, not about numbers, and I appreciate that recognition. That being said, are we -- is this hangover thing, is it a policy that people who apply, you know, during the intake but there's not enough spots are held over to the next year; is that how it's always been done? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've never met our allocation before. So this is new. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Thank you, Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So is that policy, then? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. No, it does not exist in policy. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So if in this current intake for the 90 -- the 90 spots, if there's 200 applications or 500 applications or whatever it may be -- because there's going to be more than available spots. That's the predicament we find ourselves in. If there's a change in quota, are we going to do the same thing where people who apply to this intake are held over in case there's an expansion of quota in the future? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, knowing what we know now, I am not making any commitments for 2026. What we did when we paused the reopening of the program in January of this year was we actually went and we sat down with stakeholders before we relaunched the program under new expectations and new parameters. So the work that we're going to do this year in 2025 is sit down with our stakeholders and determine what the program is going to look like in 2026. And so before we've had the opportunity to do that, I won't be making any commitments as to what 2026 will look like. We will need to make sure that we are prepared based on allocations right now and based on potential changes that

a future or existing federal government could come forward with. Unfortunately, as far as allocation numbers are concerned, we really are at the mercy of the decisions of the federal government. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. And I acknowledge that, and it is a decision that was made unilaterally and has earned the ire of many provincial governments and territorial governments. But, you know, one of the problems we have is that we have -- we only have just hit our quota whereas the Yukon has been hitting -- has made good use of that quota over time, and before they -- they're cut down to 400, but they were operating at 800. So the Maritimes have a different system where they pool their allocation. I think it's around 5,000 applications that's split between all the provinces. Is there a -- so there's different models, I guess, is what I'm getting at and ways to advance this issue together. I fear that if we just stay in our kind of box and just play with the numbers we have, we're not really going to change anything even if there's a more willing partner in Ottawa. So is the Minister prepared to work with Yukon and Nunavut to -- or with internal resources, but just we need something new, we need a new take on this, and to continue putting that pressure on the federal government to give us those quotas back. But can we pool our strength with the other northern territories in particular and get a deal like they have in the Maritimes or the Atlantic provinces? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the Yukon was able to move their nominee program up to 430 allocations in previous years. This year, because they were cut by 50 percent, they went down to 215. So that said, they are still starting from a place that was greater than our allocation but not as high as the Member indicated.

It's worth noting, Madam Chair, that different territories are in different positions as far as nominee programs are concerned. Right now, Nunavut does not have a nominee program. That being said, I hear the Member, and I'm certainly always willing to work pan-territorially. I have a wonderful working relationship with Minister Pillai on this -- or Premier Pillai on this file and have had the opportunity to speak with him, and he has certainly granted me time to speak with me on this which I very much

appreciate the camaraderie between the three territories, and certainly, I'm happy to extend that conversation to this file here.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Yeah, thank you for the clarification. I don't know why I had the 800 in my mind. But that's good to hear. I think the fact that Nunavut doesn't have one is the reason why we should be leading this conversation because, you know, if they don't need the quota right now -- clearly they don't -- then we could make use of theirs until they're at a time to be ready. So I really encourage the Minister to have more than a conversation, put a plan together, and really aggressively lobby, and lean on the provinces too because, you know, here's a secret. The provinces understand the territories are different than the provinces and are very willing to support us in our specific needs, and I think they will buy into this approach, especially if we broaden the conversation into Arctic sovereignty as well. So I strongly encourage the Minister to put a plan together, or at least a concept together, that can be shared with Premier Pillai, and I'm not sure who the Minister responsible is in Nunavut as well, but build a coalition and find a number that works for all three territories that we can share and bring that to the desk of the Minister of citizenship and refugees. Thank you -- to immigration and refugees. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Certainly, I will continue my advocacy, and I appreciate the amount that this topic has come up on the floor. I certainly talked about it frequently in the last term, and I'm happy to continue the honour of being able to work on it on this side. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just give me a sec here to find -- okay. Yeah, I just wanted to note that there doesn't appear to be any substantial growth in this area of the budget, the labour development and standards area generally. However, a number of goals in the business plan, and certainly the mandate of this government, speaks to increasing workforce, and I could go through the process of listing off a bunch but I'll ask questions about business planning in a sec.

Can I just ask the high level question first, you know, how is this division supporting the priorities of this mandate particularly in

supporting labour market training and development efforts and, indeed, growing the workforce of the Northwest Territories? If we're not kind of giving further resources to this department, how are we expecting them to achieve kind of better results or the increased goals that are listed throughout the business plan? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll start, and then would -- I'm sure the Members would love to also get to hear somebody else talk at this table as well, and I'll pass to deputy minister Fulford who I know has wonderful things to say.

So to start, some of the things that we are doing have to do -- you know, for example, in this section, we have apprenticeship allocation certification. We also have our labour market programs. And unfortunately, while we did see that the federal government did not reinstate our labour market programs across the country, we saw a \$625 million dip in that funding across the country. We were still able to hang on largely to what we were able to do in this section even without that because, as the Member said, this is an incredibly important section. So as one of the key things that we've done that I love to be able to talk about is really broaden the access points for access to entry into the trades. So it used to be that you had to graduate from high school, for example, with certain courses and have certain marks in them, and one of the things that we've done is open up another route which says if you have graduated from high school in the Northwest Territories, you can enter into an apprenticeship.

Some of the other pieces that we've done are really going out and trying to bring together, you know, the programs that we have within education, culture and employment and the residents that are trying to access them, so certainly working with our dev corps who are putting together their own training and workforce development tools as well, and then we also have our Skills 4 Success. And with that, Madam Chair, I would love to pass to the deputy minister who can speak in greater detail.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Deputy minister.

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't have a lot to add to that but I would -- I would also highlight the increase to the small community employment support budget that was voted last year by the Members

and has resulted in a change to the program to focus more on the employment -- state of employment in the NWT small communities which is where the problem is most acute. So that additional million dollars is being flowed to programs that support the labour market in those small communities. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for those answers. So maybe I'll turn to some of the targets in the business plan. And just want to say, you know, I do appreciate that they've established targets. This is something that I raised during the last review. I guess my comment now is, you know, the targets are still -- I guess vague isn't the right word. But I'll give an example.

So our target for implementation of the post -- for post-secondary is to increase post-secondary students from 569. So having a target like that means that we will achieve our goal if we have 570 students in post-secondary. So we've increased it by one; therefore, it's been increased. So I guess the comment I would make is it's great to establish a target of increasing students, increasing post-secondary students. We've got increased students in occupational demand training. In every case, the targets in this area of the business plan, which is growing and enhancing the northern workforce, the target is to grow it but we don't know how much or how it's going to happen.

There's so many of these, I don't think I can possibly get into all of them with the five minutes I have left. So I guess the question would be does the department plan to establish more specific targets for each of these line items and come forward with plans for actioning all of them? And if not in the business plan, where can MLAs look to find kind of what the department is hoping to achieve by 2027? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I certainly want us as a territory to be very ambitious and to -- I'd love to see us set targets we know we can't meet and, you know -- that sounds silly, but in the sense that I always want us to be wanting more and wanting to grow bigger and wanting to achieve greater things as a territory together. That said, I know that there is -- we also want to be able to ensure that our goals and our targets are within reach. And so as a

Minister, I don't want us to see 570 here and then pat ourselves on the back. As a Minister, I want us to see marketable change in these outcomes. I want -- you know, I want, for example, the MLA for Mackenzie Delta to feel at the end of this Assembly, like, together we have achieved something. I want, you know, the Member for the Sahtu who comes and talks to me quite frequently about trades training to feel that we've made significant differences in his region. And I think that that is important.

