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The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Tuesday, June 3, 2008**

Members Present

Mr. Abernethy, Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Bisaro, Mr. Bromley, Hon. Paul Delorey, Mrs. Groenewegen, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Krutko, Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Hon. Sandy Lee, Hon. Bob McLeod, Hon. Michael McLeod, Mr. McLeod, Mr. Menicoche, Hon. Michael Miltenberger, Mr. Ramsay, Hon. Floyd Roland, Hon. Norman Yakeleya.

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

Prayer

Prayer.

Speaker (Hon. Paul Delorey): Good afternoon, colleagues. Welcome back to the Chamber. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister responsible for the Cabinet Subcommittee for Infrastructure, Mr. Michael McLeod.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 48-16(2)
IMPROVING THE GNWT CAPITAL-PLANNING
AND DELIVERY PROCESS

Hon. Michael McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government of the Northwest Territories is facing a difficult challenge in providing the programs and services residents require, given the fiscal resources available. Delivering and maintaining the infrastructure from which to deliver these programs and services also faces the same challenges.

The Western Canadian economy, and in particular Alberta, is heated. The Northwest Territories competes in this economy and faces the same challenges as other governments and the private sector in delivering infrastructure projects on time and on budget.

Decisions about capital investments affect the availability and quality of government services. Capital investments are the physical foundation of government service delivery that includes transportation infrastructure, water and sewer systems, and buildings that house government services such as courts, parks and recreation, health, social services and other important community programs. The quality of this infrastructure has implications for health, safety and quality of life. The government's physical infrastructure is what permits economic activity to efficiently take place. It allows people and goods to move, provides reliable water, and it's where children are educated and elders are cared for. In many cases it is a determining factor that makes

NWT communities a place where people choose to live.

The fiscal reality, Mr. Speaker, is that the government's infrastructure needs exceed by a wide margin our financial ability to address them. Therefore, we need to explore broad and innovative approaches to infrastructure planning, acquisition, usage and maintenance.

This approach needs to take into account funding limits as well as changing priorities, demographics and service initiatives. The Government of the Northwest Territories needs to find ways to optimize opportunities for shared and flexible approaches to infrastructure management and should seek to optimize opportunities for leveraging infrastructure funding, creative partnerships and alternative means of accessing infrastructure for programs and service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, this Assembly has also recognized the importance of providing affordable housing in our communities. The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation will continue to be a participant in our capital-planning process. However, we must ensure that housing remains a top infrastructure priority while recognizing the differences between how we build government facilities and how we deliver housing. Therefore, we will continue to allocate and budget our housing delivery using a parallel process that recognizes the need for different planning parameters for housing but does not lose sight of the value and economic benefits that result from a coordinated planning and delivery process.

In recognizing these challenges, Mr. Speaker, the Premier established the Ministerial Subcommittee for Infrastructure to review, advise and provide recommendations on how best to plan for, acquire and deliver infrastructure required for GNWT programs and services.

Based on the analysis of current GNWT practices, the subcommittee developed a list of recommendations for improving the GNWT's capital-planning and delivery processes. These recommendations were presented for consideration in detail to the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning and were also considered and

approved by Cabinet and FMB with a view to improving the planning, acquisition and delivery of infrastructure projects to help control costs and take preventative measures to avoid higher future costs.

Some of the more important changes we'll be implementing are: more rigour and discipline will be imposed on the capital-planning process by developing large building projects to a class C or schematic design stage and subjecting these projects to a peer review to ensure that the proposed infrastructure solution appropriately matches the defined program/service needs. Projects must advance to the class C stage and have undergone a peer review prior to proceeding to the consultation stage.

PWS, in consultation with departments, will develop standardized designs for like buildings — examples are schools, health centres, parks infrastructure — and these standardized designs, once developed, will be used for all future infrastructure projects.

Departments will attend to their deferred maintenance projects as a priority over new or incremental infrastructure projects.

Obtaining bids from contractors through public tender and negotiations requires careful scheduling, and tenders must be scheduled to allow enough time for contractors to purchase, fabricate and expedite materials. Winter road and barge schedules present additional constraints. Problems with schedules can increase the risks to the contractor and to the Government of the Northwest Territories and add costs to the project. Tendering in April and May for summer construction is not ideal as contractors are already committed to other projects. Therefore, we'll ensure that the appropriate consultation with standing committees takes place with a view to obtaining approval for the Legislative Assembly to consider the infrastructure acquisition plan along with the required budget allocations in the fall session.

Approval of the capital-planning process well in advance of the beginning of the fiscal year will allow for opportunities for better schedules and cost savings through the ordering of materials earlier and the logistical planning for transportation being confirmed earlier in the season.

A value analysis will be performed on every major project. These reviews will provide a mechanism for audit and accountability to ensure that projects have met the conditions of their approval. It is also important to ensure that lessons learned are incorporated into the capital-planning and project delivery process.

The Business Incentive Policy was established in 1984 to provide a level playing field for NWT-owned businesses to compete with businesses from southern Canada on GNWT contracts. At that time

the NWT economy was still in the developmental stages. The economy was not mature or diverse, and GNWT procurement and contracting — construction and leasing in particular — were the major underpinning of the NWT economy. The current Business Incentive Policy, or the BIP, provides a preference to NWT-owned firms by providing a bidding advantage of 15 per cent for northern content and 5 per cent for local content when these businesses bid on GNWT and community government projects.

Some 24 years later, in 2008, the maturity and scope of the NWT economy have vastly changed. In the mid-1990s diamond mining, oil and gas exploration, and related industrial services became the dominant players in the NWT economy and offer steady and secure income to many contractors. The reality is that there is more interest in mining and oil and gas construction and maintenance contracts than there is in GNWT contracts, and as a result, the GNWT's influence over the economy through the use of construction contracts is minimal.

In addition to the diversification and maturation of the NWT economy, the Western Canadian economy, in particular Alberta, is booming. This has resulted in major construction contractors either leaving the NWT altogether or becoming more interested in seeking contracts in Alberta rather than in the NWT. Outside of Yellowknife only one major contractor has consistently bid on large GNWT/community government building projects. Coupled with the annual cost of inflation, estimated at 20 per cent per annum, this lack of competition or interest in GNWT construction contracts is making it extremely difficult to complete projects on time and on budget.

Mr. Speaker, requiring community government compliance with BIP is not consistent with the spirit and intent of the New Deal for NWT Community Governments, the intent of which is to recognize community government authority and autonomy and provide communities with the tools to make decisions and implement them effectively.

The solution to the above problem is to create more competition for GNWT/community government construction projects. In order to facilitate competition, one needs to create more interest in these contracts. In order to generate the required interest, we need to consider removing the application of the BIP from these projects and contracts.

The subcommittee has recommended eliminating the application of the BIP from the GNWT and community government infrastructure projects. Cabinet has requested my colleague the Hon. Robert McLeod, Minister of Industry, Tourism

and Investment, to develop options on how best to implement this recommendation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the subcommittee will develop an implementation plan for this revised approach to the planning, acquiring and delivering infrastructure, and I will be seeking an opportunity to advise the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Infrastructure of this revised approach and how it will be implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Ministers' statements, the honourable Minister responsible for Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 49-16(2)
CHIEF ALBERT WRIGHT SCHOOL OPEN

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. [English translation not provided.]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this moment to celebrate the opening of the new Chief Albert Wright School in Tulita. The new school has opened for classes and will be having a grand opening in September or October.

Thanks to the many partners involved in this project, the new school is a top-of-the-line facility. The building is 25 per cent larger. It includes a gym, a community library, computer areas, wireless networking, a large science room and a great view of Bear Rock.

Thanks are due to the district education authority, the Sahtu Divisional Education Council, Pin-Taylor Architects, Dowland Construction, the school staff and the community for their hard work that has been put into this new facility. I especially would like to recognize the efforts of the community, the district education authority, the staff and the students for setting up and running school programs out of various buildings following the fire.

The building of the new school probably seemed to take forever, but students are overjoyed to be back in their own building. The opening is a cause for celebration.

Special thanks are also due to Tulita's Yamoria Community Secretariat, which provided funding for the gymnasium expansion, which is a beautiful facility for both the school and the community. This is yet another example of northern government and agencies working together to maximize facilities for our people.

I would like to particularly recognize the principal, Wayne Dawe, and the superintendent, Seamus Quigg, for their efforts to make sure studies were minimally disrupted during the given situation. Thanks to all the Government of Northwest

Territories' partners, it is now possible for Tulita's 153 students to begin the coming school year in a wonderful facility that will help them reach their full potential.

Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister Responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation, Mr. Miltenberger.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 50-16(2)
AGREEMENT FOR UTILIZATION OF
THE SOMBA K'E HEALING LODGE

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to announce that the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation has reached an agreement for the utilization of the former Somba K'e Healing Lodge near Dettah. Effective June 2008 the corporation will be leasing this facility to the Deton'Cho Corporation, which is owned by the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. They will operate the facility as a training centre in partnership with the Mine Training Society and Aurora College for three years.

Under this partnership Aurora College will be offering the Underground Miner Training Program at the facility and will offer accommodations to all students in the program on-site to introduce trainees to a camp-like setting. The Deton'Cho Corporation has committed \$150,000 over three years to purchase equipment, furniture and other supplies to convert this facility into an educational facility. Mining companies currently operating in the territory will also serve as partners in this initiative. Together, this partnership between the government and the private sector will allow for the development of programs and services that will assist our residents in gaining sustainable employment opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that an appropriate use has been found for this facility. Since taking ownership of this facility in 2003, the Housing Corporation has incurred operating and maintenance costs related to this facility totalling approximately \$1 million. It is important that we expend funds in the most appropriate and beneficial way possible. In this case not only does the lease allow us to redirect funds to other areas; the intended use for the facility will be beneficial to residents wishing to gain employment in the mining industry. The shelter component of this agreement will also make it easier for residents from outside Yellowknife to learn at their facility and have access to housing during their training.

This agreement is evidence of the successes that can be realized when we work in partnership with community organizations, other departments and development corporations. I'd like to extend my

congratulations and best wishes to the partners as they pursue their efforts to train residents to take advantage of the many opportunities stemming from resource development.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ACCESS TO HOUSING CORPORATION PROGRAMS BY CLIENTS WITH OUTSTANDING ARREARS

Mr. Menicoche: [English translation not provided.]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak on the need to ensure that access to NWT Housing Corporation programs is done fairly and that the program requirements do not put up any systemic barriers for Northerners. I can tell you that some days I wonder whether I ran for the position of housing relations officer instead of MLA.

Mr. Speaker, I have some constituents who have been denied access to Housing Corporation funding because of their arrears with them. These arrears are related to a loan these constituents received for work that was done to their house. These constituents have disputed these loans, because the work was never completed and the required repairs remain outstanding. So these constituents are in a fix.

The Housing Corporation is following their rules that clearly state that if you are in arrears to the corporation, you are not eligible for funding under any Housing Corporation program. The required outstanding repairs and any additional repairs my constituents need done to their homes will not happen until they can deal with these arrears.

The one way I can see for this issue to be dealt with is if we had an appeal board and a formalized complaint process. If the original issue of the incomplete repairs had been dealt with in an appropriate manner through a formalized complaints process, there probably wouldn't be an issue today. However, Mr. Speaker, we are left with a situation that clearly points out the need for an appeal board with the power to make decisions that can take into account the client's history.

There clearly needs to be some flexibility in how the "outstanding arrears means no access to funding" policy is applied. If the NWT Housing Corporation can come to an understanding with the client that addresses outstanding arrears and the new funding

requirement, I can see no reason that another loan could not be processed.

Another issue needs to be reviewed. When the Minister examines the role of an appeal board and the application of the no-outstanding-arrears policy, there's an income threshold eligibility for each community, especially those that are off all-weather roads.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Menicoche, your time for the Member's statement has expired.

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues.

I know that the Minister is working on rolling out an appeal board process in the near future, but we need it now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL ACCUMULATED DEFICIT

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, today I'm going to pick up again on the discussions regarding debt and deficit at Stanton Territorial Hospital.

The Minister stated in the local media last week that the overall debt to pay back FMBS for covering the payroll for the past 13 pay periods, or six and a half months, is over \$26 million. If you add that to the \$11.5 million of accrued deficit, it gives you a total of \$37.5 million. Given the reduction exercise the government is currently conducting and the scarcity of dollars to go around, I'd like to know where on God's green earth are we going to come up with \$37 million extra.

Mr. Speaker, in the same article I spoke of earlier, Minister Lee also said that there would be a supplementary appropriation bill coming forward during this session to deal with the payroll issue. I am left wondering whether or not that supplementary appropriation is going to be for \$11.5 million, which is the accrued deficit, \$26 million for the payroll crisis or \$37.5 million to address both issues.

I still have a difficult time understanding why this has been happening for six and a half months and how long the government anticipates it to continue. If the authority is not paying the \$2 million in payroll back to FMBS, then where exactly are they spending the money?

Are operations and cash flow so far off track at that hospital that this has had to be the case for the past six and a half months? I could understand one or two pay periods, but how can you explain 13 consecutive pay periods totalling \$26 million?

The department conducted a zero-base review at Stanton that began early in the spring of 2007. This was supposed to be a tool by which management at Stanton could make decisions and assist in the development of a balanced budget for 2008–2009. What kind of balanced budget can you get when you owe FMBS \$26 million to start off with, and another \$11.5 million deficit is staring you squarely in the face?

Mr. Speaker, I will again today have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services on this issue at Stanton. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON HAY RIVER SPRING BREAKUP AND FLOODING

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, Hay River was once again affected by our annual breakup. This year saw a particularly bad and somewhat unusual turn of events in the breakup, resulting in serious property damage. Excluding the cleanup to businesses and government property, the tab has been estimated to exceed \$1 million.

I would like to thank the Hon. Michael McLeod for the time that he spent coming to the community to firsthand survey the impact of this year's flooding. ENR was available for a helicopter view of the damage, Mr. Speaker, which yourself and I accompanied the Minister on.

I'd also like to commend the town of Hay River and the Flood Watch Committee for their tireless efforts again this year.

We are also thankful for the continued presence of the University of Alberta specialists who are able to analyze the science of our breakup, and fortunately, they have secured funding for future years' monitoring of our river as well. This has been a tremendous assistance to our local EMO and volunteer resources.

I would also like to thank Mr. Kevin Rowe from MACA for his assistance in helping our residents through the claims process. I know there were still some concerns about the after-the-fact reimbursement, but thankfully, there is financial assistance available.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss not to acknowledge again the input of our resident flood watcher with

much historic and traditional knowledge of our river, Red McBryan, who celebrated his 89th birthday aboard the charter for the aerial view of the river into Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, besides the work still underway related to cleanup and repairs, we continue with the boil-water order. In cooperation with the Town of Hay River, mayor, council and Public Works, I remain hopeful that a long-term solution to the water intake treatment and storage can be developed to avoid this boil-water order — which is prolonged, at this time of year — in future years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FOLK ON THE ROCKS ANNUAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the week of July 18–20, Folk on the Rocks will be hosting their annual summer music festival. This year's theme is Global Fusion, and it is an exploration of what multicultural means in Canada today.

For 28 years Folk on the Rocks has been bringing music to the shores of Long Lake. The festival is one of the NWT's premier musical events. It is known as a culturally diverse event, which includes a 50-50 split between northern and southern performers.

The festival has always supported northern performers and has been a great opportunity for these northern performers to play alongside and collaborate with established southern performers. This exposure is incredibly valuable to these northern performers and helps them enhance their current skills.

Folk on the Rocks should be very proud of their contribution to the northern music scene. They've made a real difference in the lives of many northern performers.

This year's line-up is spectacular, both from a southern and a northern point of view. Artists include Juno-nominated Jill Barber, one of Canada's most renowned singer-songwriters; Toronto-based Elliott Brood, who plays dark, gritty folk music and howling bluegrass; B.C.-born and Toronto-based Ndidi Onukwulu, who has a voice you just won't forget; Malajube, with their rock punk and bubblegum pop sounds for everyone to enjoy; the Mushfiq Ensemble, singing in a dozen different languages; Shane Philip, with a musical tapestry including reggae, ska, folk, funk and rock; from Fort Smith, State of the Art, a hard-rocking band with

raw grit and intensity; Four Leaf Clover, St. Patrick High School's own jazz band, well worth a listen; Shea Alain, a local singer-songwriter and winner of last season's Rock the Folk contest; Santa Lucia LFR, Latin, funk and rock; Plants and Animals from Montreal with classic rock and folk progressive; Uzume Taiko, the dynamic fusion of old Japanese and new styles of drumming; Tambura Rasa, upbeat sounds and songs from around the world; Taqralik Partridge with spoken-word performances from Nunavik; Aaju Peter from Greenland; Juno-nominated Mike Ford, previously from Moxy Fruvous; Alex Mahe on guitar in both French and English; Mathew Noqingaq, a drummer from Iqaluit; The Green Fools, Calgary-based comedians; the songs of Stephen Kakfwi — some of you might remember him; I think he's been in here once or twice — Tony Foliot, the Snow King; the Dawgwoods, Yellowknife's newest folk-rock band, with great sounds; Bryce Young; and Yellowknife's own The Skinnys, who are pure entertainment.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Abernethy, your time for the Member's statement has expired.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had one line to go.

I encourage everyone in Yellowknife over the weekend to come out and enjoy the performances. You won't be disappointed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PROVISION OF MIDWIFERY SERVICES

Mr. Bromley: Mahsi. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk on the provision of midwife services in the NWT. There are currently only three midwives working for Health and Social Services in the Northwest Territories — one in Yellowknife and two in Fort Smith — with only one of the midwife positions in Fort Smith receiving core funding. The other midwife there currently has only short-term funding.

Although there are other registered midwives interested, there is no funding for other positions here in Yellowknife, where there is increasing demand. An expert in the field estimates there is probably already enough demand for an additional three or even four midwives in Yellowknife alone.

I have several constituents who rely on a midwife in helping with the births of their children, but many other constituents are lamenting the lack of service available. The midwife here is unable to take

additional clients due to her limited capacity as the sole midwife in town and a sole program staff/manager/advocate in the territory.

Currently there are no midwife training programs in the NWT, and although there is some interest in Fort Smith to collaborate with programs down south, there is no funding. Even if there was a program to train midwives, there is, at the moment, not enough money and no vacant positions for the graduates. Having the capacity to train midwives here would bring long-term sustainability and promote their retention in the North. Funding is required for this support.

Mr. Speaker, following the Territorial Midwifery Profession Act of 2003, it is unfortunate we are not able to fully implement a midwife program, even in the capital. Encouraging the training of local women to become midwives and to practise to the extent possible in their home communities would be, in the long term, an effective use of resources. Our highly appreciated medical doctors are both busy and expensive, and it only makes common sense to invest in strategies that can relieve demand for doctors while lowering the costs of birthing.

Mr. Speaker, this service is regarded as both a quality-of-life factor and an effective use of government dollars. I encourage our Department of Health and Social Services to consider this and make midwife services widely available to our communities. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ADHERENCE TO NEGOTIATED CONTRACTS POLICY

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, as Members of this Legislative Assembly we have a responsibility to provide support for our local entrepreneurs, contractors and individuals in our communities. At times these individuals approach us, asking us for support letters under the negotiating contracting policy and procedure of this government. The policy applies to public contractors in the area of housing, road construction and other government contracts that are out there, but the policy clearly states that the contractor must obtain a support letter from the local community and the affected MLA.

I have submitted support letters on behalf of local contractors in my riding and also walked them down the hall to the Ministers' offices and hand-delivered them to the appropriate Ministers who are responsible for these particular contracts.

Mr. Speaker, those support letters are following the existing policy of this government. But sad to say, those letters do not seem to have any influence on

this government's ability to implement that policy, which is clearly stated as one of the options for contracts to be let by this government.

Assuming that the process was being followed, negotiation was taking place between the contractor and the department affected, and that Cabinet was dealing with it, it's sad to say, Mr. Speaker, that after reading through the local newspaper, I realized that these projects that I had submitted support letters for are now being publicly tendered through the newspaper, yet I'm not hearing back from the Minister that that was being done.

Again, I have to ask myself, as an MLA of this 16th Legislative Assembly, exactly what influence do I have as an MLA who is strictly following the policy of this government to show support for a local contractor on a local contract in my riding?

Again, Mr. Speaker, it's sad to say: do we, as the government and as Members of the Legislative Assembly, have influence in regard to policies and procedures of this government, or are we being totally ignored by departments, Ministers and people within this bureaucracy so that, as Members of this Legislative Assembly, we do not have a say on exactly how....

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Krutko, your time for the Member's statement has expired.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I must ask myself: exactly what is it that Members have to do to basically have influence on contracts that take place in our ridings? Knowing that there's an existing policy that is in place and following the policy as it's identified, we see those particular items being dealt with outside the process, where you have to read about it in a newspaper and not hear it directly from the Minister who is responsible for implementing that policy.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will be asking questions of the Premier on this matter later.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION, HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN SMALL COMMUNITIES

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to talk about access to education,

health and social services for the residents in the small communities. For us in the larger centres, when we require medical attention, we pick up the phone, make an appointment and see a doctor, or if we need emergency care, we can be in a hospital in a matter of minutes.

However, for residents in Lutselk'e and Fort Resolution access to the doctor is limited to once every two weeks if they are lucky. If they find themselves in an emergency situation, they are medevaced out of the community. This also means huge disruption in lifestyle for them, and if they have to stay for an extended period, it also impacts their friends and family. To visit your friend or relative, you have to take time off work or school, leave the community and incur unplanned expenses.

Mr. Speaker, for what many take for granted in larger centres, many residents in the smaller communities must endure disruption in lifestyle, incur expenses, and leave their homes.

Attending school in a larger centre means a wider selection of education options, better programming, better facilities and specialized teachers. Because of lower enrolment levels, school budgets in smaller communities have fewer resources, which relates to limited or no classes in home economics, physical education and trade-related courses.

As well, Mr. Speaker, in smaller communities there are constant teacher issues, with a basic need for housing meaning a regular turnover of teaching staff, which ultimately impacts the quality of school programming.

What we take for granted here in the larger centres, with many education options for our students, those in smaller communities are continually asking the local district education authorities and the territorial government to improve school programming, to address enrolment and budget issues, and to resolve teacher housing issues. Mr. Speaker, for our smaller communities this is the norm.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, in our smaller communities we see higher rates of incarceration, higher rates of youth crime and higher rates of suicide. Also, the impact of substance abuse is more evident.