At this point in time, I will say to the Member I don't have a goal to sit and identify and strategize because what I would rather see staff doing is actually going out and making a difference in the lives of students. I want those career and education advisors not talking about in a strategy about what they do on a daily basis but doing those things. So it's -- I hear the Member. I hear the desire for documents like that. We do have our Skills 4 Success document that we continue to work towards and strategies like that, but I don't want to create new ones. I want staff out there working with residents and with Northerners. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Madam Chair. And, I mean, I guess what I would say in response to that is that the difficulty is -- I'm not necessarily looking for documents per se. I don't think that staff time is necessarily best spent kind of just producing plans and reports all the time, but the problem is that if we don't know what we're trying to achieve, it's very hard to define for the people trying to achieve it what success is going to look like and what they should be working towards. So I guess I've got to come up with some Member's statements to talk about this a bit more because -- but the bottom line is is that, you know, if we're just looking to increase post-secondary students but we don't really know what that's going to look like, how -- it's very difficult for me to understand how we have kind of a concerted plan. Or have we even gone about the work of trying to identify, you know, what are the problems that we're trying to solve, what is the -- what are the main barriers to workforce development in the territory and what do we need to do in order to kind of remove those barriers and increase the workforce and what does success look like. I do think that it's important to define that.

So maybe the Minister can or her staff can kind of help me better understand it because I think that there probably are answers to these questions out there. They don't necessarily have to take the form of a plan, but I do want to know that we know exactly -- that we have a good idea of what we're trying to achieve with

any given program. And better yet, that we're even measuring the success of that program so we can determine if we're achieving it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And, Madam Chair, I think it's worth saying that one of the things that I really like about this Assembly is that we're using our business plans more as living documents and reevaluating them year after year. And so certainly, you know, as the Member stated that he had pointed out last year wanting to see targets added in, the comments of the Member are certainly being taken into account here today.

In regards to the number itself and what the goal is, certainly at face value here the number is to see more students accessing post-secondary. I think what you might run into is nuances and differences in that and how each of us even interprets that. One could say that you have students who, you know, had already used up their Student Financial Assistance and now we know that Indigenous students have unlimited Student Financial Assistance. So you could have situations where it's the same students who are going back to school now that they have more access. It doesn't necessarily mean that these are new students to post-secondary education at the end of the day. And even that there has a difference and nuance and a difference in how -- it tells a different story at the end of the day. But at face value here, our goal is to see more students partaking in post-secondary education or more post-secondary education being taken at the end of the day.

I'm certainly happy to continue to, you know, adjust this as we go and certainly interested to be more specific as long as we're still working towards that goal of increasing the number of students in post-secondary at the end of the day. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

I will go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. So I wanted to first zero in on the labour market programs, and looking at the goal that has been set out in the business plan to increase -- let me just bring up the business plan -- to maintain or increase the uptake. And so I notice that so far between 2022-2023 and then the following year 2023-2024, in fact there was a decrease in the

number of clients and the number of employers that were participating in the labour market programs. Fairly significant, so from 188 to 156 clients in 2023-2024, and then from 71 to 63 employers. I also note that there was a significant drop in funding between those two years, and we're maintaining that lower level of funding. Like, what is the department's plan to actually try to raise those numbers if we're actually seeing a drop so far? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, if I can say to Members, if they want me to follow along in the business plan, it would be helpful if they gave me a page number.

So in regards to the changes in the labour development and standards section, we've gone from 2024-2025 Main Estimates of \$17 million, and now we're sitting at 2025-2026 Main Estimates of \$18.9 million. And so if the Member is wanting me to reference a different section, very, very happy to speak to specific sections and what the changes might be.

As far as changes in number of employers itself, I guess in that case would venture to pass to assistant deputy -- no? I am going to say that at the end of the day, I don't have the data that would show, you know, on hand right now, who those employers are and kind of what that would look like. There's certainly going to be fluctuations year over year, and our staff are going to continue to work with residents in order to increase, first of all, through my ITI hat, the number of self-employed persons that we have across the territory. And then with my ECE hat back on, certainly working to make sure that we are supporting employers to grow, that we are supporting them to access wage subsidies so that they can take on more staff, do more training. And the addition of that is I will say in conversations about this in other circles that there are also businesses currently being purchased by larger conglomerates. And so, you know, where we've got joint ventures or we've got, you know, the purchase of different businesses. This has even happened in Kam Lake by Indigenous governments or by dev corps themselves. And so the differences in our number of businesses, while there are businesses that have certainly closed in the territory, some of them are businesses purchasing other businesses, but I don't have that level of detail in front of me here to say what exactly I'm pointing at here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. And so the page in the business plan I was looking at is page 18, in case that helps. But I'll -- I mean, on a related topic, you know, in the budget there's -- we've got the trades and occupations wage subsidy that's the same as last year, so \$922,000. Is this fully subscribed? So those are grants to provide financial assistance to employers to hire Northerners and support that individual if they get apprenticeship or occupation certification. Can the Minister tell us whether that's fully subscribed and is there more demand for this program than we can offer with the \$922,000 that's allocated to it? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister for Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I can say in previous years, these programs all have not been fully subscribed. One of the goals that I certainly have is I want to see them fully subscribed. I want to see them in communities doing the good work of supporting employers to hire people to do the training, to purchase equipment they need to purchase in order to support somebody's learning and experience on the job. And so certainly a goal of mine is to see these programs absolutely fully subscribed across the territory. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. And so just to confirm, so the next one down the list, the workforce development agreement which also provides grants for both individuals and employers to help with training supports, employment partnerships, can the Minister confirm whether that one is fully subscribed or that's also still an aspiration or goal to actually spend all that money? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister for Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, when I'm talking about the programs, I'm talking about all of our labour market programs as a whole have not been all fully subscribed. To compare the numbers of where each of them have been at, I would need to get back to the Member as far as their subscription rates. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, I know that there's also been a lot of work to try to ramp up the SNAP program and that might help feed into some of these programs, right, so if we're getting more students, you know, leading them towards apprenticeships then we'll see more uptake as they get a bit older. And so it does seem like there has been some increases -- okay, and so now I'm looking at page 14 in the business plan.

There has at least been an increase from 5 to 6. Okay, if I go up -- in any case, has the Minister tried to identify, like, what are the barriers to expanding that SNAP program even more, to have it be taken up by even more students across the territory? I know it's been stuck at sort of it's -- it's been active in four regions of the territory. I know one of the goals is to expand it to more of the communities and more of the regions in the territory, and that hasn't seemed to happen so far. Does the Minister have any insights into what's stopping it from expanding to more regions or attracting more people? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Member. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So absolutely, Madam Chair, I don't think it would be a shock to anybody in this room that I am obsessed with the SNAP program. And the Member is 100 percent right, I want to see this program in not just every region. I would love us to be overambitious and see it in every single community because I think at the end of the day, we would -- it would serve the entire territory in such a positive way.

So this program, really, over the course of the last four years has exploded in numbers, and that is in gratitude to the staff at ECE that have really hit the pavement and really hit the road in making those relationships. And so what is the biggest thing that we need in the territory in order to make this program work, especially in every single community across the territory? We need those relationships. We need employers who have journey persons on staff, who are willing to take on a SNAP student. That is the number one thing that we need here. If we can find those relationships, we can certainly turn around and find the students. But first and foremost, we need those employers willing to take on students. I'll stop there. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. It does make sense, and I look forward to sort of further conversations with the Minister and colleagues to -- for us to brainstorm and find pathways forward to, you know, find more journey persons to take on apprentices, find more employers. And I should clarify too that when I was talking about moving from 5 to 6, so there's more SNAP student participants in that but it's that there were 5 SNAP students registered as apprentices, and then it's gone to now 6 registered apprentices.