Access to needed professional counselling in smaller communities is limited and often not available due to constant challenges of attracting, hiring and retaining qualified professionals. Not having a system that attracts....

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Beaulieu, your time for the Member's statement has expired.

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, access to needed professional counselling in smaller communities is limited and often not available due to constant challenges of attracting, hiring and retaining qualified professionals and not having a system that attracts and retains local workers due to policy indifference.

Mr. Speaker, these basic everyday services are something that we all take for granted in the larger centres, but for many residents in our smaller communities, this is a reality. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ENVIRONMENT WEEK AND CLEAN AIR DAY

Ms. Bisaro: Mr. Speaker, this is Environment Week. As mentioned yesterday, it's a time to acknowledge that each of us can and must do something to improve the environment.

There are many small ways that we can go about helping to save our environment — in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools and in our communities.

We can lead the way through our actions and by encouraging others to help save the environment: to walk instead of drive, to use a cloth shopping bag instead of a plastic one, to shut off the computer when you are away from it instead of leaving it on, to turn off the lights when leaving a room.

It cannot be denied that our world is getting warmer, Mr. Speaker, Canada's North especially. As a result of human activity we produce greenhouse gases that ultimately heat up our atmosphere, and it's no secret, Mr. Speaker, that greenhouse gas emissions are a major factor affecting climate change. As a result, the average temperature in some regions could rise as much as seven degrees.

Wednesday, June 4, tomorrow, is Clean Air Day, a day to recognize how pollutants contribute to climate change and a day to start changing our behaviour.

The North is very lucky to have some of the cleanest air in the world, but that can easily change. As humans we put huge amounts of pollutants into the environment all day, every day, through heating our homes, generating electricity, driving our vehicles.

Tomorrow take action for clean air and climate change and leave your vehicle at home. Walk or

bike wherever you need to go — they are, after all, healthy, active alternatives to the car — or accept the offer of free transit from the City of Yellowknife and ride the bus. Whatever you do tomorrow, before you do it, think about the pollutants you will create and act to preserve our clean northern air.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DELAYS IN RECEIVING RESPONSES FROM HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES MINISTER

Mr. Hawkins: Today I wanted to talk about the difficulty northern families have accessing services for their children who are diagnosed with autism. I've spoken to a number of them, and I'm really starting to understand their struggle. I can't really talk about this today because I'm more than just struggling in the sense of understanding their issues. I'm struggling to get answers from the Minister of Health and Social Services. That's what I want to talk about today.

A number of times I've written the Minister, and I find that things are really slow. I write a letter to find out about NHIB money and how much the GNWT is owed, especially in this crisis of trying to find money to pay our bills so we don't have to lay off staff. It takes seven weeks before I get a response acknowledging that it's still slow. It takes two extra weeks on top of that to finally get a response. That's nine weeks to get an answer when we're in a difficult position — when Members want to be proactive to find ways to help the government solve some of these financial crunches.

Speaking of that autism issue, I wrote the Minister over three weeks ago with just some simple questions, because I have parents struggling with this issue. I'm still waiting for those answers.

In March I'd written the Minister regarding multiple sclerosis coverage. I had a family come to me and say: We're struggling; we have a potential drug that has a positive effect. Mr. Speaker, it took over three weeks to find out a yes-or-no answer for this question, which is: was this drug one we cover? By the way, three weeks later I found out it was. But a walk down that back corridor could have certainly helped this family. They were concerned why it would take over three weeks to get an answer.

At the end of April I wrote a letter — a supportive letter — because there is a family who is struggling with crack addiction. Although the answer didn't come out the way I wanted it to — with ministerial support — it did take over a month to at least acknowledge my letter.

Mr. Speaker, how are we to get back to our constituents in a timely way? This is not just

happening to me. I've heard at least one other MLA speak to this as well. A staff member has told me that when they try to communicate and get information for MLAs to move forward on issues, this continues to be a problem. If it was a photo-op or it was a cutting of cake, I bet that Minister would be running down the hall to do this. The fact is that I need answers to do my job.

I will have questions for the Premier today regarding what he has expectations of as reasonable response times for Members to do their jobs.

Mr. Speaker: Members' statements. The honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. Robert McLeod.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CAPITAL-PLANNING AND DELIVERY PROCESS

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to use my Member's statement today to speak to the comments that Minister Michael McLeod just laid before us.

I like to see that the government is finally starting to look at a lot of the infrastructure projects they have going on across the Northwest Territories. I like the fact that they're going to try and get these program budgets passed in the fall so they'll give contractors an opportunity to get all their material on the winter road and begin construction. We see every year the infrastructure carry-overs from one year to the next. I think that drives a lot of the cost of our infrastructure projects up.

One remark that stood out was the standardized designs. I like to see that. I like the fact that we may come up with a standardized design for a lot of our projects across the Northwest Territories, with a little tweaking here and there, and not making them big, multi-million-dollar works of art. I think it's a good idea to get away from that. We've already seen examples of projects that have gone way over budget just because of the basic design of the buildings. There's nothing wrong with a good, clean design that's very functional. I think that'll go a long way to improving the amount of money we spend on these infrastructure projects.

The level playing field is something I've always had an interest in. As a rule, Mr. Speaker, I don't normally support negotiated contracts. I have gone against that rule a couple of times this year because I felt it was something that was beneficial to the North and the community in supporting these projects. I went against the rule I normally follow. I think that also drives the prices of some of our infrastructure projects up. A good example was a contract I saw for some work on the highway: \$2.4 million for one five-kilometre stretch, negotiated; \$1.7 million for the five kilometres

before it, publicly tendered. That's a difference of \$700,000.

I think we're on the right track here. I like the fact that they will be looking into the designs. I think there will be a lot more competition. I hear from contractors all the time. Sometimes they feel like there is not a level playing field when they have to compete against the fact that some contracts are negotiated. To take advantage of some of these situations, they do try to partner up with some groups to get into negotiated contracts, because they feel that it's their only opportunity to get any more work.

Mr. Speaker: Members' statements. The honourable Member for Nunakput, Mr. Jacobson.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DOCTOR SHORTAGE IN THE NUNAKPUT CONSTITUENCY

Mr. Jacobson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm getting kind of frustrated with the health of my elders in Ulukhaktok. They haven't seen a doctor since January of this year. It's almost six months. I really feel this is an injustice for my people in my riding of Nunakput, in Tuk, Paulatuk and Sachs. I'm going to have questions for the Minister of Health at the appropriate time.

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Jacobson. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to recognize a couple of constituents of mine in the gallery today. Roy Courtoreille is the regional vice-president for the UNW. Mr. Terry Rideout is in the gallery today. Welcome to the House.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: I'd like to recognize a constituent of mine, Mr. Dudley Johnson from Norman Wells. Welcome to the House.

I'd also like to recognize a former resident of Tulita, Mr. Mike Labine.

Mr. Abernethy: I'd like to recognize a constituent and an advocate for fathers' rights, Mr. Mark Bogan.

Ms. Bisaro: I'm very pleased today to recognize and welcome a group of outstanding students from William McDonald School. These students basically had the best marks of any of their cohorts in social studies. That won them a trip to see us in action here at the Legislative Assembly. I'd like to mention

Jordan Drouin, Azya Barret, Jordan Zoe, Curtis Kenny, Janessa Elanik, Harley Lang, Julie Gourley, Dylan Colbourne, Corinna Mount, and Jeremy Phung. Accompanying them are two staff members, Sharon Morrison and Stephen Offredi. Welcome.

Also, I'd like to recognize my constituency assistant, Kerry King.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: I'd like to recognize Mr. Mike Labine, the dear papa of Miss Nicole Labine, who is one of our pages this week; as well as Ms. Arture Chadwick from Fort Smith.

Mr. Speaker: If we've missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to the Chamber. I hope you're enjoying the proceedings. It's always nice to have an audience in here.

Item 6, acknowledgments. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

Acknowledgments

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 5-16(2)
ELAINE DOCTOR — TULITA

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. [English translation not provided.]

Mr. Speaker, the people of Tulita have always known Elaine Doctor as Tisha. She is known in the community of Tulita.

Tisha is a very committed worker. You'll see her in the office early in the morning and, at times, late in the community arena volunteering her time to minor hockey and going the extra mile at times to help families in tragic events.

Elaine comes from a very strong family background, and her work is known beyond the people of the Sahtu region. She has dedicated all her time to serve her people in Tulita.

It gives me great pleasure today to rise in the House to acknowledge Elaine "Tisha" Doctor in appreciation of her contributions and her dedication to the Department of Health and Social Services when she retires this year after more than 31 years of service in the Sahtu region.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 240-16(2)
STANTON TERRITORIAL HOSPITAL DEFICIT

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. It gets back to the six and a

half months that the government allowed Stanton Territorial Hospital to not pay FMBS back in the amount of \$2 million every two weeks for a total of over \$26 million. I'd like to ask the Minister why this has been allowed to continue for the past six and a half months.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As indicated earlier in answering questions on the same topic, it's a generally accepted practice. For all health authorities and the departments, FMBS pays the payroll. It becomes accounts payable to authorities or departments on the day the payroll goes out. It really is strictly a cash-flow issue. The outstanding payroll does not have any direct relationship to the deficit situation at Stanton.

Mr. Ramsay: Up until six and a half months ago Stanton did pay back that \$2 million FMBS paid in terms of payroll. I'm sure the other authorities also pay it back.

The Minister didn't answer the question. I want to know why this has been allowed to happen and why this debt has been allowed to build up to \$26 million over the past six and a half months.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I just want to make it clear for the record that when the Member is talking about accumulated deficit, he should not be adding \$11.5 million accumulated deficit with the outstanding payroll amount. The accumulated deficit of \$11.5 million takes into consideration all of the outstanding receivables and payroll.

In terms of the question about why we're letting this happen, nobody's letting anything happen. The important question is that the government and the authority and everybody interested wants to know is what is causing the deficit situation, whether or not the organization is being underfunded, where there's a need for rebasing, or whether we should be looking at different ways of delivering programs and doing a cost-in-program review, which is precisely what the authority and myself and the Cabinet are engaged in.

Mr. Ramsay: The \$11.5 million of accrued deficit has happened at Stanton over the past three years. The \$26 million that I'm talking about is the payroll over the past six and a half months that Stanton hasn't been able to pay back to FMBS.

Again, I would like to ask the Minister: if Stanton is not paying the \$2 million back to FMBS every two weeks, what are they spending that \$2 million on? They've got to be spending it somewhere. Are things so messed up there at that hospital that they can't pay this money back? Somebody's got some

explaining to do. I'd like the Minister to explain that to me.

Hon. Sandy Lee: The important situation is that Stanton has been accumulating a more significant deficit over the last three years. It has had a past operating deficit and surplus going back and forth, with the information I have going back to '99. But it was in the last three years that there was a significant deficit accumulating, and it was incumbent on this government.... And I was sitting on the other side. I was asking the same questions, wanting to know why that is.

We are trying to figure out what it is so that we can take more clear and decisive action, and the public administrator who's in place now is in the process of doing that. Then, of course, as soon as we can give a final report on that, I will be working with the Members on that. It's a complex situation that we are looking into very rigorously.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Final supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Minister for that. The interesting thing in this is that the hospital went out and did a zero-base review just last spring. It came back with some recommendations. I find it really interesting that having gone through that zero-base review, they've had FMBS pay their payroll the last six and a half months. To me, there's something wrong there.

I want to ask the Minister: will the Minister commit today to sitting down with Regular Members — if it's the Social Programs Committee, so be it — and explaining to us what exactly is happening at Stanton and what exactly are the plans of the government to address this situation?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, from day one I've made it my operating principle that I consult with the Standing Committee on Social Programs on all that is going on, and especially with respect to Stanton.

Mr. Speaker, I have to make it clear that the zero-base review was not initiated by Stanton territorial authority. It was a joint effort on the part of Stanton territorial authority, the department and FMBS to get together and review all 53 programs to get to the bottom of what is the driver that is causing this deficit, understanding all of the environmental factors and the rising health costs and the demand-driven services that a hospital like Stanton territorial authority is offering. We have some very good data on that zero-base review.

The government has chosen not to address the financial issues until we get the answers. We're very close to getting them. I have committed to the Standing Committee on Social Programs to go back to the findings of the zero-base review. I'd be

happy to give a full briefing on that and work with the committee and the Members as to the steps going forward.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

QUESTION 241-16(2)
DELAYS IN RECEIVING
RESPONSES FROM MINISTERS

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question today for the Premier of this House, and it has to do with my Member's statement. I raised the issue of the fact that I have at least one Minister who's not responding. I should also, at the same time, point out that I haven't seemed to have any other problems with any other Minister about getting back to either e-mails or written letters.

The fact is that this is an issue, and I'd like to know what the Premier has as an expectation of a Minister getting back to a Member. My question for the Premier is: does he have any rules on this? Or does he have any sort of expectations regarding how long a Minister can allow e-mails or written letters to be outstanding?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The Hon. Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no set guideline rule on timing to get back. We try and get back as soon as we've got all the information. It depends on the complexity of the file or the question, the details being required. If we have to work with health or educational authorities on those, that can take additional time. So it depends on what's actually coming forward.

If there's concern about a Minister's conduct or dealings with Members, I would be glad to deal with the subject matter with the particular Member and Minister. If it means a joint meeting in my office, we can arrange something like that.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to hear if the Premier thinks it's reasonable that I had to wait nine weeks to find out what the NHIB number was. It only took me one day to go down to the principal secretary's office to say that if I don't get this answer, I'll call a press conference to ask about what's going on, on that side of the House. Does the Premier find that a reasonable time period to wait — nine weeks?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Again, it depends on who you work with. If you have to go to the federal government to get that particular information.... The case may have been that the Member has gone down the hall, and that information may have been just provided to the Minister. The Minister could have provided that to the Member. I'm not sure of the particulars, when that information was actually

available. But as I said, if there are issues with the performance of a Minister with Members, I would gladly sit down with them and discuss the issue.

Mr. Hawkins: We can go through this all day, but the bottom line — what I want to hear from the Premier — is: will he highlight this as a significant issue, that Ministers do their utmost to get back to Members in a timely way? I mean, we look terrible in front of a family that we want to get a simple answer for. We make this government look horrible when they want to find out what drug coverage there is for them for their family when they're in trouble. Will the Premier make that clear to his Cabinet, that if there is a problem, they communicate that with Members immediately?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that with our relationship with Members in this format, we work cooperatively with them. Again, it depends on the complexity, if we have to make requests to other levels of government or boards and agencies. This particular case may be a little different. I would be glad to look into it. Again, the fact is that we try to work with Members on the information we get and to provide that as soon as we can. So with this particular case, I'd be happy to sit down with the Member and try to get more details and look into this.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, that \$100 million NHIB number was actually floating around out there. It's in this building. There are discussions about it. So I don't know about the lengthy research required to get it.

The fact is that it keeps coming back to this point. All I'm asking for is that the Premier will, first, maybe not come up with a hard, steadfast rule but communicate to his Cabinet that they are to respond as quickly as possible. If there are any problems there, they are to contact the Member's office to make it clear that there are some hiccups, but they're working on the problem. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared to talk to my Cabinet Ministers regarding timely responses. Again, if there are issues with any one of us on timely responses, I'd gladly sit down with them and go over the details and try to get to the bottom of it. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

QUESTION 242-16(2)
ADHERENCE TO NEGOTIATED
CONTRACTS POLICIES

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Premier. It's in regard to the policies and procedures we have in this government, especially in negotiated contracts. It's clearly stated in the policy that in order to get to negotiations with government, whoever gets the contract must get support letters from the affected community and the MLA.

I have written letters in regard to projects in my riding, especially the roof on the school in Aklavik, a couple of housing projects — Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic — for the local development corporations. Again, Mr. Speaker, I don't know if those letters have any influence on the government to basically negotiate with these individuals, but later to realize that these projects are showing up in newspapers in which they're being publicly tendered....

I'd like to ask the Premier: exactly how much clout do these letters have in regard to Cabinet's decision to negotiate those contracts with the individual contractors in my riding?

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The negotiated contract is case by case, depending on the contract itself. If it's part of a bundle, the process is there in the negotiated contract policy. When a contractor or a development corporation puts a request in to negotiate, then we require that a letter accompany that from the Member and the community, and they would be reviewed together.

The Minister responsible for that project would carry that forward for discussion in Cabinet to decide if that was the avenue to take. But it's case by case. I'd have to sit down with the Member to find out which project it was and go through some of the details to see what the specifics were in that case.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, just on that: for myself, I feel negotiated contracts are an integral way of stimulating the local economy by generating jobs and employment in a lot of our communities.

I'd like to ask the Premier: in light of the Gwich'in MOU, which clearly states that a percentage of those contracts.... We are trying to build capacity work with the First Nations. We do have an MOU with the Gwich'in Tribal Council, and I know these discussions have taken place annually.

I'd like to ask the Premier: is there a possibility for allowing more time to be spent before they make the decision, from the time a letter goes to the department and it's publicly stated in the papers, so that at least as an MLA we're aware that this

process has been changed? I don't think there's an avenue for that. I'd like to ask the Premier: is that something that Cabinet considered looking at?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, with the changes we're looking at doing in our infrastructure acquisition planning process, the more time we have at the front end will always help the whole number of cases. We also have to be aware that from time to time — again, case by case — if we have an emergency situation and so on, sometimes departments have to act right away. There are a number of projects that have happened there that have had to go on, but case by case we've looked at them. As well, there would be a capital-planning acquisition process, which was just discussed earlier. That would allow for more lead time to have that type of discussion. So hopefully, that will give more time in this process as well.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, again I'd like to ask the Premier: when a project of no social or economic value to a community has an MLA and a letter from the community to defer the project if we don't see the benefits flowing to our communities, is there a possibility of deferring capital projects in a particular Member's riding? If the Member and the community suggest it, knowing that there will not be any economic benefit or that contractors from outside are taking all the work, taking all the money and basically leaving us with the unemployment and not giving us the social and economic benefit for that, is that a possibility?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I think it's the case that rarely have we had a request to defer or delay a project from a community. Usually there are concerns about the fact that we're not able to proceed with them in a faster method or manner. In this case, the House has approved the budget. Initially those projects that were identified would normally go through the process of a public tender or an RFP. It is outside of that where we do go, for example, as the Member discussed, with the MOU, the memorandum of understanding, with the Gwich'in. We now also have one with the Sahtu, I believe. We would look at projects and see if they would fit and if there's a capacity to do those projects. We could consider deferral, but like I said, most times there's concern we're not moving fast enough on our projects.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is in regard to service departments — Public Works, Housing and other departments that basically are putting out these tenders. Using Public Works as an example, I don't know if they understand the MOU with the Gwich'in or if they don't understand there's a negotiating contract policy. That is, an MLA writes a letter that has some influence and is being told and having to tell a contractor, "Sorry; you didn't get

back to us in enough time; we're going to go forward with the contract," with no allowable negotiating process.

So I'd like to ask the Premier: can he maybe talk to the Minister of Public Works and Services to ensure they understand there are policies, procedures and an MOU in place with the Gwich'in Tribal Council to ensure they are having a fair process that's incumbent on those agreements?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, all Ministers are aware of the MOU that we do have in place around negotiating a project. The Minister of Public Works and Services is very familiar with that. In fact, he sat down at the table, along with a number of other Ministers, to do an accounting of that, as we do every year. In fact, that one has just been renegotiated, if not signed off again. It is in that process, is my understanding. We're familiar with that process, and we'll stick to it. Again, the process is that normally when the budget's approved, it is through a public process that we initially go down. If the request comes in, then we look at deferring to the negotiated contract policy, and then the Member's letter and community letters of support apply at that point. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

QUESTION 243-16(2)
CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE SOCIAL WORKERS
AND SOCIAL WORK POLICIES

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services. In two small communities in my riding there are some issues with social work, child apprehensions and so on. I'd like to ask the Minister if she is willing to commit to reviewing and revising the department's policies and procedures with an attempt to make them more small-aboriginal-community friendly. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I need to ask in more detail exactly the concerns of the Member. I could tell you that most of the people working in the department in that area are aware of the fact that they have to be mindful of the people they serve and the cultures of each community they do serve. But when there are specific situations that Members have, we are happy to look at them individually. If the Member could give me more information, I'd be happy to look into more details of that.

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, it would be difficult for me to stand up on the floor here and draw on a bunch of specifics, but I can provide those for the Minister easily.

What I'm trying to do is get some form of a commitment from the Minister to try to make the policies and procedures work in the small communities. It doesn't seem to work. It appears that there are qualified people in the small communities who can take the kids of their relatives and their grandchildren and so on, yet the child ends up out of town. My position is that there's something wrong with the policy; the policy doesn't fit the small communities.

I'll ask the question: would the Minister be prepared to work with the smaller communities and the smaller communities' MLAs to look at specifics with an attempt to revise the policies and procedures that are more congruent with small communities?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, absolutely. That is the area that I'd been working on when I was on the other side, and it's one that I'm committed to.

The principle that the department is supposed to follow is to keep the children in families as much as possible and in communities as much as possible. Mr. Speaker, the information I have for the Tu Nedhe constituency is that as of March 31 — but those facts do change — there are nine children in some type of care. Most of them, I can tell the Member, are within the community, within families or within extended families in the community. That is the policy of the department, and that's the one we follow.

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, I'm beginning to actually see what the problem is. I don't think the policies have ever been brought to the communities. I'm not really a hundred per cent sure that even the qualifications of the social workers who are working in the communities need to be as high as they are. Some of the issues in the community are very simple issues that can be addressed by hiring local social workers. I'd like to ask the Minister if she would consider looking in another area: changing the qualifications of the social workers who are required to work in the small communities.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I do agree with the Member. I hope I'm making it clear that wherever possible we do try to hire our people locally. We make our job descriptions and activities conducive to having people hired locally. I think members of the community of Fort Resolution especially are lucky in that they have quite a number of local people from that community who have been trained, who have worked elsewhere and who have come back, such as a nurse practitioner who has come back. I do understand from my visit a month ago that some in the social workers' pool were born and raised there but had moved away to pursue their.... I don't want to get specific to individuals. Anyway, I want to tell the Member that I'm totally

committed to the concept of working under that principle.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is not for me to say that there are any specific problems with people working in-house in social services for the community. I guess my question is more in line with looking through the whole bureaucracy and the development side of the policy, looking at what is developed and where the basis of that type of policy originates. I don't have a question. I was just looking at the policy. That's what I am asking about. Thank you.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I will commit to work with the Member to see how our policies can be more community-friendly.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

QUESTION 244-16(2)
YELLOWKNIFE ASSOCIATION OF
CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR SENIORS

Mr. Bromley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. If you don't mind, I'll harken back to my Member's statement on Friday, when I talked about some of the forced-growth costs of the Yellowknife Association of Concerned Citizens for Seniors in their territorial facility, Aven Manor. I am wondering if there is something the Minister, through her department and her health authorities, could do to try and meet those costs that are rising each year and have not been met for the last two years.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The YACCS that the Member referred to in his Member's statement last Friday has benefited from extra funding from the government. I think it's common knowledge that they had a collective bargaining settlement last year. It was necessary to increase the funding to adhere to that, and the government provided that extra funding. I think it's in this year's budget to build that in.