My last question, so also another big highlight in the business plan which I know the Minister is a big fan of is the laddering programs, and it talks about the number of laddering programs we're trying to increase and the number of students. But can the Minister explain what exactly is a laddering plan and how we count them or how we know, you know, if we're going from 35 to something, what is a laddering plan and how do you count them? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. So a laddering program is a program that you take, you know, this course here, and that course there affords you also the experience that you need and the credentialing that you need to get to the second part of the course. And so a great example of that -- not one that we have currently in the Northwest Territories, but that I would love to one day see -- is, for example, if you sign up for a nursing program through Ryerson College today and you for some reason have to withdraw after the first year, they ensure that you finish with your personal support worker program. If you go back and you have remained for two years, they ensure that you finish with, for example, your licensed nursing program. If you stay for all four years, you finish with your registered nursing program.

So that's an example of a laddering program is where based on how many years you stay, you still finish every year with a different credential. And what that accounts for is we know that life comes up, we know that everyone's living circumstances are different and people might have -- they might have an intention to be on a program for four years, but that's not always what people are able to do. So laddering programs allow us to build on our experience within our education and training system. So

that are the types of programs that we have in the territory. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. With that, Members, we will have a short break. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay, Members, we're continuing with labour development and standards. And next I have the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry, earlier I was unavailable; my computer died, so. I did want to -- I appreciate the opportunity to return to this.

I did want to follow up on what has been done or said about the nominee program with respect to the numbers. Maybe the Minister can enlighten on that or the department as to what action they've actually specifically taken to demonstrate they need the current numbers. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister from Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, this is not a conversation between myself and the federal government that -- or the federal minister that just started in January. We have, over the course of my time in this role, had the opportunity to be forming that relationship with the federal minister, have had the opportunity to have conversations with the federal minister around the importance of this program and the importance of building -- continuing to build a workforce in the Northwest Territories. And as we continue to make improvements to our own workforce development here in the territory, we still have needs beyond that, as I know the Member knows as well. And so certainly, when it came down to our program being cut, making phone calls to the federal government both from a political level and then also advocating as well from an official's level. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. So is the Minister saying she made a phone call is the result? Or can she explain what whole response has been provided. I've asked for actions so -- I heard phone call. So what else has been done? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as in regards to the federal government specifically, my advocacy and actions have been through letters and through phone calls. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Can the Minister provide those to committee members. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'd be happy to provide both the letter that I received from the federal government and the ones that went back. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Just to be clear, she said she would provide the letter she sent and the letter she received back, I assume? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister for Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as long as there's no issue with confidentiality in regards to the federal letter, then I'm certainly happy to provide it but I would certainly need to respect the federal government as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: So just to be clear, again, is the Minister's letter confidential, and was she suggesting she'll provide that to Members? Maybe we'll deal with these one at a time. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am more than happy to send the letters that I have sent to the federal government and share those with committee.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: What partners specifically -- and I'm referring to business partners, that is, in the city of Yellowknife or the territory at large, that she met with to discuss this particular challenge as well as to appreciate

the impacts of these changes in plan? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Certainly, Madam Chair, I hear a lot about this program from my own constituents who I represent, and then in regards to advocacy with stakeholders that we had the opportunity to hear from and the opportunity to work with at the department in relation to this program here, there was the chamber of Yellowknife and the chamber of the Northwest Territories, our Chamber of Commerce Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories Chamber of Commerce, and also CDETNO, and then in addition to that individual business owners as well.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. What actions or commitments has the Minister provided these organizations with respect to the responses to these changes? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, any outreach that I have received, I have responded to. And then the overall response would be meeting with stakeholders to determine their feedback through consultation, and then the results of that is the program that we announced on February -- last Friday, 21st, February 21st, and that's the program that relaunches this week here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. As to what actions or commitments has the Minister made to these organizations? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much. Our commitment was to relaunch the program after hearing from them. So we listened to them. We took into account their perspectives and relaunched the program. Madam Chair, there was no commitments made at the meeting because, of course, needed to ensure that we were weighing all of the facts and balancing everything out and

putting together a program at the end of the day that we felt was fair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Was the program relaunching itself, or did it take some intervention by the department and the Minister? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Sorry, was the question did the program relaunch itself?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Yes. Can I ask him to -- okay, I'll go back to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: In essence, was the program going to relaunch itself, or did it take some intervention from the Minister to relaunch it?

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Well, certainly, no program from the GNWT launches itself. There's always a concerted effort behind it, Madam Chair. It was end of day back in January when we learned of a drastic cut to our allocation numbers of the nominee program from the federal government. Unfortunately for the deputy minister, he's been very gracious in giving me his contact numbers, so I was immediately on the phone with him. I asked for the program to be immediately paused. That was a political decision. I did not feel that we could in good faith launch a program within 12 hours that it's so drastically changed. Following that, I asked for officials to meet with CDETNO and the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce as well as the NWT Chamber of Commerce. Given the feedback and perspectives received there, we were then able to redesign the program, keeping in mind our new allocation of nominee program candidates or allotments. And then from there, we made a -- I made a commitment on the floor of the House to Members here and to residents that they would have time with the new parameters of the program before we relaunched it. So that is what we have given to people as of Friday, and the program will relaunch this week. It will be open for one week in order to give people an opportunity to get their applications in. I did feel that it was important that we give people that time because as we know, technology sometimes doesn't always work the way we want it to. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Was the lottery concept part of the redesign by the department? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll ask the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Yes, that was part of the redesign.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: So how did they -- how did it come up with that the lottery is the best or most efficient way of doing this? Noting that it was given a week's notice that they would open it up for applications, 60 were already allocated, in other words unavailable, and the remainder would be open for anybody who were able to put a package together. Was there no consideration to evaluation of impacts of these particular jobs or on positions not being filled? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as I've said multiple times in the House -- and I think it's really important to say again -- that there is absolutely no way for us to design a program that would have satisfied everybody in the territory who wanted to be a part of it. I am very sensitive to that. I am very empathetic to that. There's no way for us, with 150 allocations, to meet a demand that is far greater than that. And so there's no way for -- I knew there was going to be no way for us to launch a program that was going to be perfect in everyone's eyes.

I take full responsibility for the request of the lottery approach. It was something that we went back, under my direction, to the federal government and asked for. My concern was fairness in this process, and I didn't feel that launching a program on first come/first serve, where we could end up with technical issues, where we could end up with people in a panic the night before and the day of and the morning of trying to be the first one out of the gates. I thought it would be unfair because you end up with situations where people have themselves and their ten best friends waiting to put their application in, you end up with situations where the person with more data and the fastest internet being able to become part of that first come/first serve situation. And so having a more randomized approach meant that if somebody made the criteria and they met the deadline, that it did not hinge on them having the fastest internet or the most friends that

could submit applications at the end of the day. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I recall a number of years ago the two Indigenous organizations there, the GTC and the Tlicho, acquiring substantial amount of training funds through Skills Canada, and I thought that was quite complementary to the training plan that they outlined in the article there. And I'm just wondering if there's some departmental efforts in acquiring a partnership for accessing some of the Skills Canada funding available? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, when it comes to Skills Canada, we still do put money in for Skills NWT. I believe we put in \$70,000. And that is matched through funding as well from the federal government. There's also Skills 4 Success that we had funding for through the federal government. That funding has since sunset. And then we also have labour market dollars that we get through the federal government. As I previously mentioned here this evening, \$625 million of that funding was sunset across the country. That is, of course, met with not a lot of support from provincial and territorial Ministers. I was just on an FTP call that spoke to this again earlier today. That's the FLMM table. And I'm using an acronym against my better judgement, and I can't remember what it stands for. But it's the labour market Ministers' table. And we are constantly and consistently advocating for the reinstatement of that \$625 million, especially right now with what is happening south of our border. Those dollars are incredibly important across the country. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for the Sahtu.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you to the Minister for that reply. As I recall there, I said it was really a substantial amount of training dollars. I was quite surprised that it was into the several millions of dollars for their training plan. So I thought to myself when I seen it here -- and if you're having discussions with the federal level, I'm quite fine with that there. I just see an opportunity, and I'm just wondering if the Minister is on it, which I take it she is, to acquire a maximum amount of capital there for our training plans. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Do you want to respond, Minister? Minister of

Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And I appreciate the Member's words. Certainly, any dollars for whether it's housing or training or both of them together or education or any part of that that comes to the territory is a win for the whole territory. And so if the federal government is creating deals and partnerships with Indigenous governments across the territory, that is certainly something that I absolutely support. I think that any dollars into the territory is a good news story for all of us. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you, Minister. No further questions. Please turn to page 54.

Culture, education, and employment, labour development and standards, operations expenditure summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$18,906,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Moving on to languages and culture on page 58 with information items on page 62. Are there any questions? Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a few questions for this section. In business plan, page 28 for the Minister, it speaks to ECE's desire to include heritage resources in emergency planning. So I note that ECE has updated its business continuity plan. But could the Minister explain if this is just for GNWT assets, or is the department working to support other cultural organizations that it provides financial assistance to? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, can I pass to the deputy minister to speak in detail on this one. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Deputy minister Fulford.

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Madam Chair. What this is really aimed at is archaeological resources. So on the land, if you can imagine -- and you've heard the stories of climate change causing the erosion of places that used to be inhabited, particularly along the Beaufort Sea, and making sure that we're planning for those climate change events that

are actually destroying the archaeological heritage, potentially, of the NWT if we're not able to plan for and mitigate and record for those events. So that's what we're talking about there. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. So I note in the progress to date on that item that you also mention archival records. And that's kind of what cued me to asking about that because there are archival records outside of the GNWT's ownership within the territory. So I assume that just means archival records that speak to those heritage resources? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'd like to pass back to the deputy minister.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Deputy minister Fulford.

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Madam Chair. And that is the other piece of it, is the archival records, it does really speak to those archival records that the GNWT has control over. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you for that clarity. And thank you, Madam Chair. On page -- sorry, there's two page numbers on this, 36 or 38, I apologize. But it's in our business plan policy initiatives, speaking to Indigenous language service standards. I realize those standards, I believe, have been released recently, which is fantastic news. But I am curious what monitoring and evaluation plan for review of that rollout, what benchmarks the standards are meant to reach. Is there an available documentation of any monitoring or evaluation that might be occurring for these service standards? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to deputy minister Fulford.

MR. JAMIE FULFORD: Thank you, Madam Chair. So the rollout of the Indigenous language service standards is slated for April 1st, so they haven't actually been rolled out yet, although we're keenly anticipating that. We're developing those, you know, review, performance standards, and that will be informed, I think, by

our experience and beginning to implement them. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. Would the Minister be willing to share those items with the committee when they are available? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And just one final question. In both -- in the main estimates on page 59, both culture and heritage and Indigenous language secretariat, both have seen a reduction since the 2023-2024 actuals, and I was just wondering if we could get an explanation or substantiation of that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of culture.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, one of the biggest differences between the main estimates for 2025-2026 and 2024-2025 is the movement and transfer of the arts funding to industry, tourism and investment. So that transferred not only almost \$1.5 million to ITI, but in addition, it also transferred the money available through the Canada Council of the Arts MOU to ITI as well, and that was in the -- that was one point -- roughly \$1.5 million plus \$275,000. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. And, yeah, the 2024-2025 Main Estimates for the Indigenous language secretariat are slightly lower than this year's main estimates, so that's a positive, I believe, but in the historical 2023-2024 actuals, it's quite a significant drop. Could the Minister explain that, please. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the -- sorry, I'm just going to pull it up here. Thank you.

So what we saw in the 2024-2025 Main Estimates and the big reason for the decrease is tied directly to fiscal sustainability reductions. So we had a reduction in travel for the official languages board specifically. In addition to that, we saw reduction in the contributions to Indigenous communications societies as well as a reduction on travel for a regional linguistic position. And then we also saw a reduction in the funding afforded for translator training. And then in addition to that, we have multiple mentor apprenticeship program coordinator positions within the department, and so we reduced by one of those. And then we also were holding on to significant amount of funding there for the Indigenous language adult immersion diploma that was to be delivered at Aurora College. And so that work is not yet complete at Aurora College, but we were hanging on to it year after year in anticipation of that work being done. And so the commitment was made to once the program is developed, then I would come forward to my Cabinet colleagues and work to have that funding hopefully reinstated and go through the regular planning process at the financial management board for that funding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Thank you, Madam Chair. So one thing in that list of items from fiscal restraint that caught my ear just now was a reduction in translator training. Could the Minister please explain why that was a choice that was made? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, in regards to that line item -- and forgive me, I'm just working to pull that up here. And that was in my -- that's -- sorry, and I apologize because it was in a previous year's budget, so I don't have it readily available in front of me. And, sorry, it -- so for that specific program, it was historically undersubscribed, so we were able to kind of trim off the top without trimming in to what was traditionally used by people accessing that program. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Great Slave.

MS. REID: Yeah, thank you, Madam Chair. It's disappointing that it was trimmed rather than advertised but more of a comment than a question, and I'll cede my time. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have the Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. For the Indigenous language, to promote, that's good. I see here Indigenous language broadcasting. And it's -- it did went down from 2023-2024. Because I know that there's -- I mean, that's another way to encourage and support Indigenous language, to promote Indigenous language. Can the Minister explain why Indigenous language broadcasting went -- if there's a decrease in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, that was part of our fiscal sustainability reductions. And so what we were able to do is -- and that was last year's reductions that were already done in the previous main estimates. But what we were able to do was look at programs that were historically undersubscribed and trim off the top of them. But we continue to make investments into, for example, our mentorship apprenticeship program that saw 37 pairs this year. We continue to make investments, for example, in our education instructor -- languages instructor program that is in schools in multiple regions in the territory right now. We continue to fund, for example, our Indigenous languages scholarship program that has seen increases year over year of students taking part in it. So we are still making significant investments but have found ways to trim from some programs in order to ensure that we're investing in other programs that are oversubscribed across the GNWT. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. You did mention interpreter/translator or, you know -- we've been asking -- I've been asking too -- not just me, but there's a lot of people that have asked. Interpreter/translator program, it was offered through Aurora College at one time. It was a pilot project. And I know it was popular at that time. And I'm sure a lot of our interpreter/translator that are in here probably went through that program as well, you know. Interpreting is -- I mean, it is an important -- you know, it is important for -- to promote and save the Indigenous language even in a lot of our -- our communities, when they have meetings, they do it in both language. They have interpreters/translators available but they are aging. So I know that the schools are promoting it, but we do need the interpreters/translators, like the one that we have here in the building, you know, that are interpreting. Simultaneous interpretation, it's not easy, you know, going from English to the

Indigenous language or vice versa. So I just wanted to know if there's any plan -- I don't see it in the business plan but maybe possibly to do interpreter/translator program pilot project. We have the facility. Either it's you can do it in the regions, or there's other places that we can have that program. This is going to be one way of preserving our language. And we note that many of our young people in our small communities, they're not practising as much, and there's not too many speakers, you know, in a lot of places as well -- in a lot of places. So I just wanted to know if there's a plan to do some kind of a pilot project interpreter/translator program in the near future. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm so happy that the Member from Monfwi brought this up. This is certainly very top of mind. I know that a lot of us in this House have had an opportunity to have really incredible relationships with a lot of the interpreters in this House. And, you know, they do far more than interpret for us. They definitely also take care of our hearts on a daily basis. And so I know that a lot of us get some pretty good hugs coming into this room and a good reset from a lot of the people who, you know, surround us and do such a good job of reminding us why we're here on a daily basis. And so I really appreciate the Member bringing that up.