As for the forced-growth situation that the Member is referring to, my information is that they had applied to Yellowknife Housing and Social Services Authority, and they have approved that forced-growth funding within their budget for the last two years. The authority was able to provide that extra funding.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Minister has different or other information than mine. I believe her assistant attended a meeting where we were given a paper from YACCS saying they

had applied for \$38,000 two fiscal years ago, and it was declined. Last year, again, \$83,000 was declined for cost-of-living increases and so on. So I wonder if the Minister could look into that a little further and perhaps find out about that. I'll leave it at that.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to look into it to make sure that we're talking about the same numbers. My understanding is that they were approved for the funding. We do need to understand that the NGOs apply funding to their governing authority, and the authority has the power and the flexibility to fund those monies. Even within these difficult times we have been able to maintain the NGO funding level at least at the way it is. My understanding is that YACCS got the money, but I will confirm that and get back to the Member.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make clear that I think I heard the Minister say that they were getting a flat level of funding, and I certainly want to emphasize that that's not what I'm talking about. They need additional funding, just as we approve for every activity, for the increased price of fuel and labour and so on. I understand they did get a collective bargaining agreement, which was good progress. But this, I think, deals with things like rising fuel costs and so on. So if that could be part of the investigation. I thank the Minister for those remarks.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

QUESTION 245-16(2)
WESTERN HARVESTERS
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment. With regard to the hunters and trappers programming, I've got harvester constituents, and they're having difficulty accessing programs to get into the.... I believe the government has a program to help in purchasing snowmobiles and the new traps so that they can expand their harvesting. I just want to ask the Minister: what is the name of that program? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. The honourable Minister responsible for Industry, Tourism and Investment, Mr. Bob McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to report that trapping remains an important source of cash income for many people in the Northwest Territories, especially in the smaller communities. It allows people to practise a way of life and also to maintain a connection to the land. The name of the program that the Member is

asking about is the Western Harvesters Assistance Program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much for that very, very straight answer. Just in terms of accessing Western Harvesters Assistance Program, Mr. Speaker, where does the constituent go to apply for that program? Is it to the department or is it to some other local organization?

Hon. Bob McLeod: The Western Harvesters Assistance Program is probably one of our most successful programs. It was established about ten years ago with \$15 million allocated to the program to be spent on a matching basis with community organizations. To date, \$14 million of that \$15 million program has been extended and matched successfully by most organizations. There's about \$1 million left to be distributed. Generally, the uptake is by the local aboriginal governments who would apply, and we would confirm matching funds. Then they would establish a program for harvesters to be able to access funds for buying Ski-dos, quads, what have you. In the Deh Cho we've been working recently with some of the communities whereby individuals who are receiving residential school payments can apply to their local band and purchase Ski-dos. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Menicoche: This year was a particularly good year in terms of many of our trappers who did end up in the residential school system, and they did have access to some extra bonus income. I had a couple of constituents who had problems accessing the Western Harvesters Assistance Program, Mr. Speaker. But just once again, where are the guidelines and procedures that constituents can access and further need to understand? Thank you.

Hon. Bob McLeod: All renewable resources offices would have this information. And to be certain, the regional superintendent of ITI would have that information, or we could contact his office. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Final supplementary, Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just in terms of our government, do we use our new SEED program, the support for entrepreneur economic development program, to assist trappers in this regard as well, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Bob McLeod: That would be something that I'd have to check into. I would expect that in order to do so it would have to be organized in the form of a business venture.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Nunakput, Mr. Jacobson.

QUESTION 246-16(2)
DOCTOR SHORTAGE IN
NUNAKPUT CONSTITUENCY

Mr. Jacobson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is for the Minister of Health. Can the Minister provide me an update on the doctor shortage in my riding of Nunakput?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Jacobson. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were extraordinary issues the last time we met, where out of the four physicians that are responsible for the Beaufort-Delta region, a number of them were on leave at the same time. That was not due to planning. So there were some extraordinary situations. But as of, I believe, the end of March the complement there is back to normal with locum coverage.

Mr. Jacobson: I need to know in regard to an immediate solution to try to provide the doctor services in my community. It's been six months.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I believe there are six physician positions allocated for Beaufort-Delta. They have never been able to hire all six. We have about four, and we have to then use locum services for that. This is obviously a very crucial issue. It's an issue that I actually brought up in our teleconference in the Western Health Ministers meeting last Friday. It's one that I want to bring forward to a Ministers' table for all Ministers. We are planning on meeting in September.

At home I want to look at the different staffing models for doctors, but that's not going to be ready for presentation to the Members until the next business planning session, because it's something that I'm working on and I have not finalized. I agree with the Member that this is something that we need to take some drastic action on, or at least come up with a different staffing model as to how we can address that.

Mr. Jacobson: I'd like to invite the Minister to visit my riding of Nunakput to hear this first-hand from my constituents and the dissatisfaction with what the government is providing.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I appreciate that the Member wants me to come and visit his riding. He did extend that invitation before last session, and I was not able to come. I would be happy to do that and to work with the community and the leadership and the people about how best to address this issue.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

QUESTION 247-16(2)
REDUCTIONS OF ENERGY
COSTS AND CONSUMPTION

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure who my questions are for. We have stated in this House that the cost of living in the North may well be the biggest issue that this government, the 16th Assembly, will grapple with. We have only to turn on the radio and the television, and we hear about the rising costs of fuel, the rising cost of food. A big part of our costs of living in the North is related to energy. I'm concerned about this government seeming reluctant or the speed at which they are responding to these rising energy costs and the price of fuel.

NTPC has a mandate for some of the delivery of energy in the Northwest Territories. I'd like to ask — I'm not sure if this would be Minister Bob McLeod.... I'd like to ask him what NTPC is doing to get away from the generation of power with diesel fuel.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. I'll address the question to the honourable Minister Responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, Mr. Yakeleya.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question. The Power Corporation is working very closely with the established Ministerial group on energy, with Mr. McLeod and Mr. Miltenberger, in terms of looking at various options and ways that we can reduce the use of diesel power in our communities. There are a number of initiatives, such as looking at working with a private developer on wind power energy and looking at the hydro strategies.

We have looked at our own efficiencies and operations within the plans of bringing up our technologies in terms of reducing the cost of fuel consumption in our diesel operation plants. There are other initiatives that we have got in terms of going out and doing some public awareness and conservation initiatives and working with other initiatives, such as the Arctic Energy Alliance and doing energy audits across the Northwest Territories on some of those Arctic facilities that are used by the communities.

We're very closely working with the Ministerial energy committee to look at the big picture in the Northwest Territories to reduce the cost of living in our communities.

Mrs. Groenewegen: There are many innovative and new ways of producing energy. I'm afraid that with the comments I'm hearing back from communities of wanting to get away from NTPC, they're thinking that they can bring in their own means of generating energy in the community that would be more cost-effective than being served by

NTPC. A while back we thought about creating a monopoly with NTPC for the communities that they were serving.

In specific relation to Hay River I have some concerns here. NTPC has hydro at the Taltson which they wholesale to NUL, and NUL retails it and sells it and distributes it in Hay River.

To the mandate of NTPC. I have a copy of a letter here where the president of NTPC is writing to Minister McLeod saying that NTPC does not have a duty to serve Hay River — this rests with NUL — and that their relationship with Hay River is similar to selling power to Esso or anybody else. So to the mandate of NTPC, I would hope that the communities and the residents of the Northwest Territories would be somewhere in their priorities.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: I'd like to ask the Member for the question again, please.

Mrs. Groenewegen: When we talk about the Taltson expansion, when we talk about generating energy, quite often we're doing it in the context of industry. I'd like to know where the service of affordable, sustainable energy supplies to communities comes in terms of the priorities of NTPC.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: The Power Corporation will not turn off the power to any of the communities in the Northwest Territories. It is an essential service. We take it very seriously. I will speak to the chairman in terms of that letter that Mrs. Groenewegen has made reference to in the House.

Mrs. Groenewegen: When you look at the initiatives underway, for example, in our neighbouring jurisdiction of Alberta, they are investing hundreds of millions of dollars in alternative energy sources, such as gasification of forest products, biomass. You can go on the Web site and find all kinds of them. I feel like here we're just trying to figure out where to buy fuel cheaper. So we need to get more progressive.

What kind of dialogue takes place between NTPC, as a major supplier in the North, and other jurisdictions? We want to be on the cutting edge of this. We don't want to be in the Dark Ages here.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: The Power Corporation is pursuing aggressive initiatives with the Minister's Energy Coordinating Committee and working very closely with the department in terms of our fuel systems delivery, such as the Over-the-Top route. We are looking at various initiatives in terms of seeing where we can reduce power and the costs of doing business. We are operating under the Public Utilities Board path in terms of our efficiency, and they are keeping a close eye on our operation. We are pursuing very vigorously, through the

Minister's Energy Coordinating Committee, all the initiatives that the Member has talked about. We've certainly had the chance to engage with the committee in terms of the initiatives and certainly look forward to seeing some of those initiatives come to reality within the life of this government.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Final supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope this is not too little, too late. Crude oil is at \$128 a barrel right now. This is bringing to mind the emperor that was fiddling while Rome was burning. We have got a huge problem on our doorstep right now in relation to the cost of energy and home heating fuel, and particularly because we are talking about power, I'll stick to energy. We have got a very pressing, huge problem here. This is the beginning of summer, but winter will be coming, and we are in a crisis here. We need not a whole lot of study; we need some action.

Mr. Speaker: I didn't hear an oral question there, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. McLeod.

QUESTION 248-16(2) DEVOLUTION AND RESOURCE-REVENUE SHARING

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the 16th Assembly took office, something we haven't heard much of that we heard a lot of in the 15th was resource-revenue sharing. The Premier had made reference to it a couple of times, saying that it was a back burner, but I believe there's still some work being done on it.

I'd like to direct my question today to the Premier. He's had the opportunity now for a couple of meetings with Prime Minister Harper, and I'd like to ask the Premier: has there been any discussion with the Prime Minister regarding resource-royalty sharing?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The Hon. Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The area of devolution, resource-revenue sharing is something I have had an opportunity to discuss with the Prime Minister as well as our northern regional aboriginal leaders and at the recent Western Premiers' Conference, where we sat down and had a chance to share some of our issues. I have indeed had a chance to speak with the Prime Minister. The federal government is interested in moving forward with this file. I also shared at that point that we wanted to ensure what we got in the North was acceptable to Northerners and that it actually benefited us, not kept us in the same track we're on right now.

Mr. McLeod: I'd like to ask the Premier — and I thank him for that — if we have people on staff today that are actively working on this file as we speak now. I'd like to ask the Premier that.

Hon. Floyd Roland: We do have some staff working, whether it's in the Department of Finance or Executive, with the appropriate parties. For example, at the last regional leaders' meeting I discussed with them coming together on a number of initiatives that we could jointly move forward on. Within the Executive we've been in contact with the regional leadership to come up with a joint process. We have some staff who have been in discussion with federal Finance, for example, to see if there's any movement from what they've put forward in their position. We have to get ready for our next round of regional aboriginal leadership meetings and have further discussion about the next steps we would be willing to take.

Mr. McLeod: Part of the problem we've had the last few years is the lack of will by the aboriginal governments around the Northwest Territories to get on the same page and go forward with a unified voice — it almost sounds like I'm starting to write a song here. I'd like to ask the Premier if they need buy-in from all the aboriginal governments across the Northwest Territories to try and pursue the devolution talks with Ottawa.

Hon. Floyd Roland: At one point in the history of the Government of the Northwest Territories, when the talk of devolution and resource-revenue sharing came up, the federal government's position was unanimity across the North. We've been in these discussions for well over 20 years now. There have been past governments who've put their case forward to the federal government to say, "Could we at least look at a significant majority and not unanimity?" That position has been agreed to.

The past government had a number of the organizations sign a joint letter with the GNWT and forwarded that to the federal government. We haven't had an official response from them. The start of this government has been to begin again sitting down with regional leadership, trying to come up with a common position. We know that some regional leadership was concerned about moving ahead, but this budget is an example. If we don't move ahead, we're facing more of these areas of not moving forward when we know there's a revenue stream going to Ottawa. The fact is that we don't need everyone on side. Our preference would be to get as many groups as possible in agreement to move forward.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is a concern of mine, and I think it's something that the 16th Assembly and the Premier need to address.

The more time we take, the more revenue that is leaving the Northwest Territories, until it comes to a point where we're all dried out, and they'll say, "Okay, here's your devolution and resource-revenue sharing," and try to figure out what's zero per cent of zero.

I'd like to ask the Premier — he spoke to different groups talking to each other: how far apart are we between our government and Ottawa? Do we have a framework agreement in place? How far apart are we?

Hon. Floyd Roland: There are a number of different factors included. If it's purely around the devolution piece — and that is the authority moving to the North and the aid-base transfer, as we call it — there is some difference. On where to do the job right and transfer it over, we need more than what's being identified. There are some other incremental costs that we've discussed with the federal government.

The other side of the equation is the resource-revenue sharing piece. That is one where we've had some discussions with the federal government. They've written to us, talking about the 50 per cent in and out, as they treat all other jurisdictions, but there's been an additional cap put in place for us. At that point, we have a difference of opinion on how we need to proceed forward. We're working again with regional leadership to try to come up with something that we can jointly move forward on.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

QUESTION 249-16(2)
PROGRAMMING AT
NORTH SLAVE CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Justice. It gets back to the delivery of programming at North Slave Correctional Centre. I wanted to raise this issue again. I think it's something that has the potential to impact every Member in this House and every community that we represent. I get an uneasy feeling that the Minister isn't getting the straight goods from the department, and I've been down this road before with a former Minister of Justice who didn't get the straight goods from the department, and it's the same department. I'd like to ask the Minister of Justice if he is aware that the case managers or the program delivery officers have already been reassigned into case management positions.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister responsible for Justice, Mr. Lafferty.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Those two positions were vacant positions. The two individuals who are potentially impacted are in the

process of filling those positions, if they want to continue in that position. So it is in the process. The way it stands right now, with their experience and qualifications, they should be able to fill those two positions.

Mr. Ramsay: It sounds to me like the department has already reassigned the program delivery officers into other roles at North Slave Correctional Centre. That is fairly optimistic of the Department of Justice, to be doing this.

Again, you look at the budget, budget-wide, and there are instances like this where the Department of Justice has gone out and reassigned two program delivery officers, and the department's budget has not passed the scrutiny of Regular Members. In this case, I believe that puts communities at risk, because we're going to be sending inmates back to the communities where they came from without the rehabilitation that they need when they're incarcerated.

I'd like to ask the Minister: when can he put on the table the credentials of those people who are going to be delivering programs at North Slave Correctional Centre?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, there is no risk with the changes. We are dealing with the same individuals who have delivered those particular programs over a number of years.

Those particular two individuals that we've highlighted, the two positions will be filled by those individuals. It's highly likely that they will continue that service, and they will continue that service at the corrections centre. So for the Member to say, "The program, they're discontinuing it...." Just for the record, there are no changes in the program. We will continue to deliver that program. It's not just dealing with those two individuals that deliver the program. There's a delivery officer, as well, and a psychologist who will certainly deliver on an ongoing basis. Mahsi.

Mr. Ramsay: If you have already, Mr. Minister, reassigned the two program delivery officers into other roles, they have other duties. I don't know, or I'm not aware of, in a case manager's position, a job description where it says they have program-delivery function.

So again I want to ask the Minister: how can he assure this House and the public in the Northwest Territories that the programming being delivered at North Slave Correctional Centre is going to be timely, coordinated and professional in manner?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: With those individuals who are fulfilling those positions, we do also provide train-the-trainer sessions in-house. Corrections Services do provide them with training.

So there is ongoing training for staff members in that particular area.

To deliver these programs, they do get their qualifications to deliver, and for these specific positions that we're referring to, they do have the qualifications to deliver the programs at the corrections centre. When they do so, there's always the backfill of those positions from the corrections staff.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Final short supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm wondering if the Minister would commit to sitting down again — similar to what I asked the Minister of Health and Social Services earlier — with the Standing Committee on Social Programs and Regular Members on this side of the House to show us who is going to be delivering the programs at North Slave Correctional Centre and what their credentials are for delivering the program.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: We did go before the committee on Main Estimates and also before the Committee of the Whole, and we'll be more than happy to go before the Social Programs Committee. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

QUESTION 250-16(2) PROVISION OF MIDWIFERY SERVICES

Mr. Bromley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Catching up, I'd like to ask some questions relative to my Member's statement earlier this afternoon to the Minister of Health and Social Services on the midwifery program.

My understanding is that this is a relatively new program that became possible with the Midwifery Protection Act in 2003. I just wonder if the Minister could comment on what exactly the program is, what it entails, and where we stand with it.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we broke ground with the previous Minister of Health and Social Services when he worked hard to pass this legislation. We have a very successful midwifery program in Fort Smith, and I am aware that we have one midwife in Yellowknife.

It is my hope and plan that we could extend that program, and the consolidated primary clinic that is being planned for Yellowknife is an essential part of the ability to extend this program, because it does

need space and the capacity to grow. I know that in my visit to Hay River, the authorities there have shown some interest in that too. So it is a program that I'm looking to expand in the time to come.

Mr. Bromley: Thanks to the Minister for those comments. That's very encouraging. My constituents will be happy to hear that information.

Has the Minister's department been interacting with the public on this issue? Are they aware of the interest in additional and expanded opportunities in that program?

Hon. Sandy Lee: I don't have specific information that will give stats on that, but certainly it's one that we as a government need to look to doing more of, because as I have stated here many times, we need to reduce our medical services and clinical services. The use of midwives allows us to get the prenatal, postnatal and birthing process away from the clinical and medical facility, where it's been over-medicalized, and move it into primary care services wherever possible. Obviously, the midwives work very closely with a doctor and other health care professionals, but it's definitely a different way — going back to the basics, so to speak — on the birthing part of our normal lifecycle. It's one that I support and one that I support to do more of, going forward.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The time for question period has expired; however, I will allow the Member a supplementary question. Mr. Bromley.

Mr. Bromley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the Minister for those remarks. It certainly is a quality-of-life issue for many people and a great way to go. I appreciate that support.

Is the department also considering partnering with southern institutions or determining whether there's a particular role for practicums in the Northwest Territories, a way of engaging students of midwifery in the North so that they can stay here and participate in an expanded program?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Absolutely, and I can tell you that the program in Fort Smith is one that is being looked at by other jurisdictions, especially in rural community settings. They go to lots of different places to do presentations on how this can be done.

I believe there was a plan to expand the midwife program in Yellowknife, but literally, I saw the facility. These clinics that they have now couldn't do it. So of course, we will use students coming up or nurses who want to be midwives, in that aspect.

Perhaps I could make a commitment to do more detailed information, put it together, and offer it to

the Member for further discussion. But it's one that I'm committed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Item 8, written questions. Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to the opening address. Item 11, petitions. Item 12, reports of standing and special committees. Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 14, tabling of documents. Item 15, notices of motion. Item 16, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 17, motions. Item 18, first reading of bills. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

First Reading of Bills

BILL 10

AN ACT TO AMEND THE PHARMACY ACT

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Pharmacy Act, be read for the first time.

Mr. Speaker: Bill 10 has had first reading.

Motion carried; Bill 10, An Act to Amend the Pharmacy Act, read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: Item 19, second reading of bills. Item 20, consideration of Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, with Bill 8, Tabled Document 37-16(2), Committee Report 6-16(2), Committee Report 7-16(2).

By the authority given me as the Speaker by Motion 10-16(2), I hereby authorize the House to sit beyond the daily hours of adjournment to consider the business before the House, with Mr. Bromley in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): I would like to call the Committee of the Whole to order for consideration of bills and other matters.

What is the wish of the committee?
Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The committee today would like to continue on the Main Estimates for '08-09 with the NWT Housing Corporation, then move on to the Department of Health and Social Services.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Does the committee agree?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): The committee is agreed. A break has been called.

The Committee of the Whole took a short recess.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Okay, I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole to order. Committee is agreed that we'll continue with the NWT Housing Corporation.

MAIN ESTIMATES 2008–2009
NWT HOUSING CORPORATION

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): I'd like to ask the Minister if he wishes to call witnesses. Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Yes, Mr. Chair.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Sergeant-at-Arms, would you please seat the witnesses.

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Laughter.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): What a well-trained committee. Thank you. Committee agrees.

Will the Minister introduce the witnesses?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have with me Mr. Jeff Polakoff, president of the NWT Housing Corporation, and Mr. Jeff Anderson, vice-president of the NWT Housing Corporation.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Is committee agreed that we are done our general comments? Do you wish to proceed to the detail?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Committee is agreed. On page 2-149 is the Corporate Summary. That's going to be deferred until we're done with the rest of the detail. So we will start on pages 2-150 and 2-151. Note that these are all information items. Are there any questions, page 2-150 or 2-151? Specifically, these are under the Executive, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$1.121 million. Any questions? All agreed?

NWT Housing Corporation, Executive, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$1.121 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Page 2-153, under Finance and Infrastructure Services, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$11.816 million. Any questions? Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Just in regard to the committee report, there was a suggestion that in the Department of Finance, I believe, there were two financial officer positions that were going to be moved to the Department of Finance. But in light of the accountability process at the Local Housing Authority that the regional director of operations had to deal with, I think that.... I'd just like to know, in light of those transfers, what are we going to be doing to ensure that accountability practices are followed by way of audits and whatnot, to ensure that we have the financial processes fulfilled under our agreements with the LHOs, our regional director of operations and, more importantly, in light of the Auditor General's report on that, and also realizing that the Department of Finance also has a challenge on its hands to recruit accountants? I think it's right across the board for most government departments that it is a challenge just to fill those positions.

I'd just like to know, in light of that, is there a backup plan that we have if we fall back on our accounting of those audit commitments we have with the Financial Administration Act? I'd just like to ask: what's the alternative to simply transferring those two positions to the Department of Finance?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. If I can call on Mr. Polakoff.