In addition to -- and sorry, let me take a step back. So those relationships and the succession planning that needs to happen for the interpreters in this building is something that is incredibly important to both the Speaker and I, and so we have been sitting down and having lunches every session when we're here in the House with myself and the Speaker and both of our staff, so clerk's office staff and then also education, culture and employment staff, because we want to work with the interpreters in this building to find out, first of all, what are their suggestions because, really, they are such -- they're not just language champions. They're language experts. And so we have so much to learn from them in order to learn how we can put together a program that really fuels language in this building. But it's not just about what happens in this building as well. It's about what happens outside this building and really creating language communities right across the territory.

And so last week, I also had the opportunity to sit down with our official languages board and made a commitment to them that, absolutely, I want for all of us at the end of our time

together -- because they're on terms as well. But we're all here because we want to see good work done and so it takes us working together in order to make sure that we are doing meaningful work and at the end of the day have something to show for it.

And so all that to say there, absolutely as far as succession planning, there are good conversations happening in terms of a deliverable, like a course at Aurora College. We now have Dr. Angela James as the president of Aurora College. She comes from the Indigenous languages secretariat. So me saying that she definitely has a very personal interest in the success of language in the territory, I don't think I'm speaking out of turn. And so where we're at right now is in order -- so Aurora College does have an intent to have -- take up a space within language development in the Northwest Territories, and I have made the commitment that when they have that program ready, to bring it forward to the financial management board for the funding that we removed from this budget. But I couldn't keep hanging on to funding that we weren't using for the purposes that we committed to this House for using, so I in good -- in -- you know, in respect of the processes that we have here in the House, let go of that funding so we could put it to something that was actually appropriated by this House. But absolutely, I continue to have meetings with Aurora College. Just had one yesterday. Indigenous languages did come up as well. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Well, yeah -- well, that's a good information to know. And it's not just only with the Indigenous -- with Aurora College, but this could be done in partnership with the Indigenous government or organizations because the schools are doing their part, but we need more. And it's kind of disappointing that, you know -- that we had to get rid of that program. But it would be nice if we can build on other programs to promote the Indigenous language. It doesn't have to be in the regional centre but each region can do their own. But I think this is where the partnership is important with the Indigenous government or organizations to preserve our language.

So, yeah, and it's kind of disappointing where that broadcasting is reduced too as well because that was another -- there's a lot of Indigenous elders, they listen, and some of our young people listen to those programs as well. And it's -- it is important. So I just -- it's more of a comment.

But I would like to see some kind of a program in -- maybe within the next fiscal budget, partner -- create a partnership with the Indigenous government to see how we can bring some of those programs back to revive our language. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister, would you like to respond? Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, what I think is really important to capture here is that there's over \$5 million a year that the GNWT receives from the federal government specifically for Indigenous languages, and that funding is funneled straight to Indigenous governments, and Indigenous governments determine what their programs -- their community-based programs will do and certainly have the support of ECE for that.

I absolutely agree with the Member that revitalization of Indigenous languages across the territory is incredibly important and is one that we need to take seriously and we need to take it seriously right now. So what we have, as well, within the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, is a brand new ADM position that was supported by this House. That position is specifically for languages and culture. And I can tell you that the individual who very excitedly accepted that role has not had a spare minute since he walked into it. He was with me last week as we sat with the official languages board. It was a very busy week last week as far as Indigenous language revitalization is concerned, and we were also able to celebrate all of our MAP pairs and MAP partners.

And so even though Aurora College is not yet doing a specific Indigenous languages course or diploma course, there's still good work being done both from Indigenous governments and then also through the mentor apprenticeship program that pairs people up so people are -- have the opportunity in a very organized fashion to be going through language training.

And some of the interpreters in this House are some of the mentors that work in that program. So, I mean, I can't celebrate the interpreters that we have in this Legislative Assembly enough. They really are the best of the best, and I very much appreciate the work they do, not only in here, but also in communities as well. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. No further questions? Please turn to page 59.

Education, Culture and Employment, languages and culture, operations expenditure

summary, 2025-2026 Main Estimates, \$16,567,000. Does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Are there any -- there are additional information items on page 63 to 69. Are there any questions? Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I just have a couple questions, one on the Aurora College programs and services.

Obviously, as you read through this document, you can see they, you know, highlight the 21 community learning centres. It speaks about the college providing community-based adult literacy and adult-based education programs. So given the recent announcement by the board of directors for Aurora College that they'll no longer be supporting the adult learning centres, I'm wondering if the Minister now has a plan on how that -- the department will be taking on that mandated item to assure that those -- that important work continues to get done? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, certainly appreciate the Member referencing that the community learning centres are still captured within our main estimates book. Certainly the announcement from Aurora College came after the books were printed and in all of our hands, so that change is not reflected here.

So regardless of whether or not Aurora College plans to operate the 21 community learning centres, there is still a responsibility for adult learning and basic education across the Northwest Territories and from the perspective of the department of education, a mandate to ensure that education is accessible in communities. And so currently we're working with Aurora College to understand if their plan does still basically accommodate the mandate. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. We'll go to the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Madam Chair. No, and I appreciate that, but I think the college made it fairly clear that their mandate does not to support that, that they are going to shut down, indeed, the adult literacy and basic education programs. So I guess further than waiting for the college to say, yes, we are going

to do it, because they basically said they were, is this something that the department, the Minister's going to commit to ensuring that if that's the case that we do continue to use these learning centres and keep them open? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, what the Aurora College has said to this point is that the existing mode of delivery for courses through the community learning centres has not been working and that they want to re-envision what this looks like. So they've not said that they are completely vacating the adult education space. They have said they are going to be doing it different. So where I'm at right now is determining if their plan does meet the needs of the mandate of education, culture and employment. So I can't answer that here on the floor of the House right now. But they have not said that they are completely vacating the adult education space. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you. No, and I appreciate that. I think the information that was relayed to myself and certainly the information that we read in the media certainly said that the programs were going to be shut down. If, indeed, the college is looking at either working through NGOs, working with Indigenous governments to continue that program as it exists but maybe through different bodies, I'd certainly be interested in hearing that. But I guess, then, Madam Chair, then if the -- you know, if that's the case, if they are not indeed committed to shutting it down, and I would have hoped that, you know, the college would -- even if they were considering shutting it down, rather than making an announcement that they're going to be closing the learning centres, it would have been nice to say take a year if they want to evaluate it and evaluate it, and see what other options are out there. But that certainly wasn't what was presented to us. It was that this is not working. You know, we have three options. We could continue as it is, we can review it, or we can shut it down, which is basically the nuclear option, and that was the perception that's out there that that's the option they're taking. So if that's not the case, I'm happy to hear from that the Minister, and I'm hoping we can move forward and ensure that we continue to keep these centres open. So I guess my next question would be, then -- I mean, obviously we fund Aurora College to the tune of \$35 million. \$34 million last year, 35. A

portion of that funding, Madam Chair, obviously, it goes towards to keep these centres open and to fund these centres. If, indeed, the college does decide that they're not going to be funding these learning centres, are we going to be looking at pulling certainly a portion of the funding that would be -- that would be directed towards these learning centres? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, I want to be clear that Aurora College indicated that they would not be keeping the bricks and mortar facilities open as part of their new plan. They have yet to divulge what their plan will look like going forward.

I also know that myself, along with the Aurora College board and chair, as well as the Aurora College president, will be at a briefing with standing committee I believe next week, next Thursday, and so certainly look forward to sitting with Aurora College as they inform committee of what their plans are.

As far as the dollars, so for adult learning and basic education, there is a memorandum of understanding between Education, Culture and Employment and Aurora College that money -- sorry, it does come with money that is disbursed to Aurora College in the form of a contribution agreement. And so once we see exactly how Aurora College intends to fulfill that memorandum of understanding and what parts of it they intend to fulfill, then we can determine how much of the contribution agreement is appropriate for them to continue to receive and what, if any, is not. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Inuvik Boot Lake.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you to the Minister for that. And it's good to hear that she's -- the department or the Minister's at least considering that may, indeed, be an option. Certainly, you know, part of the funding is for bricks and mortar and bricks and mortar cost money to maintain, so certainly part of that budget, I assume would be included for bricks and mortar. And I as well look forward to the update from the college to the justification as to why they made this move and to kind of shed some light because it certainly, Madam Chair, has caused a lot of concern, certainly not only through my riding, through my colleagues' ridings as well, and certainly through some of the ridings of the Members across the House as

well. So I look forward to that presentation, Madam Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Would the Minister like to respond to that?

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: I look forward to the presentation as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Continuing a little bit along that line in terms of the transfer -- or the allocation of funding given to Aurora College, so last year we -- this Assembly provided an extra half a million dollars to Aurora College to support the transformation process to a polytechnic. Does the Minister know what we have to show for the half a million dollars that was given in the last fiscal year in terms of what progress has been made by Aurora College? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, there's certainly annual reports that do come out of Aurora College every year where they show a breakdown of their revenues and they also show a breakdown of, for example, what is spent on transformation versus what is spent on number of students at the college.

As far as the -- well, first of all, I will note it hasn't been a full year that they have had that funding either so that funding would have been appropriated around November 1st following our fall sitting, and it would be worthwhile during our meeting next week asking about that because at this point I would not -- I would not yet have received reporting on that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Okay, thank you to the Minister for that response, and I do think we should follow up in our direct meeting with Aurora College.

Does the Minister have an idea of what we should expect to see in terms of value for money for that extra half a million? I know in total, Aurora College transformation in the last fiscal year it was just over a million but Regular Members lobbied for, you know, bumping it up from what it had been budgeted for because we have said over and over again that the Aurora College transformation is important. Does the Minister even know what we're -- what we

should expect to see for that, say, million dollars in total from Aurora College? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, it was curriculum -- essentially curriculum development dollars for Aurora College. It was dollars that had been previously afforded through a federal agreement, I believe, with CIRNAC. Those dollars had sunset. The college then approached Regular Members letting them know that they wanted that funding reinstated. I believe the previous funding was to the tune of about \$534,000, and then Regular Members put back in about 500 -- well, not about -- exactly \$500,000. Regular Members were the ones that negotiated that and really fought for it, and so the expectation of what should be received for that I would put back on Regular Members as to what their expectations were to receive for that money that they negotiated. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, I'll leave it there for now, and I think it will be a really important discussion that's coming up when we get Aurora College directly in the room to chat with them. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: I didn't have it this time.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Okay, all right. Next we go to Range Lake, Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. We sit too close to each other. Anyway, confusing people. So I also have questions of Aurora College.

The Minister just said that one of the -- sorry, when looking at adult education and the closure of the community learning centres -- not just, but earlier said that we need to make sure that their programming meets the needs of ECE. Can she explain what she means by that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, there's still a responsibility to ensure that adult education is accessible in communities across

the Northwest Territories. And so that's what I'm referring to, is at the end of the day we have a contribution agreement with Aurora College that speaks to adult learning and basic education. And if the pieces of that contribution agreement and MOU are not being satisfied to their full extent, then obviously we need to figure out how the funding responds to that. And then if there is a gap left over, how that would be addressed by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So how much funding then -- adult education funding is attached to that MOU in dollar terms? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: It's literally sitting on my desk upstairs, Madam Chair. I don't want to say a number and get it wrong on the floor, but I would be happy to ensure that I have those numbers with me when I am in front of committee with Aurora College next week. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Yeah, thank you. And I think that's the number in question that Members are taking issue with continuing to provide to the college. So I'd like to know it for sure.

Now, the mandate letter that the Minister provided to the college is adult education -- I don't have the benefit of having it in front of me, but is adult education in that mandate letter? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much. Learning for residents is certainly referenced in the mandate letter, but the specific details of what that looks like and with our agreement with Aurora College is found within the memorandum of understanding. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So when was the Minister -- so I've heard that -- obviously we were all surprised when the decision was made and caught off guard. But my understanding is that this was not a completely novel idea, that

there had been talks about this programming. So when was the Minister made aware that Aurora College was considering closing the community learning centres? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So I was made aware that it was one of the things that they were considering in a huge spectrum of options in December. I asked the department to immediately sit down and ensure that they understood all of the ramifications of that. Because very clearly, as we're speaking about an MOU, there is not an ability of Aurora College to realize all of the dollars from that -- from that choice and wanted to ensure that they were going into this eyes wide open and wanted to make sure that the board as well had all of the information. By at that point, the board had not voted and so certainly, I'm not in a position to, you know, go public or create options based on something that is in an options paper and hasn't been voted on or a decision made. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. No, that's fine, and I think that's a reasonable expectation. The Minister can't plan for -- I mean, there could be contingencies, but until you don't know what you know. And I think, again, the board could have been -- well, should, most likely, have been a bit less arm's length than this one and at least given a head's up so we weren't dealing with the mess we're in now. This is a very significant issue, and it's a significant issue in the vast majority of our communities where education outcomes are extremely poor, and there's a very real need for adult education.

We have an upcoming meeting scheduled with the Minister with the Aurora College board chair and president to discuss this. That meeting is going to be in-camera. How can we expect our constituents to understand these decisions in a secret meeting? Like, what are we going to do to actually let people in on what the reasons were for this? Because we're going to know, we privileged few who sit here. But how are we going to let other people understand that, because this is a very significant issue that people are very concerned about. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Just for your information, the meeting will be public, so. But I can refer to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'm always

happy to do as much as we possibly can in public, and I would hope that committee would be willing to do this meeting in public. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go back to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Okay, thank you. That's the expectation. I'm glad we cleared that up for the record. And anyone watching, it will be broadcast. You're welcome to tune in. Yeah, millions of subscribers. Millions of subscribers.