Mr. Polakoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the Member for that question.

There are three different pieces to that answer. Number one would be the refocus that we place, from a corporate perspective, on providing support to the districts as well as to the LHOs. One of the things that we've done through the reorganization is to try and put our corporate focus more on our clients and more on the organizations that really serve the people of the NWT, the LHOs and the folks in the community.

With that, what our reorganization is attempting to do, or is endeavouring to do, is to provide for a refocus of our efforts into the district office to provide improved support, particularly in the financial area. That's number one.

Number two, we will be providing private LHO audits to the LHOs. As Mr. Krutko has pointed out, it is a challenge to recruit folks that are skilled as auditors, but in the case of the LHOs we'll be undertaking private audits on the LHOs.

The third piece — and one that I had mentioned yesterday — is in the case of those two individuals that have been providing us with audit service up to now. While we had originally looked to those folks being transferred over to the Audit Bureau, we've been able to identify other roles for them in the corporation while still attaining our reduction goals,

so we've been able to retain their skill sets in the organization.

And perhaps just as important as their skill sets is the history that they've got in undertaking audits. They're going to continue to be within the financial area. We intend to continue to use those folks for information as we undertake improved financial controls with the LHOs and with the district offices.

Those are the three main pieces. The fourth piece, as well, is we will continue to work with our colleagues within GNWT at the Audit Bureau. I continue to work with them on identifying other options that may be available to us to coordinate our efforts.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Polakoff. Anything further, Mr. Krutko? Moving on. Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I noticed that in the Finance and Infrastructure Services here, some of the land development and land issues take place. During my tours of my communities, particularly the Fort Liard district, there are various land issues. I'd just like to know how the Housing Corporation is addressing these and working with the communities to get some available lots to continue the delivery of housing programs and the delivery of new houses as well. Is it going to be a barrier much longer? What's the strategy in terms of delivering housing in Fort Liard? Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Mr. Minister.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, we're going to, of course, work with the LHO; we're going to work with the community government; and we're also interested if there's private land.

This is an issue in many communities across the North. In the Member's riding, as well, it's in part of the unsettled claims area, so we're going to work with MACA as we look at land within the municipality. We're looking at all these particular options. But I'd get Mr. Polakoff to maybe provide more detail. Thank you.

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Chair, yes, I'd be interested to hear further details on the approaches we'll take to delivery of programming on the amount of land that they have available in Fort Liard.

As well, I spoke about arrears in my Member's statement, Mr. Chair, so I was just wondering. I know that they've got land taxation issues in Fort Liard. People that have lived on the same land for the last 50 years. Some 20 years ago some kind of transfer happened, so now people are in arrears for land that they thought they had owned, and all of a

sudden they're starting to pay tax. So I was just wondering if taxation arrears are considered when they apply for housing programming as well.

I think what I was trying to get at, Mr. Chair, is: are we sitting down with the communities and trying to identify the lands that are available for the Housing Corporation to use and to deliver our programs? Thank you.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chair, we work with the communities to look at the homes that are available to be constructed — the type, the configuration of the homes — and of course, the lot location is a key piece, especially given the Office of the Auditor General's concern about directing us not to put our infrastructure on tenured land, be it lease or purchase. We are working with the communities. But, Mr. Chairman, with your indulgence, I'd ask Mr. Polakoff to provide more detail. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Polakoff.

Mr. Polakoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Member raises probably one of the most fundamental issues that the Housing Corporation is dealing with, not only in Fort Liard but elsewhere in the NWT.

In particular, in Fort Liard we've been fortunate in that we've got a very good partner in the Hamlet of Fort Liard, and in particular, we've seen some really good advancements made over the last year and a half.

In Fort Liard we had some housing stock that had previously been under the control of the Kotaneelee Housing Authority, which was an old federal program. The hamlet has really come to the table to work with the Housing Corporation very closely on all aspects related to housing and is very keen on the development of a working relationship, not only with the Housing Corporation but to take on responsibility for housing in the community. That's proven to be a very good partnership, not only relating to the houses in Fort Liard but also on the identification of land and lots in Fort Liard.

In the case of the Nahendeh in general, we've also seen an improvement lately with some recent staff changes, as well as some increased focus on working with communities on the identification of lots.

Throughout the Northwest Territories, though, land is going to continue to be an issue. It's an issue not only with regard to the Affordable Housing Initiative, but it's also an issue with respect to securing some of the land tenure that has been a problem with the Housing Corporation over a number of years.

That's something we consider to be one of our highest priorities: continuing to deal with the land, identifying land needs so we can move forward. We

also want to look at where some of the land issues are that have existed for a number of years related to tenure and securing that tenure but doing it in a way where we work closely with the communities. This way we can not only identify areas where we need to secure tenure but also work with the communities from the perspective of overall community development.

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Chair, I'm just wondering, specifically, if there was a line item or category where you're dedicating resources to identify these land issues not only in my communities, like you said, but throughout the Northwest Territories. Is it in here or in another part of the budget?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Each district has some staff resources for land issues, with the staff that is there. As well, there are three land positions in headquarters.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you. Moving on, Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm just going through the detail here on this page. I see travel and materials. It's been fairly consistent with many of the departments we've seen — plus departments we'll likely see as we move forward — that there's about a 5 per cent reduction on materials and travel. We talked about refocusing, changing how we do business. I know they're small amounts of money, but where we saw these decreases in other departments, we don't see that here in either travel or materials. For instance, if we were to lose 5 per cent here on travel, you'd be going down to \$8,000, and \$3,000 in materials and supplies. In total, your department's only doing a reduction of 3 per cent on travel and no reduction on materials and supplies.

To be consistent with the other departments, I obviously would like to see a similar reduction here. So when we get to FMBS, I'll likely be making a motion to reduce your travel and your materials and supplies by 5 per cent across the board.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. I don't believe there was a question there. Any response, Mr. Miltenberger?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Part of our plan, which is a two-year plan, is to... Those reductions are kicking in next year. We've hit our targets for this year to comply with the direction. Next year, part of it is going to be a reduction of 7 per cent for travel budgets and reduced computer support services by 15.

Mr. Abernethy: That's good to hear. However, given that this is a reduction time and we are trying alternate sources of revenues rather than cutting jobs, every penny counts. There's no time like the present. I'll still be making the motion to reduce

travel and materials and supplies when we get to FMBS.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Seeing no further questions... Sorry. Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I read the activity description correctly, this section of the Housing Corp is responsible for the maintenance/management of the public housing portfolio. I mentioned this yesterday, and it has to do with the reduction in the amount of funds for repairs to housing stock and also to the home ownership program stock.

I wondered if I could ask for an explanation as to why these repair amounts are going down. Is the problem that the LHOs don't have the capacity to manage their stock properly in terms of maintenance and repairs, or is it some other issue?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Polakoff.

Mr. Polakoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you to the Member for the question. It's a combination of both. It's not necessarily a capacity issue at the LHO, but it's an overall capacity. It's also a matter of the good fortune, I guess, that we have. On the one hand, we're in the last year of the Affordable Housing Initiative, with a fairly robust capital program. What we attempted to do was balance our ability overall to deliver with the resources available to us, recognizing that at the end of the day we wanted to have the most positive benefit for the communities.

In our judgment it was important to get the capital program rolled out. We would absolutely agree that maintenance is an important undertaking for the Housing Corporation. It's also clearly understood by the Housing Corporation that these three years of the affordable housing bill have been probably the most rigorous capital plan we've undertaken in a number of years. It is a challenge to get as much done as we would like to. It was a bit of a balancing act, from our perspective. While on the one hand, as I said, it's good to have the capital money and it's recognized that maintenance is very important, we were trying to make decisions based on where we thought we would have the most positive impact and, at the same time, the least amount of impact in the communities.

Ms. Bisaro: You mentioned impact, and I guess that would be my next question. What impact do you see that this reduction in repairs funding will have in terms of the current level of repairs needed in public housing stocks?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chairman, as the president has indicated, this is, throughout the budget, to hit our target, a bit of a balancing act.

We're confident we can still maintain the service levels with the funds that are available.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Any further questions? Hearing none, we'll move on to page 2-154. Again this is details on what we've just passed. Any questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Finance and Infrastructure Services, Grants and Contributions: \$5.815 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Moving on. Under Debt Repayment, Operations. Oh, I'm sorry. Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I wasn't sure where we were at. I did have a question on the debt repayment page.

During our meeting with the Auditor General on the NWT Housing Corporation audit, I asked them a question that I've asked this government, and I'll ask you the question. It's on the guaranteed debt that is appearing in our books as the GNWT this year for \$12.053 million, which actually has an impact on our debt wall. Any of the correspondence we have, or the Budget Address, indicates this is a problem for the debt wall.

Considering there's no possibility that this debt is ever going to be the sole responsibility of the NWT Housing Corporation — the debt is guaranteed by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation — have you guys thought about different ways of reporting this or getting this out of the debt wall, so to speak?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. I'd like to remind committee members that the Standing Committee on Government Operations report on the review of the report of the Auditor General on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation public housing and home ownership programs will be coming before Committee of the Whole for discussion — just so we don't get into too much detail and duplication here. But I'll ask Mr. Anderson to respond to the question.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Member is quite right on identifying this as an issue. We have had discussions with the Department of Justice and the Department of Finance on this matter. The Member is quite right that the section 82 debentures are the ones we cost-share the liability with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. The remaining, larger portion of section 79 is fully funded by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. We have had that discussion, but here, again, it's really a decision that's best served by the Department of Finance.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Anderson. On Debt Repayment, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$12.053 million. Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On the same matter, I think we have to find a way to take a lot of this debt off the books. Some people are passed on; they're still out there. We do have a process by way of writing off bad debts in different areas — education loans and things like that. It doesn't really serve justice to the corporation. For a lot of this debt, in most cases and in other scenarios, it would have been written off or written down through the process of writing off bad debts, and that's what these are. These are bad debts, where people got themselves into arrears, or in some cases they passed on and it's still showing up on the books.

I think there has to be a way of clearing off a lot of this questionable debt that's on the books. It does have an effect in regard to the debt wall of the Housing Corporation. The people assume there's all this money out there that's owing to the corporation. A lot of this money is not owing to the corporation. It's just people who haven't paid their arrears, and you carry it on your books year after year. People may not even be in the Northwest Territories, but we're still carrying them on our books.

I think we have to find a way to assess, evaluate — find ways of writing down this debt. At some point, eventually, we can write it off after it's carried on the books for a period of time — five years, ten years, 20 years, whatever. I think it's an item that has to be considered and looked at.

You mentioned the different sections with the federal government, that we have federal dollars that are obligated to us, but again, we do have the Financial Administration Act. We have the processes to write off bad debts. Could some of this debt be put into the Financial Administration Act — an authority that allows us to write off certain types of debts — and reclassify some of this debt under those legislative authorities where we can do that? I'd just like to know if that's something the corporation would seriously consider.

There are people here that have passed on. Because they were tenants of the corporation — they had arrears or whatnot — it's still showing up on the books. The corporation does not have the ability to write off debt. I think that's the bottom line. I'd just like to know if that's something, seriously, that has to be considered.

At some point we're going to have to confront this issue. We do have to find a way around it. It's one of those phenomena, that you cannot write off debt in this corporation. I think we should be able to do that.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chairman, just quickly. In regard to the debt repayment, page 2-157, we're expecting some feedback from the Office of the Auditor General in terms of how this debt is treated on our books. The Auditor General is going to be looking at other jurisdictions and may give us some direction.

As well, there is discussion to be had with the Department of Finance. In fact, if this wasn't on our books and was carried by Finance, it wouldn't be part of the debt wall we talk about. That's a discussion that has to be concluded with the Department of Finance.

In regard to the issue of arrears and the writing off of debt, LHOs can write off up to \$10,000. The corporation can go up to \$20,000. We have to come to the Legislature for write-offs more than that. We've been analyzing the arrears that are there, and we're going to be coming forward with the write-off of some of that debt that's been assessed that's worked its way up from the LHOs. The big issue is that while we can write it off, the debt stays on our books unless it hits the forgiveness, which can only be granted by the Legislature. These other small debts stay on our books as written off, but they are still on the individual's file as outstanding issues. Even though they are written off, they're there as a record.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Moving on, Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I had a question in regard to the debt repayment. Page 2-156 indicates that the debt is \$71.5 million, of which we are paying, in this next year, \$12.1 million, and CMHC is contributing \$10.5 million. My question is whether or not the CMHC amount is guaranteed, basically, until the debt is paid off, or is it reducing every year, similar to the other funding from CMHC where we're coming to the end of life?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chairman, it is guaranteed, but as the debt gets paid off, it gets reduced.

Ms. Bisaro: That's good to hear. The \$71.5 million: is that what is currently owed, or is that the original debt amount? Does it change year to year? By us paying this \$12.1 million, is our \$71.5 million debt reduced by that, or are we adding to it on the one hand and reducing it on the other?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chairman, this is the current amount. If you look at the detail, it went from, '06-07, \$12.994 million down to \$12.053 million. That's the current amount. That's what it's dropped.

Ms. Bisaro: Just one last quick question. Is there an expectation that this will be paid off, and if so, when might that be?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: In 2038.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you. I'd like to call next on Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I think all of the answers I was looking for were answered with Ms. Bisaro's questions.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Excellent. Moving on to Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The issue of the debt we carry and how it's reflected on the territorial books — has the NWT Housing Corp ever worked with the Finance section to maybe get it off our books? As we all know, the territorial government is burdened with a debt wall, and a large part of our debt wall is stressed out by the fact that the Housing Corp carries a significant load as well as, of course, the NWT Power Corp. I'm curious as to whether the NWT Housing Corp has worked with the Finance Minister to see if we could get that off of what is seen as a prescribed debt.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There have been discussions with the Department of Finance. It's the call of the Department of Finance. They've made the decision — which is reflected in how these numbers are portrayed — they deem to be in the best interests of the government. So yes, there have been discussions.

Mr. Hawkins: I appreciate the answer there. As I understand it, this Housing Corp debt was actually paid off through the federal government through its payments. Out of the total outstanding debt we have on the books, what portion of funding should we expect from the federal government to cover that?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chairman, CMHC is contributing \$10.5 million annually to servicing this debt.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Chairman, I would dispute that on the basis that CMHC is contributing almost the full amount of what our typical payment is. If I understand it correctly, our CMHC funding runs out the same time as our debt is paid off. There's a miraculous conversion on how that works. I'm just curious, because it's a debt that we've been burdened to carry because of the federal government, and yet they're paying it. I'm just not sure why we need it reflected in this manner.

I would encourage the Minister to step up to get some of this debt carried off our books. I think it's impeding the territorial government's ability to do its job.

We often talk about the debt while we talk about a reflection of the challenges we have because it's been loaded down by burdens that aren't necessarily our own. I would encourage the Minister to step up that discussion and, when information becomes available, inform us as to where that discussion goes with Finance, as well as potentially Finance Canada if there needs to be an exemption from that.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: I'd just like to point out that the Member commented this is a miraculous conversion in 2038 with debt and payments all ceasing. But the other big piece that's going to impact us, of course, is that all the O&M money will have, by that time, been backed out, and we'll be short cumulatively over \$300 million. So "miracle" might not be the term we're using in 2038 as we struggle to offset this debt.

But we will talk further with the Department of Finance. As we move through next year's business-planning process, we can discuss in more detail those types of circumstances. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Can I get some type of commitment from the Minister to supply me with some information to show that they've worked forward on this initiative and to show me what either the Department of Finance — I assume he means by Finance our Department of Finance — or potentially any type of positioning they're taking with the federal government? I just want to see that we're working on this. I'd kind of like something before the end of summer on this problem.

I'd also like to see if the Minister can come to Regular Members; maybe we can provide some support from the lobby position to raise this issue, with potentially Finance Canada, to express our concern — our grave concern — with this problem. The debt is reflected on our books, and as I've said before, it affects our operations and our ability to borrow what one could describe as good debt. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): And for a response, Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We work closely with Finance and the Office of the Auditor General on an ongoing basis on a lot of these issues. As I indicated in a previous answer, we're looking for a response. We're awaiting a response from the Office of the Auditor General in terms of how this particular debt

is treated on our books and with the GNWT. This may give us some clearer insight and direction on how to move forward. But we will be very happy to report back to committee on this and other issues. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Beaulieu. Sorry, did I skip ahead there? Mr. Hawkins, did you have something further?

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Chairman, I don't sit on the EDI Committee, so therefore, I probably wouldn't have access to that correspondence unless it is specifically requested. So I would ask the Minister to make sure he informs all Members of any developments that the Auditor General has coming forward. I'd be very interested in the position from that office. Thank you.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: We'll communicate; we'll work with the chair of EDI. But if you wish, we can also make sure that Members are copied. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you for that. Anything further, Mr. Hawkins? Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I don't want to belabour this debt issue, but I have just one more point of clarification here. Reflected here as an expense is \$12 million in debt. Indications are that the debt payment on \$12 million in long-term debt is \$71.5 million. But in our summary of net debt, estimating borrowing capacity earlier in the Main Estimates by the NWT Housing Corporation, the debt is reflected as \$26.397 million. I just wanted to know what the discrepancies were.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I haven't seen that, but I seem to recall that number. That's the number of the section 82 debentures. We have 100 per cent of that debt on our books from when those projects were put in place in the '70s and '80s. CMHC pays us almost 50 per cent of the cost of the debt payment on those. The remaining money is section 79 of the National Housing Act that's fully funded through CMHC, so that's why those aren't reflected in that number that you're referring to.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Anderson. Nothing further, Mr. Beaulieu? Any further questions? No further questions on 2-157, Debt Repayment: \$12.053 million, agreed?

NWT Housing Corporation, Debt Repayment, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$12.053 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): We'll move on to Programs and District Operations, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$18.592 million, information item. Any questions? Yes, Mr. Hawkins.

COMMITTEE MOTION 25-16(2)
TO ASSESS AND DEVELOP A STRATEGY
FOR ACCESSIBLE LIVING OPPORTUNITIES
FOR FAMILIES THAT INCLUDE
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
(COMMITTEE MOTION AS AMENDED CARRIED)

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a motion. I move that this committee strongly recommend that the Housing Corporation take immediate action to assess and develop a strategy that focuses on accessible living opportunities for families that include disabled persons.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The motion is on the floor and is about to be distributed. To the motion, Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As I talked about the other day in the Minister's opening comments of this department, I feel that people living with disabilities are extra-challenged when public housing isn't out there or available to suit their needs. Furthermore, when you have a family in a situation where there is a parent who has a disability or a child with a disability, our stock of public housing seems to again be lacking. The challenge, in my opinion, is that there isn't a progressive plan to create suitable housing. I find that these families tend to be left out, waiting and waiting for quite a significant amount of time because an appropriate stock of housing doesn't exist.

The intent of this motion is to look at all areas. I'm sure that a lot of this information exists within the local LHOs. They would have that type of information, if a family came forward and if anyone in that family had a disability, and what type of suitability, in the sense of housing, needs to be available. It's quite exciting that this motion is coming during Disabilities Week, because it further highlights the challenges that people live with. It's the principle of what I see as public government that should be out there making sure lives are made easier. It should certainly underscore the fact that we should try to make sure they have a fulfilling life and a quality of life that we can provide for them. I don't see our public housing stocks meeting that challenge. I don't think it's an excessive challenge to ask them to take an assessment of what they have on their landscape and start planning for this need.

Mr. Chairman, I'm just going to close by pointing out that I've got a couple of constituents who are in the family scenario. They have a disability, whether it's the parent or the child, and the fact is they sit

and wait. Nothing is available, and it's horrible that they're in dire need for public housing. But the fact is we can't get public housing to suit them.

That's kind of why the motion's here. In my view, it will help raise the standard of quality of life for people who've been challenged. I think this is an application that can be applied throughout our North and throughout our communities, because I think every LHO will know their area best. I certainly hope a strategy will look not just at the North but at local communities as well. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. To the motion, Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be supporting this motion. I have many constituents who are really concerned about accessibility for disabled people. The arrears are pervasive again in this issue. We do have some programming there, but arrears are a barrier again, because the people are applying for it. They've got some new disabled people moving into their homes.

I'm supporting this motion because it's about looking at the different areas and coming up with a unique strategy to address the issues of our disabled in our communities and to provide for their needs. It's as simple as putting ramps up to their doorways to make life much easier, to get around the mobility issues. It's just simple things that we're asking the government for. They don't cost very much money, either. It's something that the government's got to be more flexible about. It has to identify and move these programs around to suit the needs that currently exist. I don't have to say that we've got an aging population, and it's probably the pride of our health care system that people are living longer and longer. But how do we continue to take care of them? People want to live in their own homes; they don't want to live in regional centres. This is about creating more housing stock for that sector as well as improving existing stock, Mr. Chair. So I'll be supporting this motion. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. To the motion, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I also will be supporting the motion. But I think the motion should maybe go a little further and reference barrier-free housing. I think that by simply making reference to a system-delivery strategy that focuses on accessible living, we're talking about more than just putting a ramp on a house or widening doors and whatnot. So I'd like to suggest an amendment to the motion, if I can. Where it talks about focus on accessible living opportunities, I'd like to add "and barrier-free housing for families." That includes disabled persons, so if that's okay with the mover,

I'd like to ask if I can make an amendment to the motion.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. We'll have to get a copy in hand. Until that time, let's take a short recess. We shall return.

The Committee of the Whole took a short recess.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): I would like to call Committee of the Whole back to order. I would like to begin by asking Mr. Krutko to read his amendment to the motion into the record. Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Chairman, I move that Committee Motion 25-16(2) be amended by inserting the words "and barrier-free housing" immediately after the words "accessible living opportunities." Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The motion to amend is in order. To the amendment.

An Honourable Member: Question.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): I'm hearing question. Question is called.

Amendment motion carried.

The amendment, as stated, is carried. We will return to debate of the original motion as amended. To the motion. Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Chairman, I'm calling question.

Motion as amended carried.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Okay, moving on. Thank you for that, Mr. Krutko. Any further questions on 2-159, Programs and District Operations?

NWT Housing Corporation, Programs and District Operations, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$18.592 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Moving on to Programs and District Operations, Grants and Contributions, \$2.177 million, page 2-160. Questions? Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Just a question in regard to the contribution assistance, that residence enhancement program. There's been a major decrease in the funding for that program. Realizing the importance of the refocusing that was done where we used to have some 14 programs at one time, they basically scaled it down to four general programs. But yet for us to decrease the budget to almost \$205 over \$2 million, I think it's going to have a major impact on those programs and services.

I think a lot of Members have stated earlier in their general comments that the housing conditions in the North are.... We do have a lot of aging housing. We do have a lot of retrofits that have to take place. And even as government we realize, going through this budgetary process, there's a lot of major repairs that have to be done on the Housing Corporation's stock. I think we also have to realize that this also affects the private sector and people who are into home ownership and also people that depend on government assistance for programs that we deliver by way of HELP, STEP and other programs that are out there.

So for myself, I'd just like to ask the Minister: exactly why is there such a major decrease, and why did you cut in this area, realizing that it will have a major effect on the communities, people in home ownership, and also for people that have homes that basically need some major repairs?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Polakoff.

Mr. Polakoff: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the Member for that question.

Once again, it's an excellent question, and it's one that we certainly spent a lot of time considering when we were looking at different areas where we may want to make reductions. It was a balance. We do have maintenance and improvement money elsewhere that we feel is going to make important contributions to the overall housing stock. But it was, once again, a question that we posed to ourselves, in looking at our capital build project and trying to come to a balanced approach between capital and maintenance — recognizing that there were some capacity issues — and also looking over the longer term where we fully anticipate, once the size of our capital build has gone down, refocusing our energies on maintenance. We anticipate that's probably where our priority is going to be when the federal one-time-only money is gone. So that was the approach we took.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Chair, after doing some research in regard to previous years' expenditures in grants and contributions in this department.... For 2005–2006 activities they expended \$4.975 million in regard to this same program. So that tells me there has been a need for this program. It's almost \$5 million some two and a half years ago, but yet now we're down to \$700,000. That's a major decrease in a program where you can see from the actual expenditures that there has been intake by the people in the Northwest Territories for these types of programs. Also, for us to basically estimate a year ago, in regard to 2007–08, we're looking at \$2 million, but if you look at the actual, it's \$2.2 million. Again, Revised Estimates tell us that there is a need for this program.

So I'd like to ask the Minister: exactly how much money has been spent to date on promoting the new programs? We see it in the newspapers; we see handouts in the different brochures and whatnot. What's the cost that we've been spending promoting these programs?

I think we also have to tell the general public that we're promoting programs but we don't have any real money to administer those programs by way of being able to have people access those programs through application.

How much money has been expended to date in regard to the promotion and the layout of these new programs?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. I'll call on the Minister, Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's approximately \$40,000 for the cost, the layout and all the contract work for the design in getting the communication plan pulled together and rolled out.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): If that's all, Mr. Krutko, we'll move on to Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you. Just more on the same topic.

Earlier I had indicated, in opening comments on the Housing Corporation budget, that I thought it was very important that the Housing Corporation focuses its attention on some seniors' home ownership housing repairs. The care and the contributing assistance for residential enhancement is likely the area where these repairs would fit in.

I'm not sure. Unless the individuals are eligible for federal programs — CMHC repair program — then my assumption is that the majority of the money will come from this \$742,000. I can say that even in a part of the one region, we could probably consume a lot of this money.

In Fort Resolution we've got 60 elders' households, and in Lutselk'e we've got 25 elder households. The majority of them are home ownership units. The majority of them are units that were built with the assistance of the NWT Housing Corporation, which is great. However, now the units will start to slowly deteriorate. Unless we stop it now and put money into those programs, those seniors will lose their ability to maintain home ownership.

So I, too, am asking the question: why such a drastic cut? What was the reason or the logic, I suppose, for making them cut 50 in this area? Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Minister Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: I'm assuming the Member's asking the same line item: the contributing assistance for residential enhancement?

Mr. Beaulieu: That is correct, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: As the president indicated, there were choices made. There was, through the Affordable Housing Initiative and the focus on the capital side, full use put of all those resources.

We're of the opinion that we can provide the services required, even though there is a drop. The '07-08 bump-up from '06-07.... We had a \$1.080 million bump-up for repairs out of the AHF funding. That was one-time funding, and that's now gone. So we made some decisions in terms of where could we afford to take some money and still meet our targets.

The issue of the seniors housing that Members raised before.... I'd just like to speak very quickly to the commitment to sit down once again with the Social Programs Committee to look at how these four program areas — consolidated down from 14 — are working. If there are issues about bundling the seniors component out of that, we can definitely talk about how we could do that. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Further, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Sorry, Mr. Chair. I have nothing further on this page.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Okay. Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Moving on, Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am speaking, as well, with respect, to the CMHC. The CMHC repair programs, of course, is a big decrease, and I just wanted to find out more — if this was indeed the federal funding that was being reduced. I thought it was for housing and not just repair programs. Can the Minister elaborate on this item, Mr. Chair?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The CMHC renovation programs that are currently set for the end of this fiscal year.... We received \$460,000 from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for their residential repair program. They pay 75 per cent of the cost, and we pay 25 per cent of the cost. That brings us up to the \$640,000 that we have allocated to those programs. There has been significant take-up in previous years on this — through the Emergency Repair Program, for example. We are anticipating a lot of folks are going to be moving more to the

CARE program in the future, particularly for our seniors and disabled folks. Thank you.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much. The next item was community liaison personnel that we have in some of the communities. I know there was some uptake specifically in my riding. What is the uptake right now? I feel that it is drastically reduced. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chairman, this was one of the areas we had targeted for reductions at the request of the committee. On the report, I was to put back \$80,000, along with the money for seniors, so we put that back. We were of the opinion that staff in the regions and the LHOs could adjust to accommodate the demands that the community liaison position might have, but in this case we have put money back at the request of the committee.

Mr. Menicoche: Which communities are specifically utilizing the proposed amounts here?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Polakoff.

Mr. Polakoff: I thank the Member for that question. The communities aren't specifically identified. However, we would target those communities with the highest needs and the communities would come forward with a proposal.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Polakoff, and thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Any further questions? Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Go ahead, Mr. Krutko.

COMMITTEE MOTION 26-16(2)
TO REINSTATE FUNDING LEVELS
CONSISTENT WITH FISCAL YEAR 2007–2008
FOR THE CONTRIBUTING ASSISTANCE FOR
RESIDENTIAL ENHANCEMENTS PROGRAM
(COMMITTEE MOTION CARRIED)

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that the committee strongly recommend that the government take immediate action to reinstate funding with levels consistent with fiscal years 2007–2008 for the Contributing Assistance For Residential Enhancements program delivered by the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation under the Programs and District Operations activities.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The motion is on the floor and is being distributed as we speak. The motion is in order. To the motion, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In regard to the committee report and review of 2008–2009 Draft

Main Estimates, on page 8 of 13, in regard to reduction to home ownership repairs, at the bottom of the page, the Members recognize that the corporation is committed to maintain retirement programs for seniors and persons with disabilities and support their efforts, but it recommends that the corporation make the reinstatement of the program a priority.

This motion basically is sending direction to the government that they have to realize that these programs are important to communities. They are important to a lot of people who have gotten into home ownership, especially for seniors. If you have any major repair, it's going to be more than just a seniors Emergency Repair Program. You're talking some major investment. I think that with the amount of \$700,000, we're not going to be able to do much by way of assisting individuals in home ownership.

With the motion I believe we're instructing the government to take immediate action to reinstate the previous levels, which were in the \$3 million range, and make every effort to reinstate that program as soon as possible. So, Mr. Chair, I will be moving the motion. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. To the motion, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I support the motion. I believe that there's in excess of 1,000 seniors households — only looking at one group, again — that are in need. In order for the Housing Corporation to effectively take individuals out of core need, I think you're going to have the budget to do it. I just don't think this budget can do it.

If you're looking at even a small renovation of \$10,000, it only gives you 70 units across the entire territory. So we're looking at probably a maximum of 15 units per region with this type of budget. I think that the need is probably a lot greater than that. The need is probably more in excess of 200 or 300 seniors alone that are in core need, as far as their home ownership units go. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Any further comments to the motion? Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. While we appreciate the sentiment of the recommendations, we recognize, as do all Members, that in every program area that we operate in, we have more demand and needs than we have resources.

As the Housing Corporation we were tasked, as part of the government, to come up with some reductions to keep our fiscal house in order. We've done that. We've looked very carefully at areas to do that, and this was one of the areas. Clearly, if this motion passes, we will look at it.

If we're going to try to comply, then we're going to have to be looking elsewhere to try to find the money. That'll be our challenge, and it won't be that easy. We've been very careful, trying not to touch staff and a lot of the program areas. I just want to make those points for the record. We will always seriously consider recommendations that the committee makes, but there will be some significant challenges and movement from one funding area to another to comply.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Further to the motion?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Question is being called. I will call upon Mr. Krutko to conclude the debate on the motion. Any comments, Mr. Krutko?

Mr. Krutko: A request to record the vote.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. A recorded vote has been requested. We will go to the vote. All those in favour, please stand.

Principal Clerk of Committees (Ms. Russell): Mr. Krutko, Mr. Abernethy, Mr. Menicoche, Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Groenewegen, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Bisaro.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): All those opposed, please stand. All those abstaining, please stand.

Principal Clerk of Committees (Ms. Russell): Mr. Robert McLeod, Mr. Lafferty, Ms. Lee, Mr. Miltenberger, Mr. Roland, Mr. Michael McLeod, Mr. Yakeleya, Mr. Bob McLeod.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): The result of the recorded vote on the motion: nine in favour, none opposed and eight abstentions.

Motion carried.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Any further questions on Programs and District Operations, page 2-160? Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. In regard to the programs that we have in place, I'd just like to ask the Minister: exactly how much money is being designated for the Elders on the Land program?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Minister Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: That program as a separate entity does not exist any longer. If there are elders that live outside of the communities as their primary residence, then we will work with them to look at it. But a program to build secondary residences for elders does not exist.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Chair, I believe in that program for elders, and if we can keep our elders healthy, we can keep our elders active. For a \$10,000

investment of helping somebody build a shack out on the land.... It's not a residence. It's accommodating them so that they can have a place where they can go to continue their traditional pursuits: hunting, fishing, making dry meat, making dry fish, tanning moosehides and whatnot. To me, active elders, healthy elders are the ones that are showing the young people what healthy living is all about. I think it's important, as a government, that we don't try to stigmatize these people: "Well, we're giving you another house." The shacks that we're building on the Elders on the Land program previous to this were strictly for elders to go out on the weekend or whatever and have a place where they can sleep, cook and basically have a little shed beside their place to dry meat or dry fish or even tan moosehides.

For myself, I fully support this initiative. You go to the communities and you know who the healthy people are in the communities strictly by looking at these people. It's the elders who are basically showing the way to the rest of the community and who are basically continuing to be active, continuing to be independent, and a lot of them would sooner be out on the land, taking on these activities, than sitting in social housing and flipping TV channels.

I think that we as government have to find ways to support the elders, especially to carry out their traditional activities. I know that in my community, a lot of people have taken advantage of that program. But simply because they are social housing clients or they're in the Housing Corporation system, they are being refused this program. Again, I think that if you can define what you mean by another residence, by way of the value of that residence — it doesn't have power, it doesn't have running water and it does not basically have electrical fixtures. So personally, I think that by using that in your policy, it's eliminating or excluding elders from a program that was really designed to get these elders back into the traditional lifestyle, let them continue their traditional pursuits, but more importantly, keep them active.

I'd like for this government and this department to seriously look at reinstating that program to ensure that elders still have the ability to carry on their traditional pursuits on the land, whatever they are.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion to that effect and request of this government that it reinstate the Elders on the Land and, more importantly, find a way that we can work to assist elders to live long, healthy lives and be the stewards of our communities. They do play an important role in our communities.

I find it very sad that we find every reason to help big industry with pipeline and hydro developments and whatnot, but when it comes to elders, who are

the most valuable asset we have in our communities, we're not there to make their lives more responsive — but also more enhancing — by assisting them with these types of programs. It's not as if we're spending tens or hundreds of dollars. We're spending in a range.... Like I said, \$10,000 is all you need to spend to build these sheds or shacks on the land where these people still carry their own wood. They still pack their water. They're independent, and for me, an independent elder is more healthy than an elder who basically finds themselves housed in an apartment or a home where they can't have access to anything else.

I'd like to leave that thought with the Minister. I think it's important that we find a way to accommodate elders with regard to that program, which I feel we should reconsider. So with that, Mr. Chair, I'd like to move a motion.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Go ahead with your motion.

COMMITTEE MOTION 27-16(2)
TO REINSTATE THE ELDERS ON THE LAND
PROGRAM UNDER PROGRAMS AND
DISTRICT OPERATIONS
(COMMITTEE MOTION CARRIED)

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Chair, I move that the committee strongly recommend that the government take immediate action to reinstate the Elders on the Land program delivered previously by the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation under programs and district operations activities. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The motion is on the floor and is being distributed. The motion is in order. To the motion, Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The committee just recommended, in a previous motion, to put back a few million dollars into a budget that we know has already been looked at closely to try to hit some targets. We're coming forward, as a government, trying to keep our fiscal affairs in order, not to have our debt get too far out ahead of us.

We're in this process together. It's easy to make the motions to recommend we put stuff back. Yesterday in this House, or when we did Justice, there was a recommendation to keep vacant positions; don't touch staff. We've been given a number of encouragements.

This program, this recommendation, speaks to housing. If it's primary facilities or primary houses, we will look at assisting people. Our core direction is to provide core housing and affordable housing to those in need. We have a huge backlog of people who don't even have houses, because we don't

have enough capacity. If there is a need for a primary residence, then this would be considered. But if it's for a secondary residence, no matter how good and positive the intent, we just don't have the money. Once again, I appreciate the recommendation and the intent of the recommendation, but clearly, we're in a position of having to make choices, and a primary residence for our northern people is the first consideration, especially when we don't have enough to go around. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. To the motion, Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. We talk about strong, self-reliant people all the time. I'm sometimes afraid that people have too much of a dependency on the government to do this. I mean, I will support the recommendation that this motion is making, but I also want to make the point that we do sometimes — not really knowing it — contribute to people being too dependent on the government.

Home ownership is another good example. We say they're capable of maintaining their own homes, but then we look after the maintenance or we provide money for improvements to the home. That, in my opinion, was not the reason for giving them the home in the first place. I think there are a lot of people out there who deserve homes. Actually, I'm straying from the motion, so I can speak to my other point when we get back to the page number.

I have to make a couple of quick comments to this. I'll support the recommendation that we reinstate the Elders on the Land program, but I also wanted to make the point that we have let people become too dependent on the government to do everything from birth to death. We talk about self-reliant individuals all the time, and I don't think we're contributing to that. We have many classic examples within the government, within the budget, that take away a lot of that self-reliance. It's something that I think we have to stand back and have a look at. I think we have to address that, because if we keep going at the rate we're going.... Again, I'm straying from the motion, so I'll leave it at that, Mr. Chair, and I'll make my other comments when we get back to page 2-160. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod, and thanks for the self-policing there. If I can call next on Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I will be voting in favour of this recommendation. It was an enormously successful program a couple of years ago. There was good uptake on it, and the elders were actually utilizing it. For us, it is a small price to pay to support our elders in a traditional activity. Often it's not about building a secondary location; it's actually in a traditional area where they

need improvements. That's where they've been living all their lives — far, far before they moved into our communities and regional centres. A lot of it, too, is because it's to get their needs met. Their families are growing, so they had to move to the communities. Schooling needs to happen. But they belong to the land.

One way that our government can continue with enhancing our culture, supporting our aboriginal populations and supporting the people from the land.... This is one small way of doing it. I was glad to see it and equally unhappy that it was removed in the last term.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I would certainly like to see it reinstated and readdressed one more time to support our elders who are living on the land, and their families. Mahsi cho.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. To the motion, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, will support the motion to bring the program back as it was previously. If the program is as it was previously, then the program is designed to take actual elders out of core need. If taking individual clients, individual families or people out of core need is the business of the Housing Corporation, then this program was designed to take people outside of core need. So I'll support the motion, based on the fact that it's the same program being brought back into the fold of the Housing Corporation.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. To the motion, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As we heard earlier, this program wasn't part of the core program of the Housing Corporation. A few years back it was added. The program then was removed from carrying on. As the Member has asked for this reinstatement, much like the previous motion — and as the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation stated — from what area? It's a small amount, yes, but all these amounts add up. As we've heard from Members of this Assembly, we should not be reducing on the backs of individuals, of the people who do our work. So when we go with the program areas, we're now being told, "Don't do this. Put in money that we don't have right now."

There are many programs that we have that are of great value, and this one, as pointed out, is.... If an individual is in core need, then they need a primary facility or a home, and the programs are in place allow for that. This is a \$10,000 amount, as the Member stated, that adds to a secondary facility. For \$10,000 you're not going to build a facility that you can occupy in the winter for very long, especially in our cold winters in the North.

It is important that we do that. That's why, overall, the government has some of the best seniors programs compared to any jurisdiction in the land. But to add to that, I'd have to ask Members: if we're going to put this back in place, then we need recommendations of where we're going to take it from. It becomes our problem of trying to reinstate programs into place. That can be considered as we look at these motions that the committee feels.... But again, as Members look at making these motions for reinstatement, as they've done in another department, we're going to have to find this from someplace else. Clearly, as a government we haven't met our target initially. This will put us even further out there if we're going to respond back to Members.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Roland. Further to the motion, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hear the Premier's issues in regard to the cost and whatnot, but I think there is a saving to this government if people are living healthy lives. If people are not living in the communities, they're saving on energy costs; they're saving on costs to the corporation. Also, they are basically independent. These programs are application-based, so you have to apply for this program; you don't automatically get it.

I'll use an example, since it was in my riding. The band corporation or the band itself applied for the program on behalf of its membership. They identified ten elders and they built ten — I wouldn't say cabins — basically sheds in the bush for \$50,000, at \$5,000 a pop, which they did themselves. They had local people using a wood mizer. They went and got their own logs. They cut their own logs. They made the siding for those units. Yet it was \$50,000 to help ten people. So for \$5,000 per person, that's living healthy — living independently, not using power, not using energy in a community, and basically hacking their own wood and hauling their own water. For me, that is a statement to how people should be showing this government how they can live healthy lives, how they can be independent and how they're not using the social system — where basically they want to get out of the social housing situation we have in their communities.

One of the elders we have in our community is telling us that they want to get away from the community on a weekend because it's too rowdy. It's not healthy for them; they don't feel safe. They want to go out to their camps on the weekend. For them it's a matter of public safety. I think what we're asking for here is not for the government to look at where they can find more money. We're telling the government that we should strive for healthy, independent people. That's one of the priorities of this Assembly, and that's what this program does.

Mr. Menicoche touched on this. These people were landowners at one time. These people were proud, independent people. They had their own log homes in our communities. These people had their own land in their communities, and then government came along and basically, through housing programs in the North, established northern housing in the Northwest Territories, through the federal government.

My point is that we have a lot of housing projects that are going to be lapsed because we can't find land. There's money that's going to be sitting there for those capital projects which basically are earmarked to be expended this year. But because we can't have the land available or basically because of contracting situations, those capital dollars are still going to be there. I think it's important to realize that this program, like I stated earlier, is healthy, and it's also there to ensure that we have healthy elderly people.

I have an elderly lady — she's 98 years old, and she still lives in the bush — Carolyn Kay of Fort McPherson. She's 98 years old, and she's out in the bush right now. We have elders in their 70s and 80s up at Eight Miles who basically were helped through this program. They're living healthy lives. They set their nets in the summer and also in the fall. They catch fish to sustain their income. They can't sustain themselves on their pension. So if the government wants to build one less house this year, take that money and put it into this program.... That means that of the 500-and-some units we're building, we've still got 100-and-some to go. So where there's a will, there's a way.

On this one, Mr. Chair, I would ask for a recorded vote.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. To the motion?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Question has been called, and the Member has requested a recorded vote. All those in favour, please stand.

Principal Clerk of Operations (Ms. Bennett):

Mr. Krutko, Mr. Abernethy, Mr. Menicoche, Mr. Ramsay, Mrs. Groenewegen, Mr. Robert McLeod, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Beaulieu.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): All those opposed, please stand. All those abstaining, please stand.

Principal Clerk of Operations (Ms. Bennett):

Ms. Bisaro, Mr. Lafferty, Ms. Lee, Mr. Miltenberger, Mr. Roland, Mr. Michael McLeod, Mr. Yakeleya, Mr. Bob McLeod.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Eight in favour, none opposed, eight abstentions. The motion is carried.

Motion carried.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Moving on, perhaps. Any further questions on Programs and District Operations, \$2.177 million, page 2-160?

NWT Housing Corporation, Programs and District Operations, Grants and Contributions: \$2.177 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Under Local Housing Organizations, page 2-163, \$37.945 million. Questions? Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question relates to both 2-163 and 2-164, because the detail is on 2-164. But under Grants and Contributions the amount for '08–09 is reduced from the amount in '07–08, and it looks from the detail that it is almost \$800,000 under the line for heating fuel. I wondered — considering the cost of fuel these days and considering the forced-growth amounts that have been indicated in just about every other department's budget — how the Housing Corp expects local housing organizations to deal with the rising cost of fuel when this line item has gone down.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Chairman, we'll be coming forward for a supplementary appropriation, we think in the neighbourhood of probably about \$1 million, to offset rising fuel costs and the inflationary pressures that those fuel costs have in other areas as well.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Any further questions? Mr. Robert McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to ask the Minister and his officials.... The contribution to Local Housing Authorities is for the upkeep of rental housing. On the previous page, Rental Housing Programs, Maintenance and Improvement, \$415,000 and \$200,000 for mobile equipment.... I'd like to ask the Minister: what's the difference between the two? I would think it would be rolled into one.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. Anderson.

Mr. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Under the Maintenance and Repairs line for local housing organizations, we're really talking about ongoing preventative maintenance for our housing stock. We've also got some money — you'll notice a slight increase in there — to try to entice some folks into our apprenticeship program through the local housing organizations. For the ones under Minor Capital, we give a contribution each year to the local housing organizations so they can build a fund to keep their equipment up to proper repair. In

addition to that, we also have our major capital and our infrastructure plan for major modernization improvement funding.

Mr. McLeod: I'm not quite sure I understood that. The \$37.945 million that's on page 2-163 — and I was referencing the Rental Housing Programs on page 2-160.... I would have thought that it was just part of the same program, that it would just be rolled into the \$37.945 million.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. We've completed and moved on from page 2-160. So according to process, please restrict your questions to 2-162, 2-163, 2-164.

Mr. McLeod: My questions are on 2-163. I just referenced a number on the previous page.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There are separate budget areas. However, there's nothing to preclude us from doing that, but it covers a very extensive list of things like bathroom hardware, fuel tanks and flooring. So it's just trying to give enough detail on the accounting so you don't have too many massive figures that are not clear enough.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Anything further?