So I guess fundamentally as well is the process for the Aurora College budgeting as well, even though they're at arm's length, does it work similar to other -- like, the health authority, for example, where the total contributions, so the \$35 million we provide to Aurora College, that's on the books, but they then submit a budget, the Minister reviews it and approves it to make sure it conforms to the mandate. Is that a -- is it a similar process for Aurora College's budget as well currently? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, it's not a situation where I'm going through their budget line by line with them. They have base funding that they get through this process here. If, for example, if they have a need for forced growth -- a great example of that that I believe is in this is their -- it, sorry, it is in this, is the forced growth for their lease payments and such. That's something that would come through the financial management board. It would go through our normal vetting processes with that. But line by line, they're not going through the budget with me, and I don't have eyes on what the exact breakdown of this would be in the arm's length relationship. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. So, I mean, is this an arm's length academic institution or agency? Because, you know, they -- it would be one thing if you exceeded your grant and required more public -- a public grant to expand it or increase it or enter into temporary funding but what -- so when the Minister says goes to the FMB, is it, like are they providing a specific financial request? Like, hey, we need this amount of money to run this program, much like you would if you were providing a third party contribution to a municipal government, for example, or an Indigenous government, or is it the financial process the same as any other public agency or department? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much. So they do submit an operating budget annually. They -- for example, if they need new funding above and beyond where they're at for new programming, like, for example, we've talked about, you know, the Indigenous languages diploma, new funding would have to go through the FMB process within the GNWT. And I'll stop there, Madam Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Range Lake.

MR. TESTART: Thank you. I mean, certainly, there's a lot to talk about with Aurora College but, like, that's not -- it's not an arm's length academic institution as I understand it. It's one thing to fund the college to do a program like an Indigenous languages certificate but it still feels very much like it's always been run. And I think that's my fundamental concern. They still don't have a foundation put in place to do fundraising. We still don't have daylight on a North Slave campus plan, which is a campus that has plenty of students, in excess of staff, which is not the case with every campus Aurora College operates and -- you know, and a whole host of other issues. And I know -- I think the board is trying to hustle and get things under control, but it seems like they're doing it without letting everyone else in. This is an area of extreme interest. We'll have this discussion at standing committee. But I mean, we need to do better with Aurora College fundamentally. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Thank you. Next I have Member -- okay, yeah, Minister, you can respond. Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, to respond to the Member's question, it is still a public agency under the Financial Administration Act. And so they still, even at this point, can accept their own federal funding. They can accept their own funding even at this point right now today from other third party organizations as well.

It's also worth noting that certainly the college's legislatively is at a bit of an interim phase here. So there was the launch of the Aurora College's Act in the previous Assembly. And work that is still to be done in this Assembly are items like the funding formula for Aurora College and which would determine how they will be funded going forward as the Member kind of alluded to there. And there's also the Polytechnic University Act that needs to be done so that they really do fully transition to that arm's length in full scope of the word as the Member's

referring to so that they are aren't tied, for example, to our Financial Administration Act. But I will say as well within the Aurora College's Act, there is still a noninterference with operational aspects of the college. And so even if I was afforded, you know, the ability to sit down and go through line by line, I couldn't say to them I don't like this line item, take it out, because they'd turn around and say to me well, you're overstepping, you're in our sandbox and you need to step back out, please, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I have Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. This brings me to the question of concerns of policy and what type of oversight is provided. The circumstances I'll sort of framework is that I'll start with the beginning is does the department have any policy or influence on the school boards and authorities to be -- I guess I'm trying to say it -- nonpartisan in their political intervention in education? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: I'm wondering if the Minister could be -- pardon me, if the Member can be more specific or direct about what they would like to get to here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for YK Centre, can you be more specific in your question. Thank you.

MR. HAWKINS: So when I -- a student in a school is shamed for liking Trump -- and I'm not here to speak for the individual, of Trump, that is -- but where I worry that the parent has to deal with children who have just been shamed on that or the school, be it the school, the teachers, etcetera. As an example -- if you want an example, this is a real one -- what policies do we have on that that if teachers are providing their individual personal opinions and hence that's trickled down in shaming individual students?

Now, I want to be absolutely clear, Madam Chair, in no way would I be defending that orange guy. Don't misunderstand. I have no like for that man at all, but I respect he's been elected. The reality is that my concern is what type of oversight is provided by the department, such as guidance or policy, that if people in a free and democratic society like one person or the other, that they shouldn't be shamed and humiliated in classes or feel the pressure of bullying in the schools because they choose

something different than, say, we would choose. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, it is very helpful so thank you to the Member for being specific about what they're looking for. And so we do, in the Northwest Territories, have safe schools regulations. It is the responsibility of all schools across the territory to ensure that they are providing safe, equitable, and an inclusive schooling environment to their students. And, of course, safety takes many different shapes and forms for different students across the territory. And education bodies are required to hold staff accountable for how they behave in that regard, and ECE, of course, would support education bodies to meet the requirements of the safe schools regulations.

And so each school board is responsible for having a safe schools plan and ensuring that at the end of the day students are safe. And so that can take on the form, for example, of ensuring that they're providing training so that they're continuously building educator capacity to ensure at the end of the day the physical, mental, and psychological safety of our students. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Members, I want to remind you that just please speak specifically to what we're dealing with in the House here. We have no say in what goes on outside in the United States. That stays there. We're speaking about what happens here. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. And by no means am I getting into the geopolitical experience or wave down there, and that wasn't the intention of the specific line. But my concern is about young people exercising their opinion and how what oversight or abilities does the department see or have to address these types of issues.

I am aware of another parent bringing forward an issue that the individual teachers bring up on the screen in the classroom, how to complain about civic politicians where they're -- the teachers are exercising their personal opinions and encouraging students to focus their complaints and, in other words, walking them through the complaint process, how to file. How does -- what policy or what process can ECE do to ensure that young minds aren't molded based on the individual perceptions or

perspectives of those people guiding those fresh moldable minds? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, Madam Chair, I would hope that at the end of the day all adults, including all of us, are being respectful of one another. But I would also love for teachers to share with my kids how to exercise their civic responsibilities and civic duties and get them involved in politics and that -- you know, politics is everything from do you think you should be allowed to wear a ball cap in a classroom. And so I think that at the end of the day making sure that while teachers aren't indoctrinating kids that we absolutely are ensuring that our kids are developing critical thinking skills. And I receive letters in my role as both MLA and Minister from youth, and I applaud teachers who do that work with their students, and I applaud the parents who at the door say, hold on, I got to get my kid, and they bring a 12-year-old to come and ask me questions. And I think that -- I think that's good parenting. So thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I will go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Just to be clear, so the Minister's saying it's okay, from her perspective, that a teacher would pull up online and say well, the news reads today X, Y, Z, and, you know, I think this is, you know, a perspective, let's talk about it, which is fine. I think current affairs is important even if you agree or disagree. And then coaching students how to file formal complaints in this class of young people. And so the Minister's thinking that that's okay? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, that was not my words. I literally said it is not the role of teachers to indoctrinate children. I also, though, did say that I think it is very good and very important if our kids are learning about politics in the classroom and they are learning about critical thinking and they are learning to stand up for themselves. I think that a teacher needs to be fair in how they do that, but I would be more than happy to share any of my other perspectives about parenting with the Member after we're done this today. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: No, I'm not interested in your parenting -- I have two of my own, and I'm not here to tell you how to manage your kids and I would prefer we don't do that.