NWT Housing Corporation, Local Housing Organizations, Operations Expenditure Summary: \$37.945 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): We shall move on from page 2-163 to 2-164, Local Housing Organizations. Questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Local Housing Organizations, Grants and Contributions: \$37.945 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): We'll move on to 2-165, Lease Commitments — Infrastructure. Any questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Lease Commitments — Infrastructure: \$5.839 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Moving to page 2-166, Infrastructure Investment Summary. Any questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Investment Summary: \$163.683 million, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Moving on to page 2-167, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan. Questions? Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a general question in regard to all of the infrastructure that's proposed, but relating, actually, to carryover. In regard to infrastructure from '07–08 I'd like to know whether or not all the housing projects from last year have been completed.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We're bringing forward a paper to lay out the carryovers for the year. It will be worth about \$5 million in carryovers.

Ms. Bisaro: My other question would be then: \$5 million would be approximately how many units?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: About 20 units. Roughly, a ballpark figure, about one-quarter of a million dollars each, if my math is correct.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Page 2-167, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan. No further questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Page 2-168, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued.

NWT Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued (page 1-168), approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Moving on: page 2-169, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued. No questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued (page 1-169), approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Page 2-170, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued. Questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued (page 1-170), approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Moving to page 2-171, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued. Questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued (page 1-171), approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Page 2-172, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued. Questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Infrastructure Acquisition Plan — Continued (page 1-172), approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Page 2-173, information item again, Pro Forma Income Statement. Questions?

NWT Housing Corporation, Pro Forma Income Statement, approved.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: If I could have committee's permission to go back to 2-172.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Does committee agree to go back to 2-172, I believe you were referencing?

Unanimous consent granted.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Committee is agreed. We'll go back to page 2-172. Mr. McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Yes, thank you, and thank you, colleagues. I had just a quick question.

I think the Minister mentioned that there was \$20 million in carryovers. Is that what's showing up in the \$38.390 million? Because if you look at the other numbers, they're fairly consistent, and then you've got a jump to \$38 million. So is that including the \$28 million in carryovers?

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Miltenberger.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The number for carryovers is about \$5 million. What the 2009–2010 reflects is a loss of the \$17 million, the federal share of the Affordable Housing Initiative.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you very much. Any further questions on 2-172? We'll now return to what we deferred originally. Page 2-149, Corporate Summary, information item. Questions? Mrs. Groenewegen.

COMMITTEE MOTION 28-16(2)
TO DEFER FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF
THE CORPORATE SUMMARY OF THE NWT
HOUSING CORPORATION
(COMMITTEE MOTION CARRIED)

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move that this committee defer further consideration of the Corporate Summary for the NWT Housing Corporation, Operations Expenditure Summary, at this time.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The motion is on the floor and

it is being distributed now. The motion is in order. To the motion. Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I understand why committee is deferring this. As I recall, there were a couple of motions to add things back in, but there was no outstanding information that I'm aware of. So I guess I'm asking Members — although I know it's not a question process — why would we defer at this point, when we could move on to the next department and just move on?

I guess I'm concerned with the fact that, though we do have to look at the budget process, what's outstanding.... For committee to move to the next department and just proceed.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Roland. Further to the motion. Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: I believe a similar motion was passed a year ago under the same department, so I don't see why there are problems with a motion being deferred. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. That's a very long deferral. The motion here, I guess, is not really debatable. To the motion. Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the motion. I'm obviously going to support the motion. I think, for me, it's about being consistent, and it's about the issues surrounding the process that the budget has followed to date. We're simply just setting it aside — that's all we're doing — and we're going to be consistent until we get some positive responses from the government.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Again to the motion. Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the Premier's comments. Granted, there is no outstanding information per se, but there are some outstanding motions. If this is the wish of the majority of the House, so be it. I'd request a recorded vote, please.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The Chair recognizes a request for a recorded vote. Anything further to the motion?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Question has been called. All those in favour, please stand.

Principal Clerk of Committees (Ms. Russell): Mrs. Groenewegen, Mr. Hawkins, Mr. Jacobson, Mr. Beaulieu, Ms. Bisaro, Mr. Krutko,

Mr. Abernethy, Mr. Menicoche, Mr. Ramsay,
Mr. Robert McLeod.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): All those opposed, please stand. All those abstaining, please stand.

Principal Clerk of Committees (Ms. Russell): Mr. Lafferty, Ms. Lee, Mr. Miltenberger, Mr. Roland, Mr. Michael McLeod, Mr. Yakeleya, Mr. Bob McLeod.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you. The results of the recorded vote on the motion: ten in favour, zero opposed, seven abstained. The motion is carried.

Motion carried.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): That concludes our current review of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation. I'd like to thank the Minister and witnesses, and you are excused at this time.

And as per our original decisions, we will continue on now with the Department of Health and Social Services.

MAIN ESTIMATES 2008–2009
DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Does the Minister have some general comments?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to present the Department of Health and Social Services Main Estimates for fiscal year 2008–2009. The department's mission is to promote, protect and provide for the health and well-being of the people of the Northwest Territories. To achieve the mission, the department has the following goals:

- to promote healthy choices and responsible self-care;
- to protect public health and prevent illness and disease;
- to protect children and vulnerable individuals from abuse, neglect and distress; and
- to provide integrated, responsive and effective health services and social programs for those who need them.

The department is requesting an appropriation of \$309 million, an increase of approximately \$33 million over last year, which is an 11.7 per cent increase.

The proposed budget is allocated to five main areas of activity:

- \$175 million for health services programs that include public health, chronic care clinics, in-

patient and out-patient care, and physician services;

- \$75 million for community health and social programs that promote healthy lifestyles and community wellness and services for at-risk individuals and families;
- \$31 million for program delivery support, including \$12.5 million for authority administration and \$7.2 million for specific recruitment and retention and training initiatives system-wide;
- \$21 million for supplementary health programs, including medical travel and extended health benefits; and
- \$6.7 million for system-wide support.

The department is proposing critical capital and information technology investment of \$34 million, including:

- a consolidated primary care clinic in Yellowknife;
- the addition of seven beds to the Northern Lights Special Care Home in Fort Smith;
- the completion of the new adult supported-living facility in Hay River;
- a new territorial dementia facility in Yellowknife;
- a major renovation to the Fort Smith Health Centre;
- minor code upgrades to existing infrastructure, including the Territorial Treatment Centre, Woodland Manor Long-Term Care Facility in Hay River;
- evergreening of major medical equipment; and
- investments in electronic health records management and imaging archive technology to improve health service delivery, in partnership with Canada Health Infoway.

Mr. Chairman, the 2008–2009 budget for Health and Social Services continues to follow the direction outlined in the department's strategic action plan. We're proposing to focus our resources to continue to improve services to people, support to staff and trustees, system-wide management accountability, and development of the integrated service delivery model.

This budget proposes an increase in spending for Health and Social Services to reflect the cost of delivering these critical and valued services to residents of the NWT.

The \$33 million increase is comprised of:

- 1) strategic investments;
- 2) forced growth for services provided within the NWT;
- 3) new federal funding for specific health and social services initiatives; and
- 4) increased cost of services provided to NWT residents in the south.

Strategic Investments

As a first step in re-evaluating how we deliver health and social services, a number of initial investments are being proposed, including:

- \$571,000 for the new supported-living facility in Hay River; the total cost of the facility operation will be offset by repatriating eight clients currently in the south;
- \$224,000 for respite services for families with special needs, to establish three regional programs outside of Yellowknife;
- \$800,000 to collaborate with Education, Culture and Employment to support existing shelters and enhance community services;
- \$150,000 to collaborate with Municipal and Community Affairs to develop legislation and a framework for ground ambulance and highway rescue services;
- \$100,000 to collaborate with MACA on the Healthy Choices Framework to promote healthy living; and
- \$1 million for the standardization of foster care rates.

Reductions

To be able to reinvest in transformational changes of the Health and Social Services system, the department examined the programs and services it is currently delivering to determine how to change the way services are currently provided and to identify efficiencies that could be realized.

For 2008 and 2009 these include:

- reducing Tele-Care promotion costs, now that it has been implemented;
- changes to delivery of Telehealth services, while pursuing partnerships with Canada Health Infoway for enhanced services in the future; and
- reduction of Health and Social Services recruitment and retention initiatives to match current spending levels.

Earlier this year the department underwent a functional realignment to better support the Health and Social Services system as a whole. In support of this process, a number of positions are being proposed to be eliminated, to reflect the refocused role and function of the department. As part of the government-wide realignment initiative, the department has identified 17 positions in Yellowknife to be eliminated. This represents a 12.7 per cent reduction to the current 133 department positions: 118 located in Yellowknife, and 15 located in Inuvik. This will result in ongoing savings of \$1.6 million starting in 2009–2010. Due to the timing of the reductions, this will result in savings of approximately \$400,000 in 2008–2009.

Forced Growth

As a front-line service delivery department, a majority of the Health and Social Services budget is for personnel costs. As a result, much of the annual forced growth is for compensation-related costs. The forced growth for the delivery of services within the NWT includes:

- \$7.8 million for increases in fixed costs related to compensation, including collective agreement increases, position re-evaluations, pension liability and relief staffing in hospitals;
- \$1 million for supplementary health benefits for forecasted cost increases in 2008–2009;
- \$4.7 million to support costs related to the delivery of front-line services at the community level, such as fuel costs; non-governmental organizations; electronic health records and electronic medical records systems' operating costs; physician services; purchased services contracts to provide support services in our hospitals and at the community level, such as dietary, laundry, leases, laboratory services, et cetera.

Federal Funding

The budget also includes drawdowns of short-term federal funding for specific initiatives:

- \$1.8 million for Patient Wait Times Guarantee, to support community health nurse training, nurse practitioners, and EHR/EMR legislation development;
- \$3.1 million for year three of five of the Territorial Health Access Fund, for long-term reform to invest in front-line services such as nursing resources in small communities, midwifery, dialysis, physician support and training, and home and community care.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Health and Social Services has historically been the recipient of time-

limited targeted third-party funding, primarily from the federal government. These often result in public expectations for ongoing programs once the funding sunsets. The department is acutely aware of the implications associated with this type of funding. Examples include:

- The Territorial Health Access Fund (THAF) for long-term reform is scheduled to sunset on March 31, 2010, resulting in an annual reduction of \$4.3 million.
- The Patient Wait Times Reduction Guarantee Trust, totalling \$4.6 million over three years, also sunsets on March 31, 2010.

The department, in collaboration with the governments of Nunavut and Yukon, is developing an evaluation framework for THAF, along with the federal government, to attempt to extend this funding beyond 2010. However, as with other funds there is no guarantee that additional funding will be provided, so the GNWT must incorporate the sunseting of these funds into its planning framework.

Southern Referrals

NWT residents are referred to southern Canada, primarily Alberta, for a number of acute and specialty services not available in the NWT. These costs are driven both by the volume of NWT residents requiring referrals, and the price of services in the south.

Due to the variable and unpredictable nature of these demand-driven costs, the department has historically been required to return for supplementary funding near the end of the year, once the full costs are known.

In the past two years the supplementary funding received for these services has been \$7.7 million and \$5.6 million.

For 2008 and 2009 the proposed budget has included this funding up front in the Main Estimates to minimize the need to return later in the year for a supplementary funding request, including:

- \$5.1 million forced growth for out-of-Territories hospital and physician services and southern residential care.
- An additional \$4.7 million for out-of-Territories hospitals, reflecting a dramatic increase in national in-patient and outpatient rates. Effective April 1, 2008, the interprovincial per diem rate across Canada increased approximately 30 per cent.
- \$2.1 million for increased costs related to air medevac services to transport NWT residents

as a result of the current market conditions and increased fuel costs.

That concludes my opening remarks, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to answer any questions Members have. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Minister Lee. I will now ask the Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Programs to provide opening comments. Mr. Robert McLeod.

Mr. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I hope you're enjoying your supper.

Laughter.

Mr. McLeod: The committee met with the Minister and her officials on Wednesday, April 2, 2008, and Thursday, April 3, 2008, to review the Draft Main Estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services.

Committee members made note that the department is proposing to spend \$309.822 million in operations expenses and \$32.414 million on capital projects in the fiscal year 2008–2009. We would like to thank the Minister and her officials for appearing before the committee and responding to the committee's questions and concerns.

Committee members offer the following comments on issues arising out of the review of the 2008–2009 Main Estimates.

Nurse Practitioners

Members of the committee are very concerned with how nurse practitioners are being utilized in NWT hospitals and how they are being integrated into the NWT health care system.

It is understood that all nurse practitioners who have had their education, or upgrading, paid for or subsidized by the department could be employed in front-line positions at community health centres. There are a number of nurse practitioner positions that have been funded on an ad hoc basis and utilized one-time federal funding pots. These positions have been acknowledged to reduce hospital stays and associated costs and to improve patient outcomes. The department and health authorities should be using nurse practitioners to improve patient outcomes throughout the NWT health care system and make the necessary program and funding decisions to best utilize our nursing resources. It may also be necessary to re-profile existing vacant nursing positions to accomplish this goal.

Committee members were aware that considerable expense was incurred between the cost of training and the development of enabling legislation and an implementation plan. It is time to follow through. We expect to discuss the use of nurse practitioners and

review a definite implementation plan during the review of the 2009–2012 business plans in September 2008.

Telehealth and Medical Travel Policy

It is noted from examining forced-growth figures in previous Main Estimates and supplementary appropriations that medical travel costs are increasing at an alarming rate. Some of these costs — like increases in airfare and charter costs because of the rising price of aircraft fuel — are outside of the control of the Department of Health and Social Services. The areas where the department can control costs are related to the number of patients using medical travel and the frequency of that travel. Members of the committee believe that wherever possible, the use of Telehealth to consult with other health care professionals is preferable and more cost-efficient than sending patients on medical travel.

In order for this to occur, it is important that Telehealth programs in the two territorial hospitals be delivered in a coordinated and focused manner. For this reason, the committee recommended that the two Telehealth coordinator positions — one at Stanton and one at the Inuvik hospital — be retained.

The committee was pleased that the department reinstated the Telehealth coordinator in Inuvik; however, committee members remain concerned that even though there may be qualified persons to operate the Telehealth equipment at the Stanton Territorial Hospital, without a person and a coordination role the equipment may not be utilized to its full potential. Committee members will be tracking the usage of Telehealth through the business-planning and results-reporting processes.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to hand it over to my colleague Ms. Bisaro to continue with the report.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Stanton Master Plan

It is noted that there is no long-term planning in place related to the future of the North's flagship health care facility, Stanton Territorial Hospital. At this time, committee members are being asked to approve piecemeal capital projects without any inkling of how these projects interrelate to a master development plan for Stanton.

Members of the committee are aware that some wards are overcrowded and that patient privacy is slowly being eroded. We also hear that medical and administrative staff at Stanton is being asked to work in less-than-ideal conditions.

The Minister has committed to following through on the development and finalization of the Stanton master development plan and has made it one of the priorities of the newly appointed public administrator for Stanton. The committee wants to make it very clear that we will have great difficulty in recommending future approvals of capital projects for Stanton in the absence of the master development plan.

Support for Home Care and Respite Services

The committee supports the home care programs offered through the authorities and their partners. These programs are instrumental in keeping people in their own homes for as long as possible and keeping health care costs under control.

The committee is also very pleased to support the expansion of respite care services to communities outside of Yellowknife in the 2008–2009 fiscal year. Many families do a fantastic job in addressing the medical and care needs of their loved ones, but these same people need a break every once in a while.

On a related matter, it is noted that policies under the Income Support programs, administered by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, do not allow employed persons to stay with family members renting public housing, when those family members may require some assistance in maintaining their independence, without using the employed person's income in calculating the rental rate.

It is known that seniors living in their own homes utilizing home care and assistance from family members to maintain their independence are less of a cost to government than those who move into government-run long-term care facilities.

The committee will be making a recommendation to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to change Income Support policies so that with appropriate approvals from medical professionals, persons who move in to provide assistance to family members in social housing will not impact unit rental rates.

Electronic Medical Records and Interoperable Electronic Health Records

The committee notes that the Department of Health and Social Services is solely responsible for the costs associated with the development of the electronic medical records, and that Canada Health Infoway is paying the bulk of the costs associated with the development of the interoperable electronic health records. It's hoped that the eventual rollout of these two systems will help the medical community in accessing information and improve patients' medical outcomes and, at the same time,

reduce the administrative costs and burdens for the department and health authorities.

It's hoped that the committee will be able to see the implementation of these new systems during the life of the 16th Assembly.

Mr. Chair, I would like to pass the reading of the report on to my colleague Mr. Abernethy.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Future of Health and Social Service Authorities

It is apparent to members of the committee that our current method of administering health and social services by using regional authorities is unsustainable, going forward. A health authority with 42,000 residents in southern Canada would be a very small health authority. In recent years in most provincial jurisdictions, it is likely a health authority of that size would have been rolled into a larger authority. The fact that the GNWT has seven health authorities means that many administrative functions are duplicated and that some economies of scale by such things as centralized purchasing are not being realized.

In addition, it is understood that having seven different employers of health care workers has made it difficult for workers to temporarily work in other communities if the same health authority does not employ them. It is proposed that a single employer of health care professionals would make the system more flexible in responding to emergencies and staffing shortages. Members also believe that a centralized single employer would result in a better outcome for the funding that is currently spent on recruitment and retention by allowing for greater mobility for our health care professionals.

The original intent behind the regional health authorities was to build regional governance capacity. Members believe that between the development of the institutions of the territorial government, the non-government organization and the various aboriginal governments and development corporations, this capacity now exists and that a strong case can be made for consolidating operations in a single board representing all regions of the NWT.

It should be clear to all residents of the NWT that if Members of the Legislative Assembly are faced with a choice of cutting Health and Social Service programs or changing governance systems to save money, Members will choose to save programming for the residents.

Phase II of Family Violence Strategy

The committee was pleased to see the family violence action plan is moved from being coordinated by the Department of the Executive during its development and implementation to being delivered by the department and its authorities.

The department will spend nearly \$1 million to enhance emergency services in regions with no services and to increase funding for existing shelters and programs. This is an important step in ensuring the safety and welfare of northern families. The committee looks forward to reviewing results of our increased investment in future years.

Recruitment and Retention Issues

The standing committee has reviewed information provided by the department on bursaries and paying for seats in medical schools for doctors. It is not apparent that the people of the Northwest Territories are receiving value for money in sponsoring these medical seats, as past experience indicates that very few of these doctors are returning north, even with a Return of Service Agreement in place. The reality is that other jurisdictions are so desperate for doctors that they are more than willing to foot the bill to pay out a Return of Service Agreement.

Although the original intent made sense, given the problems in recruiting doctors, the situation has evolved into one where the Department of Health and Social Services is paying to train doctors for other jurisdictions. NWT students are being accepted into medical school on their own merits, regardless of whether the Department of Health and Social Services is paying to reserve seats for NWT medical students. For this reason, the committee recommended that the Department of Health and Social Services examine eliminating paying for the seats at medical schools. The department agreed with this recommendation and will be phasing out paying for seats at medical schools as current students graduate.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to now pass off the reading of the report to Mr. Beaulieu.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Federal Fiduciary Responsibility for Indian and Inuit Health Care Costs

It is noticed that the federal government has capped forced growth for health care for Indians and Inuit at 2 per cent per annum. With increases to health care costs averaging 6 to 7 per cent annually, the amount the territorial government is responsible for is increasing at an alarming rate.

Information provided by the Minister of Health and Social Services estimates the amount in dispute is approaching \$95 million. This money could be used to enhance existing health care services or to develop new programs or infrastructure.

It is obvious to members that it would be reprehensible as a government to restrict the services available to eligible Indians and Inuit to correlate to the available funding from the federal government. The Minister and the Premier are encouraged to work with their territorial and provincial counterparts to lobby the federal government to live up to their fiduciary and treaty obligations to provide health care to aboriginal Canadians and to develop a long-term funding solution that recognizes the increased costs in delivering health care.

Support for Non-Government Organizations

Non-government organizations deliver many programs and services on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Services and their authorities. Subsequent to our discussions with the Minister, she provided committee with a list of NGOs that have entered into multi-year funding agreements with the Department of Health and Social Services. It was noted by committee members that these multi-year agreements are for organizations that are territorial in nature, have an advocacy role and require core funding to fulfill their obligations to identified classes of people, such as seniors or disabled.

Committee members are more concerned with NGOs that enter into a funding agreement with Health and Social Services authorities to provide programs and services to community residents. Members have heard that these NGOs are facing difficulty in retaining qualified staff because of uncertainty over year-to-year funding, and that too many of their resources are being utilized in preparing yearly reports and funding proposals to justify or request program spending or funding.

It is felt by committee members that where practical, three-year funding agreements would provide enough certainty to NGOs for them to recruit and retain qualified program-delivery staff and reduce the administration burden on the NGOs. Health and Social Services authorities need to be more proactive in dealing with the NGOs that deliver programming and services on their behalf to the residents of the Northwest Territories. The administrative burden placed on NGOs to report on activities and prepare annual funding proposals can be unrealistic and detract from the NGOs' ability to actually deliver the services for which they have been contracted.

Committee members are aware that work is underway by the Cabinet committee to examine

ways to support NGOs while ensuring that the government gets value for money. As well, the examination on the future role and need for a regional Health and Social Services authority may provide an opportunity for improving relationships with NGOs. The committee looks forward to measurable progress during the life of the 16th Assembly.

Mr. Chair, I would like to now turn it back over to my colleague Wendy Bisaro.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Support for Territorial Dementia Facility

Members of the committee look forward to the opening of the territorial dementia facility in Yellowknife. This is a welcome addition to the spectrum of services available in the North, and will keep families closer to their loved ones in a safe, caring environment.

Assisted-Living Facility in Hay River

There are many Northerners in southern Canada living in assisted-living situations far from their families and home communities. The Department of Health and Social Services spends a significant amount every year in meeting the needs of these residents. It's important to note that these costs are increasing yearly, and that the point has been reached where it makes economic sense to deliver more of this programming in the North.

While it still may be marginally cheaper to contract with southern operators of assisted-living facilities, the fact is that once this money is paid out to these contractors, no net benefit to the NWT economy occurs. By basing these services in the NWT, the wages paid to employees and the money spent on obtaining local services and products will at least contribute to the economy of Hay River.

As a committee, we look forward to the opening of this new facility and hope that it may serve as a template for the development of facilities and services for northern residents who may require assistance in meeting their day-to-day living arrangements. Members also look forward to families being able to reintegrate themselves into the lives of family members who will be repatriated from southern Canada. That's the end of opening comments.

Chairman (Mr. Bromley): Thank you, Ms. Bisaro, and thank you to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Programs. We will now take a break for sustenance.

The Committee of the Whole took a short recess.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): I'd like to call the Committee of the Whole back to order. We're dealing with the Department of Health and Social Services. At this time I'd like to ask the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services if she'll be bringing any witnesses. Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Does the committee agree that the Minister bring in her witnesses?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Sergeant-at-Arms, escort the witnesses in. Minister Lee, could you introduce your witnesses for the record?

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To my left is Deputy Minister of Health and Social Services Mr. Gregory Cummings, and to my right is Director of Finance Mr. Derek Elkin.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Minister. Welcome, witnesses. General comments, Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have a number of opening comments I'd like to make. Then I've got a lot of questions I'd like to ask, once we get into the line-by-line.

One of the first barriers I want to start off talking about is recruitment and retention. In the Premier's opening statements, or Budget Address, he talks a little bit about expanding nurse practitioner training and expanding the Community Health Nurse Development Program. Yet I was under the impression when we reviewed the budget that there are actually reductions in those areas. I believe the Community Health Nurse Development Program is being reduced by four positions. I also believe that the Nurse Practitioner Education Leave Bursary has been eliminated completely. There are also, I believe, reductions to the number of individuals that we're going to support through things like the Advanced Nurse Mentorship Program.

In the statement he does talk about \$1.8 million going to investment in these areas. The Minister's comments also talk about \$1.8 million going into these areas, which I have trouble reconciling, given that there are cuts in these same areas. I believe programs like the Community Health Nurse Development Program are valuable programs that are going to help northern nurses transition from a hospital setting into a community health setting, where we as Northerners are experiencing a significant number of problems finding people and training people and getting them into there. I'm having trouble reconciling the message that we're getting now as compared to some of the information that we had discussed previously. So when we get into that area, I'm going to have some

specific questions on how you can be reducing yet expanding and enhancing. They don't seem to work for me.

Another area — and it was mentioned in the Social Programs report — is Telehealth. We hear a lot about changing the way we do business. We also hear a lot about finding ways to increase efficiencies and reduce costs. Our medical travel costs are really going through the roof, yet here we are, cutting one of the programs — or reducing our ability to enhance and deliver a program — that can clearly, if utilized appropriately, reduce some of our costs.

So I am disturbed that we are reducing one of the Telehealth coordinators in Stanton. I'm happy that we're putting the one back in Inuvik, but I think that doesn't solve the problem. The Telehealth positions provide an education and a clinical function to help with mental health consults, to help with physiotherapy consults. They help with discharge planning. If someone is being discharged from Stanton before going back to the community, Telehealth has a great opportunity to coordinate a conversation to help with the discharge planning. I really feel that in getting rid of the Telehealth coordinators, we'd be taking away one of our champions.

I hear things; people say things like, you know, we'll be able to continue to deliver Telehealth; we'll get the nurses to do it; we'll get these other people to do it. It takes time and it needs a champion: someone who can get out there and actually provide the education. It's not as simple as just doing the bookings or managing the equipment when we're doing a consult. It takes education. It takes someone to get out there and provide training and education to all of those people out there to help them understand the importance and the value of such a program and such a tool.

If it's being underutilized, I'm suggesting that it's because we don't have those champions in place. I'm under the impression that they just hired a consultant or a coordinator in Stanton, and three weeks after she arrived, she got her letter of affected status. It doesn't make any sense. You can't say it's not working when you don't have anybody in it. Get somebody in there and make them demonstrate how valuable this program and this service can be. I'm going to ask a lot of questions on Telehealth when we get to that section.

It's been difficult to get a clear picture of the position cuts that the department is talking about. When you get in there, I'm going to be interested in getting from you, the Minister, a copy or a list of all the positions that have been identified for elimination, as well as which positions were filled and which positions were vacant, so we can get a

real sense of the impact on the departments and also the provision of health and social services.

Another area that I'd like to talk about it is that I understand each authority has been given an amount of money, and they've been told to live within their means. Given the amount being provided is not necessarily equivalent to the growth that has happened in the last number of years, I'm worried that telling them to live within their means, when you've given them meagre growth, is going to result in job cuts. I've had individuals from Stanton indicate that they've already received affected letter notices. We've received no information from the department and from the Minister outlining what the impacts of telling the authorities to live within their means are. I'm worried that it's going to result in major cuts in the authorities and therefore result in a limitation or a degrading of the quality of services these authorities provide. These authorities are an incredibly important part of our health system, and laying off nurses — laying off any other health care provider — is detrimental to the provision of services.

I understand costs are ballooning in the health system rapidly, but it's time to actually rethink how we do business. This is something the Premier said right in the beginning: a lot of this exercise we're going through now is about redefining how we do business, changing direction, and finding better ways to do things and better use of our own money. There are lots of things and lots of opportunities that may exist that will help us spend our money wisely, but they seem to be completely ignored or not even considered.

I've had a lot of conversations with a lot of different individuals who have talked about Stanton as an example where our overtime rates resulting from things such as sick leave and annual leave and all of those types of things are ballooning. Every time someone is sick or on annual or away, they have to have somebody come in and do overtime to backfill for them. When they're gone, because they're taking lieu time or whatnot for the time that they've put in, two more people have had to cover for them. As a result, one sick leave or one lieu time or one annual day actually costs us way more than a simple one-person replacement.

I've had individuals talk to me about the fact that it may seem radical, but if we're actually to increase the number of nurse positions at Stanton so that we build in a redundancy, we would be able to reduce the number of overtime hours being put in. If we reduce the number of overtime rates, we're actually saving money in the long run. We can actually reduce our costs through redundancy, if we actually create some redundancy and eliminate our use of overtime. Yet when we talk to the department, we get very little response on that, or Stanton gets very little response on that. I think that is seriously

something that is worth consideration. I think that is something that is worth investigation, and I would encourage the department and Stanton to look into that very closely and see if, in fact, they can realize some savings in that way.

I know health care is difficult. I know that it has challenges due to international and national shortages of all levels of health care providers. This suggests to me to that it's really time. If in no other area, this is definitely one area where we seriously, seriously have to reconsider how we do business. Sticking with the same old way of doing business is not working. The costs are ballooning out of control. We're frustrating our health care professionals, who are our most valuable asset in the world of health care.

I've talked to individuals who have said they've applied for nursing jobs at Stanton, and they're told, "Oh, we're not looking for anybody, because we're fully staffed." Yet they're still paying out huge quantities of overtime, and it's costing them more and more and more. Then they stand back and say, "We're broke. We need \$11 million in a supp appropriation so that we can pay our payroll." Yet they keep paying overtime: more overtime, more overtime, more overtime.

Once again it's time to seriously look at how we do business. Consider some of these radical approaches, such as built-in redundancy. You will likely find some cost savings and not have to end up laying off staff at Stanton, shutting down the OR at Stanton and telling nurses in the OR, "Your job's gone; you're an affected employee" — things that I think we should all be concerned about.

I'm going to end there and let somebody else talk. I'll have a lot of questions for you as we start going line by line. Thank you very much.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Next on my list I have Mr. Menicoche, Mr. Hawkins and Ms. Bisaro. Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Health and Social Service issues are another one of the high-demand concerns in all the communities in my riding. I've got six small communities.

Maybe at this time I'd just like to say thanks to the Minister, as well. We conducted a tour of all the communities in early May of this year. The tour went really well. We went to all the communities. I just really to touch on many, many of the issues that we talked about when we visited the communities.

I'll just begin with the one that I've been pursuing for some time now: the nursing position in Wrigley. The Minister was with me in the community of Wrigley and saw the need and urgency of having that professional service there. As well, with the

corresponding policing issues that the community has been requesting for some time, it's still an urgent need. I say again to the Minister that I continue to advocate on behalf of Wrigley, that this nursing position is important and that we must seek to fill it. In fact, we should start to spend as much time as we can with the positions that we have in Fort Simpson, getting them into Wrigley on a more regular service.

I know that in the last couple of months we had one individual in Wrigley. She was there for about two weeks, and the community was very happy that there was some stability. They're developing a good working relationship with that nurse. It goes a long way with making the community feel that they're safe, that there's good health care in the community, that there's a good provider in the community. That's all the people ask for, Mr. Chair. When we talk about improving the lives of our people, this is one simple aspect of it. That simple act of having a nurse present goes a long, long way in providing that necessity.

One of the things that we heard as we travelled around my riding was the need to use the telephone to contact the regional centre, which is in Fort Simpson. There are lots of Tele-Care health issues. People are aware of it, and they have been using it. But they need to get in contact with the Fort Simpson district office, because there are appointments that have to happen. There are specialists that travel to Fort Simpson, and sometimes they require people in the outlying communities to travel into Fort Simpson. The issue here is that people have to pay for their own phone charges to get hold of the health centre, and it's often difficult in small communities. The phone is often strapped, and they're using calling cards and they're running out of minutes, et cetera. So it's very difficult for them to call to the outside, even to Fort Simpson. One of the requests that came out of several communities to the Minister's office is: is there a 1-800 number even for a district like Fort Simpson? How can we call the Fort Simpson office to talk about these needs of ours?

As well, I do have to commend, of course, Health and Social Services for the improvement in training for our CHRs in all the communities. Once again, I would advocate and support the continued training and improve the skill level. These people are home-grown people in our communities, and the improved service benefits our small communities and our people.

Another thing that was prevalent in the smaller communities is that the people are saying, "Well, you know, the doctors and nurses come here, but they're only staying a couple of hours, and they're missing some people." When that happens, people with needs often have to wait an additional month. Sometimes, if they didn't make the visit — if they

get weathered out — then often you're talking like two months with no health professionals in the smaller communities. So more effort has to be shown to the communities that we want to go there, that if there's a missed visit or circumstances beyond anybody's control, like weather, then we'll continue the following week to make that effort to get back in there. And when they are there, longer visits — even an overnight visit — is all they ask for. That will improve the service once again. Even that little overnight visit stimulates that small community — even like Jean Marie. You're paying a room for one night, and it goes a long way in the small communities to stimulating the economy with that one little act, again.

Some of the other things that we heard, particularly in Fort Liard.... They are saying that there has to be more resources in Health and Social Services to ensure a healthy workforce. They're running into addiction problems and alcohol problems in Liard. If there are more resources available, more mental health workers and more visits by them, we should be able to intercede and stop some of this.... Well, actually be there for the people when they want to heal themselves. Particularly Fort Liard is a resource-based economy, and the people are the backbone of that economy. Because they're struggling with their addictions issues, we should be there for them and provide as many resources as we can.

Some of the ways are not always department-oriented. The bands and local groups do have their own ground-based proposals that they would like support on. It goes back to some of the fundamental issues that many, many MLAs speak about. Even with some of the existing supported programs, there are no increments for cost-of-living increases to existing staff, and that's something that we have to continually be aware of. People are doing good work, but if they're not paid accordingly or are trying to keep up to the increased cost-of-living pressures, we must help them meet those to keep those people there.

As well, in Fort Liard they spoke quite heartily about using B.C. facilities to help ease some of the costs of travel for them. Often they are travelling to Fort Simpson and then getting on a plane and coming to Yellowknife. Then the doctors here are telling them, "Yes, you've got a bad knee, and we'll set up another appointment." Then they have to go all the way back to Liard. That's three days' travel. They're saying, "Look, Kevin, we go to Nelson every couple of days. Couldn't we see the doctor there, get an assessment, get diagnosed? Then we've got no problem going to Yellowknife for the treatment." But to come all the way here to get diagnosed, to them it seems fruitless, like "What's the point?" Because that's a long, long way to travel for them.

Often, too, Fort Liard is a largely aboriginal community, and a lot of them look to translation — people travelling with them for translation services — and sometimes they don't get that.

Just with regard to translation services, Mr. Chair, I spoke quite a bit in the 15th Assembly about cross-cultural training. I believe that Health and Social Services has to look at it again. One of the reasons is that people are telling me that they're still going to the health centre — our elder population is going there — and they're still not being adequately served because they've got broken English. I always say there's a lot of head movement in our elders. They go "uh-huh" lots, like in the affirmative. But when the doctor or nurse is talking to them — "Are you okay?" — they'll go, "Uh-huh," and all this time they're very sick with pneumonia.

There are some bad cases out there in not only my region, but people get misdiagnosed, and it's only because they're not understanding some of the cultural things. That's just one of them that they must understand: that a lot of the elders do tend to say yes a lot. They really don't understand what's going on, and they keep saying yes, and the doctors or nurses are saying, "Well, this person is obviously fine. Here, go home."

But I think that cross-cultural training has to be.... I don't know what happened to it. It's got to be reinstated. It will be a benefit not only to our health care professionals but also the community.

One other issue I'm going to speak about now is midwifery in Nahendeh. There was a Member's statement about it earlier today. It's something my region has been asking about, as well, for some time now, and hopefully we'll work towards it. I know that it's a success in some other regions, and only because people get to stay home. That's the key thing. Right now, for safety reasons, everybody's got to go to Yellowknife. Someone who's had a couple of children already is saying, "Well, what's the point? Why am I going there?" Anyway, midwifery is an important concern that was raised in a couple of communities.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll just note the time and allow some other Members to speak, but I do have some more opening remarks to speak to. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. I'd like to ask the Minister if she'd like to respond to those comments. Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps I should start with some of the comments that the Member for Nahendeh raised. I want to also thank the Member for inviting me to his communities. It was a very busy trip, but it was a really great opportunity for me to visit some of the smaller communities as Minister.

Increasing nursing positions in communities obviously is something that everyone wants, and our communities want doctors in the communities too, but it is not something that we could afford in all places. I have committed to the Member for Nahendeh, and other places, that I will make my best effort to see how we could increase the access to services for small communities wherever we can, even if we can't have permanent staff live there.

As we move forward and in order for us to face head-on the challenges of the health care costs, we do have to look at innovative ways of how we deliver our services, our staffing model. I think the recommendation by the Standing Committee on Social Programs.... We looked at reorganizing the board structures so that we could have a better, comprehensive implementation plan on all health care professionals. It's something that gives us a really good basis to work on.

I really look forward to taking some time with my officials when the budget is over and coming up with something for the next business plan cycle where we, as a Legislature, could look at some more details about where we can just increase the physician services, nursing services, midwifery services. Under the limited resources we have — although Health and Social Services has a huge budget — we need to use every cent wisely. Increasing services would require some innovative and transformational changes, and I look forward to having more discussions on that.

With respect to the telephone trouble in Fort Simpson — maybe the deputy minister could give more information — I think that was a very particular issue with NorthwesTel. It wasn't to do with a 1-800 number. So I'd be happy to follow up on that, or maybe the DM could add to that.

In a lot of communities we were at, cross-cultural training and such.... I think we're lucky to have the CEO we have in Deh Cho, Kathy Tetso, who has been there for a very long time. She knows, I think, most of the residents and the staff that she has. I know that she has inside knowledge of the people, the communities, the issues, and she was constantly sharing them with me when I was travelling with her. So I'm sure that she makes that a priority with any of the new staff that come on board.

Another thing I had a chance to look at: in visiting communities where the interest and the enthusiasm on the part of the community members to do a lot of things themselves in the communities.... They wanted some information on chronic disease management. They want to know more about how to take care of diabetes situations, or they wanted to work on community wellness. They wanted to work on youth issues, senior issues. I talked to the CEO and the Chair. I asked them to come up with

some of the proposals that we could work on. That's not grand and it's not huge, but it's something that could work on small communities. So I look forward to looking at more of that.

Moving on to Mr. Abernethy's questions, I'm also going to ask the deputy minister to give you detailed information on the investment of \$1.8 million under CHNDP program. We are definitely committed to increasing and expanding the NP practice in the North. It does take a lot of work in a very multilateral kind of way. Not only do we need to train the NPs, but we need to make sure that they're placed in the right places, and we also have commitment from all the authorities that they will do everything they can to accommodate the NPs that we train. So I'm going to ask him to do a little bit of detail on the difference between the \$1.8 million investment versus some of the reductions we're making.

On the issue of Telehealth that the Member.... I understand that he's going to ask more detailed questions on that. I just need to say here that the Department of Health and Social Services.... We have about 130 people in headquarters and about 1,200 people in regions in eight authorities. Most of the position reductions came out of headquarters, and it is up to 12.5 per cent. I think the Members may not have noticed, but it reflects the priority I had as the Minister, and the department, when we were given.... We're a part of this realignment exercise, and when we went to work on it, I wanted to make sure that if it's at all possible, we do not affect employees in the front line. And this is the reason why almost all of the positions, except for two, came from headquarters. That's not to say that we have a lot of fat in headquarters, but it is showing the commitment on the part of myself, as the Minister, to make sure that if at all possible we try to do it to be more effective and efficient and minimize the impact of the reduction exercise in the front line.

So perhaps Mr. Elkin or.... Let me go down the line. We could give you detailed information, without interfering with privacy issues, on the details of which positions are affected.

I just want to comment a little bit on the balanced budget issue. I think if you look at the opening comments, there was a statement that in the past we have had authorities go through their expenditures or come back for supplementary funding later on. This budget introduces a very different way of doing that. I think it's a good way of doing that. We're letting the authorities know, up front, what their budget limitations are, and we work from the beginning, starting when this budget is approved, so that we have better control and better ideas about how the expenditures are being made in each authority.

It is a different way of doing that, although officially the authorities have always been required to submit balanced budgets. It's just that there was a little bit of a practice or a convention that if the cost of expenditure goes above their budget, they could always come back for supplementary funding as long as it's justified. Whereas in this budget we're increasing their budget in the base, but there is more understanding and expectation that we will work every day, every month to make sure that our expenditures are in line with our budget.

With respect to affected positions at Stanton that Mr. Abernethy mentioned, I have to tell you once again that there were no other positions affected under this budget reduction exercise other than the Telehealth positions in Stanton and Yellowknife and Inuvik. We have accepted the recommendation, part of the recommendation, of the Standing Committee on Social Programs, and reinstated the Inuvik Telehealth position. But we believe that we have to do our part.

Health and Social Services is the biggest part of the expenditure of the.... Not biggest, but one of the larger ones. If we keep increasing and we don't do our part in keeping our costs down, that means other departments will have to do more reduction.

With respect to Telehealth positions, we believe firmly now that with the reinstatement of the Inuvik Telehealth position — we do have a headquarters position in Yellowknife — we can still continue to deliver the programs. There are lots of communities in the Territories without a Telehealth coordinator, but both services are still being prepared.

I just want to make an initial comment on that, and I'm sure that as we go forward line by line, we could have more detail back and forth.

The affected position at the OR Room: Mr. Abernethy mentioned earlier that there is a nurse being laid off in OR, and that is not entirely correct. I don't want to talk specifically to one person, because I want to respect the privacy rights, but I want to just advise the Members that we have done everything we can and the department has done enormous work and put in a Herculean effort to do the realignment exercise and the budgeting exercise without impacting front-line workers in this realignment exercise.

As a balanced-budget issue, we are in the process of working that out. I don't have all the details on that, but I'm applying similar principles: if at all possible we need to look at structural and transformational changes to the way we are delivering our health and social services so that we minimize the possibility of affecting front-line health and social services workers.

We have not finalized that budget plan yet. The Cabinet will be looking at options, and the Standing

Committee on Social Programs will, I'm sure. I'd be happy to share some of that information with the committee.

I'll leave it at that. I'm sorry to take so long, but there was a lot to add there. I wonder if the deputy minister could just give a little bit of detail on some of the issues raised.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Maybe just for the case of proceeding, I think we'll allow each Member to make general comments, and at the end of the general comments we can allow you as much time as you need to answer those general comments.

So with that, I have Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Bisaro, Mr. Ramsey, Mr. Bromley for general comments. Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm glad to see answers are free-flowing tonight. I thank the Department of Health for coming before us, and I'm going to keep my opening comments specific to the Minister's comments.

That said, I'm pleased to see the infrastructure, not just here in Yellowknife but throughout the Territories. I know this investment will go a long way. I'm very happy that Yellowknife will be receiving a primary downtown clinic. I've heard from a number of people. Most recently, a couple of weekends ago, I was at Canadian Tire, and someone was telling me how difficult it is to get in to see a regular doctor nowadays. At the doctor's they have to book weeks in advance just to get a spot, so they take either themselves or their kids to emergency, where they have to wait hours just to see a basic doctor over something simple. They certainly wish there was a more streamlined approach.

I've heard a number of concerns — I would describe it as no fault of the staff — in the context of the triage approach. It's the approach that exists and works, but the fact is, it is slow for people with everyday concerns who just need a little help, as opposed to the emergency ones, which it's designed for.

So I'm really pleased to see that the primary care clinic is being moved forward, finally. This is an initiative.... I couldn't tell you exactly when it first came to light, but I'm sure it must be in the range of seven or eight years ago. Someone came up with this idea of consolidating all the clinics and putting a primary clinic downtown. That way, we could take some stress off Stanton. It's phenomenal.

I'm always impressed when government moves at the speed of government. So much goes on by, long before anything gets done. This is a fantastic example of this. But the fact is, maybe it's this project's turn, and I'm kind of glad to see it's on the books.

Mr. Chair, I'm quite curious as to where it will show up — the acquisition of what land or what spot or what facility will be turning into this. I certainly hope that the government, as I've said on a number of occasions, does not purchase a lease for life. I often find it quite concerning when there's no end in sight for these things, or no option to buy after a certain number of cycles. This would be a horrible prospect to invest in unless the government was the end benefactor of owning a building or some type of capital investment.

Mr. Chair, another project I'm quite pleased about — and I know a number of members here are — is the territorial dementia facility. It's a significant piece of infrastructure in this community, because it will finally deal properly, in an appropriate and respectful manner, with people who are suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's. I know that YACCS, the Yellowknife Association of Concerned Citizens, has worked tirelessly with a number of members there to bring this project to life. They've struggled for many years. This is quite a credit to their lobbying and pushing, and the pursuit of a number of MLAs to keep this project on the books for many years or, I should say, at least on the radar of government for a number of years. Moving forward with it, with the launch a month or so ago, was certainly a significant movement. Without the partnership from groups like Diavik, I don't think the project would be built. I'm very grateful for their contribution, because this infrastructure is, of course, needed, as many other pieces here are needed throughout the North. My only fear is, of course, that this is tied to the budget, and the project's success or failure will be tied to the budget. I will have questions for the Minister, at this time, to find out whether, if this budget doesn't proceed in this forum, they will be lost in this potential capital investment.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to seeing the outcome of.... Again, speaking of the Minister's opening remarks, I look forward to seeing the evolution of this \$150,000 to collaborate with MACA on developing a framework for ground ambulance and highway rescue. I know when I was on city council with Mr. Ramsay and Ms. Bisaro, that was always an issue — that the Yellowknife fire department was responding to emergencies. There was always, of course, the fairness of compensation as well as a number of other issues. So it's finally nice to see it again — fine work from government moving at the speed of government. The fact is, this is finally another initiative moving forward, and I'm glad to see it. I'm sure the city will be quite pleased, as well as other areas such as, probably, Hay River and maybe even larger centres that have their own ambulance service.