So, Madam Chair, the issue is, then -- I think the Minister may have her finger on the issue which is the indoctrination of perspectives and keeping things fair. So what oversight, policy, direction, can be provided to the school boards that can help trickle down through the education system to ensure that they're receiving a balance of perspectives? And sometimes we're going to hear things you don't want to hear, sometimes you're going to hear things you want to hear. And that's okay in the growing minds of people to hear and learn about different perspectives, and I think that's a fantastic -- the principle really comes down to as not being pressured or coached in any way, and I would think that that would be up to the individual and, of course, them being young people, hopefully they'll have good communication with the parents, if that's possible. I can't speak that it is. So the indoctrinate issue is exactly the issue I have, ensuring that young minds aren't pressured, and I'm asking how that is communicated to school boards, authorities, etcetera, to ensure that we have the fair and balance opportunity without feeling any shame or pressure. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. So, Madam Chair, the Education Act was amended in 2013 to include a definition of bullying, establish safe school regulations, which include the territorial school code of conduct and a requirement that education bodies ensure the development of safe school plans. It is worth adding in here that in 2022-2023 school year, a safe and caring school subcommittee was established under the authority of the deputy minister of Education, Culture And Employment, and ECE meets with representatives from education bodies annually to discuss implementation of the safe school regulations. If there is an incident in a school that a parent is uncomfortable with, I certainly encourage them to speak with their student and the teacher. I have found that most teachers are -- well, every teacher I have come across is more than happy to have conversations. If a parent finds that there is an instance that where something can't be resolved with the teacher, I do recommend then that they approach the principal. Certainly, if it needs to be escalated beyond that, bringing it to the superintendent is the next course of action there. And, of course, all school boards

do have the ability to implement policies within their own school boards underneath these requirements here as well. And so certainly encourage parents to not shy away from following up on stuff like this. And while I do, for example, and have said here that I get excited about the opportunity for our students to find their own voices and our youth to find their own voices -- we heard about that on the floor of the House today during Members' statements where Members and Ministers were able to join youth and hear their voices, and I think that is incredibly important. But certainly, we want to ensure that those interactions are respectful and that at the end of the day that students are given the opportunity and empowered to make their own decisions at the end of the day. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. Next, I will go to the Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I know that in many of the small communities, we have a lot of good support staff, we have a lot of good teachers, we have a lot of good schools. I don't want to discredit by saying that, you know, because our education is no good or, you know, like I heard that quite a few times, but we know that a lot of work is being done by the school staff. I've seen it myself by the support staff. They're making every effort for the student to succeed, to focus on the outcome. But there is a problem. There's one -- well, there's a lot of problems but, you know, one of the problem is that we know there's a lot of social issues in small communities with drugs, alcohol. You know, there's all kinds of issues. So we do have a problem where the -- in the absentees, it's -- I mean, we've seen the numbers too, the data that's in there and even in the Tlicho region where 84 percent in 2023, you know, 84 percent. It was also presented at our Tlicho government or annual meeting.

So a lot of them went back to the parents, and especially the young parents who are not sending their kids to school. So I even had some -- I talked to some of the young parents too, you know, myself, why. It's not the school. It's not the teachers. You know, it's us why, you know, because we know that the teachers, they're not going to be there forever. The school is there at the moment. But it's that not sending their kids to school. And I know that we got away from the -- one of the productive choice, it will be nice if we can focus on -- especially for family that are on income support, focus on the young family that are not sending their kids to school that are on income support. How can we check to see family that are on income support sending their kids to school? Is there any way or where in the legislation or in this education

that one of the productive choices that, you know, in order for a family -- but it's -- I don't know if it's one of the things that you would want to do. But find a way that we can send the kids to school, you know, or they can send their children to school and not be living -- not be at home when the school is out because it's happening a lot in many of the small communities. Even in my region I see that, you know, like, young children should not be at home but nobody is doing anything. So I know there's a lot of blame on the school or the teachers. That's what they're saying, you know, but I don't -- you know, like, I have a little grandson that goes to school, you know, so I -- I mean, that's our job -- or not our job, but that's the parent's job but we're helping the parents, you know, so there's a lot of grandparents that are doing the same thing. But what can we do to help these young parents to start sending their kids to school? And I know that in my region, the family preservation program, they're making an effort. You know, I see them working really hard, really well with the young family.

Not to punish them through the income support. But there's got to be something in there where -- because they are our future generations. We need them to be educated because many of the people are reaching the retirement age and somebody has to take over 20, 30 years from now, and that's, you know -- it's like we got to do something. We can't wait another 10 years, 20 years. Something has to be done now for the students to succeed and start focusing on the outcome, the education outcome. So do you have any plan -- is there a plan that education is doing -- that we are not aware of, but is there a plan in place where we can start focusing on fixing the absentees of our young children? Is ECE working with the parents to focus on improving the attendance rate? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I'll go to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Absenteeism of our students across the Northwest Territories is a huge issue and has a direct and significant impact on the education outcomes of NWT children in every single community, in small communities, in regional centres, and in Yellowknife. It is one of the strongest ways that we can support our students to succeed is by making sure that they're in school. And it is remarkable -- and I don't have the data with me but I'd be happy to show the Member -- that when a student misses, you know, even a couple of days here and there, it very quickly adds up to an entire

school year, and it's very easy for those days to get away from us. And so this is certainly something that I hear about from one end of the territory to the other. I hear about it with Indigenous governments. I hear about it with parents. I hear about it with community members. I've even had an elder come and tell me about they can remember a time where, you know, elders would be sitting in front of the post office yelling at kids that weren't in class and saying get to school or get a job, but you're not on the streets, off you go. And so I really want to thank the Member for bringing this up because this is incredibly important.

There are communities and community governments that are definitely working on this one. For example, even local community leadership and the community as well working with the school board to advocate jointly for ensuring that at a local level that there is family awareness and that they are encouraging kids to go to school, encouraging families to get their kids to school.

There are also communities in the NWT who -- small communities in the NWT are saying, okay, what do our kids want? They want bikes. Let's support them with bikes and get them in the classroom, and if they go to class they get a bike. So there are different communities that are really focusing on different ways that they can support this because the Member is absolutely right, it is everybody from principals, superintendents, teachers, parents, community members, and kids themselves. Even encouraging a student that is missing in the desk next to them has a huge impact. I think that sometimes we just need to know that we're noticed when we're not around, and whether you're an adult or a child, that you matter in the classroom. I went from even Yellowknife to a school -- want me to stop talking? Okay, sorry.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya): Thank you. I will go back to the Member for Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Yes, thank you. Thank you, I know you got carried away. It is okay. But you being a parent, and I know you probably seen it all and, you know, us too as well in small communities.

I know that we all want our young people to do well in life. We want them to succeed in life. We want them to start working. We don't want them living on the system or, you know, like, income support to be dependent. We want them to be independent. That's what we all want for our young people because they are our future generations. And another one too is that SFA.

I know lately I've been hearing lots of parents, especially in larger regional centre, you know, a lot of them are saying, you know, their child is already in a university. Some of them, I know they've been saying that, you know, their child is completing their first year, second year, but I haven't heard too many of those from small communities. So I just -- I want to ask the Minister if -- this is regarding student finance program. So if a student does not come back --

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Yakeleya):

Sorry, Member, noting the clock I am going to rise and report progress.

Thank you to the Minister, and your witnesses. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses from the chamber. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Report of Committee of the Whole. Member from the Deh Cho.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Tabled Document 275-20(1) and would like to report progress. And Mr. Speaker, I move that the Report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Deh Cho. Can I have a seconder? Somebody from Great Slave. All those in favour? Opposed? Abstentions? Motion passed.

---Carried

Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Wednesday, February 26th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer or Reflection
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
 - Oral Question 475-20(1), Budgeting Process for Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority
 - Oral Question 475-20(1), Senior Envoy to Government of Canada
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements

7. Oral Questions
 8. Written Questions
 9. Returns to Written Questions
 - Written Question 13-20(1), Physician Staffing
 10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
 11. Petitions
 12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
 13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
 14. Tabling of Documents
 15. Notices of Motions
 16. Motions
 17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
 18. First Reading of Bills
 19. Second Reading of Bills
 20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Bill 12, Business Day Statute Law Amendment Act
 - Tabled Document 275-20(1), 2025-2026 Main Estimates
 21. Report of Committee of the Whole
 22. Third Reading of Bills
 23. Orders of the Day
- Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. This House stands adjourned until Wednesday, February 26th, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 8:05 p.m.