Mr. Chairman, although this moment's probably not the time, I'm certainly curious as to the description of where these 17 positions are being reduced.

I would like the information on a line-by-line basis. If it can't be read aloud, I'd certainly like it on a piece of paper for myself.

The issue, really, is the 17 positions in Yellowknife. The fear is.... We've heard from a number of sources, whether they're in ORs maybe mentioned, or in other areas. I've heard a diabetic nurse has been let go; what happened, more accurately, was that someone left and they decided not to re-staff. That's having an impact. That's affecting constituents of mine who are having those types of problems. I just want to make sure we find out what and where spots have been chosen to be eliminated. Again, I say that it's a public document. I'm sure I'm not the only one here who would like to see the detail of exactly where they — supposedly strategically — let someone go.

Just on that note, the fact is.... Fundamentally, I'm a little cautious on agreeing that strategic analysis has been done on a lot of these positions. I don't reserve that comment strictly for the Department of Health; that's probably for most departments. I wonder what motivated them to choose one person or one position over another. On that point alone, I wish, as a Regular Member, we had more input on that. I know there are a number of positions in sectors of government that, I feel, probably do little to nothing and could have gone first before some of the things that have been chosen.

On the federal wait-time money, I certainly hope the Minister will highlight a little further on what we will realize and see what's happening out there. She highlights, here, \$1.8 million for patient wait-time guarantees. Whether that's here in Yellowknife at Stanton or at the Yellowknife Health Authority or throughout the communities or the territory, I'd certainly like to see where that is highlighted directly on the ground. The principle of that is, I want to make sure people are served up front and by the front-line workers. That's really where they have the biggest impact.

On that note, I've heard from a number of constituents about their concern — and this goes back to the 17 positions. The fear is that the front line has often been attacked, whereas the management line has been cushioned, and the senior management has been covered with high honours to ensure they were protected. Oddly enough, they are the ones who have the highest salaries and whatnot.

These are just opening comments. I just want to leave it with one final area. It was mentioned earlier, and I'm sure it will be mentioned a few more times, about the locum nurses. I'd like to repeat some of the comments made by, I think, Mr. Abernethy. At a constituent meeting of mine

I heard from a number of nurses about the fact that overtime is at its max.

To that detail, I'm going to ask what the cost of that is and what the cost of it is in the sense of affecting our hospital and our bottom line. I wouldn't be surprised if that was related to that \$11 million problem that Stanton has. All these things are cumulative in how this place is being operated. The nurses were telling me a little more about when it gets to be late at night and their phone rings; they know who's calling, because no one wants to work and there's a shortage of staff.

Again, I'm highlighting comments already said, but I've heard them myself. I've had the pleasure of recently being in the emergency ward. I could see how busy they were, serving people and trying to do their best. I watched people come in and said, "Well, they got the phone call. They were really short and they had to be there."

The fact is, it causes me to wonder.... The point was made earlier: if we hired a few more people and built in that redundancy factor, that probably could make a big difference and go a long way in balancing out the stress. The burnout factor is high. Sure, if you're young, it's always exciting to get a lot of extra overtime and whatnot; the older people like lieu time and whatnot. But you reach a point in your career where you just don't want that stuff anymore. You want to do your job and go home at the end of the day, be with your family or whatever is important to you. This so-called stuff of overtime and lieu time, I think, burns out the experienced person. They really like to focus their energies and time elsewhere. That said, it really comes down to the principle of reasonable and fair and responsible management.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to thank you for this time. I shall be listening eagerly to the other Members as they bring forward some observations and comments on the Minister's opening statement.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Next on the list I have Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of comments. I will have questions when we come to the various sections within the document. These aren't in any particular order, but just as we've gone through the document, a number of things have struck me.

I am pretty much amazed at the amount of money we spend on medical travel. I feel there has to be some method of reducing the amount of money we spend on medical travel. This is an area I think the department needs to seriously look at.

The other area — and these are sort of tied in, for me.... I'm disappointed that the Stanton Telehealth coordinator position was not reinstated. I accept the

explanation from the department, but I don't agree with it. We can agree to disagree, I guess. I feel really strongly that if we can expand our Telehealth services within hospitals and health centres — basically, all over — it's going to assist us in reducing some of our medical travel costs. I think there's an awful lot of instances where a Telehealth visit could replace an actual airplane or drive or whatever to the larger centre to see a medical specialist.

I am concerned with some of the ways the funds have been saved — some of the reductions within the budget. I think there are about six or seven reductions to professional development for, mostly, nurses. The doctors seem to have managed to retain theirs. I'm somewhat concerned that if we don't provide incentives for professional development and we don't provide options for nurses to take advantage of training and re-profile themselves and so on, then that's going to have an effect on keeping our employees long term.

It was mentioned in the standing committee's report about multi-year funding for non-government organizations. I don't remember if the Minister mentioned it or if it's elsewhere, but I understand there is some move toward providing multi-year funding for NGOs. I think that's a great thing. I want to make sure the department does go forward with that.

I am more concerned about the fact that I don't see any evidence in this budget of increases to account for forced growth for NGOs. Once we get there, maybe I'll get an explanation for it. But to me, that's a huge concern. It's one thing to give an NGO a three-year contract. If there's no avenue for them to get extra funds for forced growth, then it really doesn't do them any good to have a multi-year funding agreement.

Affected positions. And, unlike some other Members, I do have a copy of the 17 positions; we did get it. I don't know if it's the same one that you guys are going to give us, but the committee did receive it from the department. I do have a question, though. The data that we have indicates 15 positions. Yet when we got the extra information from the department, it's got 17 positions and two of them say "TBD." So when we get there, I'm certainly going to want a little explanation as to why we have two positions identified and we don't know what they are. Or you can tell me that it's 15 and not 17.

Another issue that comes to mind for me — and perhaps the information is there and I can't find it — is that there doesn't seem to be any sort of reference or indication that there's money provided for addictions treatment and services. Again, it might be there, but I don't see it itemized. I feel very strongly that we do need to provide those services

to our residents. We've had this conversation before. In Yellowknife I think we need a centre to provide that sort of service. Perhaps the consolidated clinic will do that for us. I don't think the hospital is the right setting for addictions treatment.

Funding for Indian and Inuit health services is a huge problem, as the Minister's well aware. I just have to say out loud that this agreement needs to be renegotiated, and it should have been done two years ago, I think. So whatever needs to be done to get that done, do it.

It was mentioned earlier that the money has been earmarked for highway emergency services and that this is a shared project with MACA. That's great. There is a need for that particular service and for it to be provided, and the communities shouldn't have to fund that on their own. I'm curious to know how the departments will work together and to know how much money MACA has budgeted. I see \$150,000 here, but I don't know how much money there is in total.

As to the Stanton issue and staffing at Stanton and so on, I recognize that the Minister really can't answer those questions because it's not within the purview of the department. However, the Minister is responsible for the authorities from a monitoring point, and I'm concerned that Stanton needs to develop a master plan. I know she's working on it. It's mentioned in the standing committee's report as well — that the committee's not going to support throwing money at Stanton unless there's evidence of a master plan, and a good master plan. I encourage the department to make sure that gets done sooner rather than later.

I have to mention the locum nurses problem and the overtime problem at Stanton and so on. Again, it's not really something the Minister can speak to, so I'll just leave it at that.

Lastly, I haven't noticed in the document where health authorities have received any kind of an increase in funding for their own forced growth. It could be there, but I'm going to ask some questions when we get there to try to understand that the authorities have been given an increase, certainly for this year. They've been told to live within their means, but we have to make sure they at least have a reasonable figure to live within.

The only other thing I have is the nurse practitioner positions within Yellowknife. There were two positions that were going to be lost. I thank the Minister for the work she did and the department did in providing a six-month solution. That's great. Those two individuals are particularly happy. However, we need to have a longer-term solution than just one that's going to last six months. I anticipate hearing something, I would hope, prior

to this six-month period being up, that we've got a longer term solution for the nurse practitioner positions within our health services.

That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Next on the list I have Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to thank the Minister and her staff for being here with us at this late hour in the day. I appreciate their time.

I wanted to start off by thanking the Minister for her hard work on the dementia facility here in Yellowknife. As well, some thanks have to go out to the former Minister of Health and Social Services, Mr. Roland, and Mr. Miltenberger, who played a role in getting the project where it is today.

Applause.

It's high time the Northwest Territories had a service here in the NWT that will cater to those elders with Alzheimer's and dementia. I think it's long overdue. Again, thanks.

I also wanted to thank — I know Ms. Bisaro mentioned it — the Minister as well for listening when it came to the nurse practitioner positions here in Yellowknife. I know it's a short-term fix, but thank you for your flexibility and your ability to listen to our concerns. We appreciate that.

I thank the Minister. She is in a very unenviable position, being the Minister of Health and Social Services. Our jurisdiction, obviously, is not alone with the rising costs of health care. In fact, we probably see it a little bit more than other jurisdictions, given our geographic location in northern Canada. We always have to, as Mr. Abernethy said, find new ways of doing business and make sure that every dollar we're spending is spent effectively. That's why I sometimes come across as maybe giving the Minister a bit of a hard time on the accountability side of things and what's happening at Stanton. I don't want to see us wasting or losing out on opportunities to spend money more effectively and more wisely. That's the reason I raise so many concerns about Stanton and its operation. I don't want to see any more ward closures there. I don't want to see any more positions lost at that hospital.

The Telehealth coordinator: arguably, that position is going to save us money, so why the department would look at cutting there.... I'm not quite sure, again, that I understand the rationale for cutting a position that, like I said, arguably is going to save us money. There was talk earlier, too, of the nurse in the OR. There are rumblings that there might be more layoffs or affected employees at Stanton. Again, I don't know if we need to be looking at that.

I mentioned earlier in this session that nurses out at that hospital are working alongside the locum nurses, and I think there still is too much of a reliance on locum nurses. I think HR should be involved, too, in trying to open up positions. I think we should be increasing the indeterminate float pool at that hospital so that we do have the ability to hire more nurses that are living here.

We let our nurses go, and then we hire them back and we fly them back. To me, that's taking a step backward. We want to ensure that our nurses are living here and they're happy. I don't know if that's necessarily the case out at Stanton today.

Ms. Bisaro also talked about the Stanton master plan, and I'm not sure how we would, or why we would, embark on spending millions and millions of capital dollars at that facility without a master plan. To me, it's ludicrous. We shouldn't even be thinking about that. That master plan should be the blueprint by which we go forward and we get a plan for how the hospital is going to be run.

I've had lots of issues with how it's been turned into an office building, and we're putting too much administration in there. That's very expensive office space. I think, when we're looking at the master plan, we have to ensure that it is exactly what it was designed to be, and that's a hospital, not a glorified office building.

I disagree with Ms. Bisaro a little bit on some of her comments, because I believe we have to use the Minister: she's our conduit to Stanton. I mean, we've got no other avenue. We have to go through the Minister. She's accountable to us. The questions are going to come, and somebody has to answer the bell when it comes to money and accountability issues at that hospital.

We've had many discussions about the management there. I won't waste any more time here, talking about the management there, but I do think there needs to be changes.

Again, I know the Minister, and again, she was on this side of the House not too long ago, raising the same issues, talking about the same things. I'm glad to see that she's in her position, and I have a lot of faith in your ability, Ms. Minister, to deliver on running a first-rate health care system here in the Northwest Territories.

I'm glad to see Mr. Cummings is there as well. I know he's got a tremendous amount of background experience in the area too, so I'm happy to see him there.

You know, for the first time in a long time, I think there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and I think we can get there if we work together and share information and come up with a way to do business better.

That's about it, Mr. Chairman, for me. Again, I've got a number of questions as we go through the detail, as well, but I wanted to thank the Minister and her staff again for being with us tonight. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Next on the list I have Mr. Beaulieu. Oh, sorry. Mr. Bromley, Mr. Beaulieu, and Mr. Jacobson. Mr. Bromley.

Mr. Bromley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to try not to repeat too many of the things we've heard already. I have many of the same issues, and there's general agreement there.

I also want to thank the Minister and her staff for being here in support of Health and Social Services and their authorities.

I think, first of all — and here I am, repeating already — I have to stress support for non-government organizations. You know, the people across the Northwest Territories that are self-motivated and generous with their time and skills all represent opportunities as well as amazing assets that we have in the North. I think working with them and supporting them is a respectful and also a very wise way to go.

I was encouraged to hear about the interest in the multi-year funding, and maybe there's been a little start on that already.

I wanted to mention in this area that I've talked about YACCS already today: the Yellowknife Association of Concerned Citizens for Seniors. There's the Centre for Northern Families and the YWCA. There's also a number of organizations involved in working with the homeless, and many others.

Particularly with wages and what that can mean to retaining qualified staff in these organizations that are obviously competing with government and industry in the roaring economy that we have today.... The predictability that multi-year funding brings can help somewhat with that, but obviously, the wages issue needs to be addressed directly and looked at from year to year.

Finally, of course, the cost of living, and I think Ms. Bisaro mentioned that specifically. Obviously, facility maintenance, utilities, fuel, food and so on are rising steeply.

I wanted to mention emergency room services as an area that I hear about. These are obviously the very front-line services where our facilities exist. And particularly, I understand, we're down on our admitting clerks, even to the point where nurses and — rarely, I suppose — doctors are having to be taken away from care services to do the

administration of admission and so on, particularly in the evenings.

Somewhat associated with that is the whole idea of security issues in our hospitals. This has been raised very strongly: issues of both theft and safety, and safety of both young and elderly patients as well as the medical staff themselves. There have been a number of horror stories that have come out, and the potential for very serious consequences is high. We are trying to get by with fewer security staff — and less-trained staff, for those that remain.

The need for more effective plans and their implementation for a number of areas that probably have been mentioned: making good use of nurse practitioners; long-term vacant positions for nurses in small communities, and these vacancies have downstream impacts on other people and facilities; and of course, the locums that have been mentioned. I think there's been some tune-ups there, and we're already enjoying some significant savings, but again, there's probably more room for progress there.

Something that's been highlighted in my riding is translation services and how extremely important that can be, especially with our elders when they need health services, and especially on an emergency basis. I'm not knowledgeable about what services are provided. I'm highlighting the importance of it and, if they are vacant, making sure they're filled as quickly as possible.

The Health and Social Services authorities have been brought up as opportunities for efficiencies; working with them to stay within budgets. Some clear tune-ups are needed there, and I'm looking forward to working with the Minister and her staff on these as we get into a lot of things that we've already had mentioned.

On the positive side I also wanted to mention the territorial dementia facility. It deserves a repeat.

I'll mention respite services. Our amazing volunteers and family members who are extending their services, sometimes at considerable cost, deserve our respect and our recognition, and I really appreciate the increase of respite services. I hope that extends to aftercare in the communities for addictions clients that are returning to communities.

I'm going to leave it there, at that spot. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): Thank you, Mr. Bromley. Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have very few comments. From the perspective of my communities of Tu Nedhe, Fort Resolution and

Lutselk'e, I think one of the key issues is for the department to work on prevention.

There are many ways to prevent some of the chronic diseases that are in the small communities, even starting with diabetes, where there needs to be something done. There's a high rate of diabetes. I'm not sure of the rate. I just know a lot of people that have diabetes, at least in my hometown of Fort Resolution. I think the department should be working on the prevention of the various diseases, starting with diabetes. I think preventing that would be, of course, a lot more economical than treating diabetes, so I think that a lot more effort should be put into prevention.

I think that community wellness is an area that is very important. I think that A&D workers in communities need to have proper quarters for counselling individuals. I know that in my communities, the alcohol and drug workers are part of other office workers, and they're all in there together. Sometimes when individuals go for counselling, whether it be for drug or alcohol or one of their addictions, then they're walking through a bunch of other people who are standing around or working at the office and visiting around there, because it's become quite a centre for individuals to drop by and visit with people there, or do some business with them or whatnot in the office building.

So I think that community wellness should be a priority. Again, working in the area of prevention in both of these areas — drugs and alcohol — prevention is also something that would go a long ways. It's a lot more economical to prevent people from getting into addiction problems, as opposed to treating the addiction problems.

I spoke earlier, in my Member's statement and previously, on counselling and so on. I believe that the department's headed in the right direction with the social workers that are being brought into our communities. But there's always a natural turnover when you have employees that are not specifically from the community, so I feel that the department has to do something to maybe change the standards that are required in order to become a social worker.

And very importantly — for something that's operated out of headquarters here in Yellowknife but it affects all of the communities — is policy development. I'm not sure if policy has to be written a certain way because some of the various acts that the department works under have to be applied a certain way. I'm not 100 per cent sure on the detail; I'm not sure of the detail at all, actually. However, I do see the results, and the results are that the policies don't fit the smaller communities that well. Individual social workers are doing their jobs, and they're doing a good job of carrying out their mandate according to the policies and

procedures laid out by the department. It conflicts with the way people view things.

Just one area that I've looked at a little bit recently has been the whole issue of child-care work and child apprehension and so on, although I guess it's not a really major issue in these two communities. However, some of the other people from those communities that are located, for example, in here or Hay River and so on are also people that are my constituents that have had their children apprehended.

From the outside just looking in, from a layman's perspective, it would seem like such a natural thing to be able to keep the kids with other family members in that family or that circle that would be more than capable of taking care of the kids, but the reality is it continues in one direction. It's a very hard thing to change, and once it gets rolling, I think that.... Once it happens, it's very difficult to reverse. Once these policies are applied, it's very difficult to reverse. They're almost irreversible until you get way up the ladder — maybe to the ministerial level or maybe the deputy minister level before things can be reversed.

It's got to be a situation where individual social workers coming into a community have to have a good understanding of what they're dealing with. I think that's part of the issue: sometimes people don't take responsibility for their past actions, but not taking responsibility shouldn't be punished by losing your kids for the rest of your life. There's got to be a balance somewhere, and I'm hoping that the department's able to do some work in the policy development area that could be more sensitive to what happens in the smaller aboriginal communities.

Another area I'd like to just touch on is home care in the small communities. These are small programs compared to some of the huge programs and huge projects that are all over the North. In small communities there's very little there, but what is there should be supported by the department.

In both communities, I've heard, there are concerns with the home care workers, whether there is too much work, not enough support, or other things that could be a problem.

I know that in Lutselk'e the issue is very clear: they just need more home care workers for the community, considering all the elders' households that do exist.

Along with other departments home care is another good program that prevents elders from having to be forced into a care type of facility. I think everybody knows that an elder living at home, getting a little bit of home care, making sure that the unit's in pretty decent shape, is going to cost the government a lot less than if that individual were to

be relocated to a care facility of some sort, whether it be a level 1, 2 or 3. I don't really know the difference; I just know the words. I know that there are different levels of care: that one requires up to a nurse, and the others probably require a lot less. I think some of those home care workers could help elders remain in the community.

Once an elder does go beyond the ability to take care of themselves 24/7, and with a little bit of support from local home care workers and so on, then the elders should also remain in the communities for their last days too. I don't think that's something that the department has taken a really close look at. I know it's really difficult to do, and it may be costly, but it's also very important. It's very important to the people of the community; it's very important to the elders; it's very important to the families. So sometimes, when you have things that are paramount to the people in the small communities, the importance of them having their elders remain in the community for their last days is something that I think the government should pay for, if need be. Thank you.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Mr. Jacobson.

Mr. Jacobson: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It's good timing today, because I was speaking on this today in regard to doctor shortages in my riding of Nunakput in the Beaufort-Delta.

To serve my people of Nunakput, doctor shortages need to really be looked at with the Minister and her staff, to try to utilize the doctors out of Yellowknife to come up north for short stints, and to assist the nursing staff in the smaller communities — the locum nurses who come into the community who don't really know the community people. They're only there for two or three weeks at a time, and there's high turnover.

I can see where the turnover is coming from. In my riding the nursing station in our units has four apartments above the health centre. I went on a tour a couple of times. The furniture, kitchen utensils, no TV, blankets and stuff — I could see why they want to leave.

The biggest concern for me in health is my elders in my communities not seeing doctors for as long as six months. Today I got a call from Ulukhaktok, and still no doctor.

Our elders won't complain about pain or the way they're feeling until a family member tells them they have to come to the health centre. The next thing you know, the elder is being medevaced out of the community and brought into a larger centre. This has to be looked at. It's a real serious situation I have in my riding with the doctor shortages.

My colleague Mr. Beaulieu brought up a lot of my concerns with Health and Social Services. He touched on that for me.

The last one I'd really like to speak on.... I'd like to thank Dr. De Clerc and his staff up in Inuvik in the Beaufort-Delta for providing the service for the Beaufort-Delta area, and also the staff at Stanton Hospital. I used the emergency last week, and they're really good at what they do. So I commend them and all the hard work they're doing for both Stanton Territorial Hospital and the Inuvik Regional, and all the good work they're doing with all their staff.

Again, the Minister knows the issues I have with the doctor shortages and the problems I have in my riding.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): Thank you, Mr. Jacobson. Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I, too, would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. De Clerc and the nurses who have made an effort to stay in the communities, regardless of the conditions they're working under. They're short-staffed, they're short of doctors, but they still make attempts to do their best.

As an organization we're talking about health care, but there are different types of health care in the Northwest Territories. You have urban health care, in which you have clinics, you have walk-in clinics, you have a major hospital — you can, basically, have lots of NGO support. In the communities in the rural parts of the Territories it is a service that, in some cases, is not even existent. In Tsiigehtchic we don't have nursing. The basic programs and services are not to be had.

It's the same thing with mental health and dealing with alcohol and drug programming. We've revamped that program to try to make it more accessible throughout the Northwest Territories, but we've made it so stringent we cannot find the people to fill those positions in those communities.

A lot of those positions could be provided to deal with alcohol, drugs and mental health issues in those communities. In Fort McPherson some 27 years ago, Mr. Neil Colin and his wife started the alcohol and drug centre on their own, because they felt that someone had to take on that responsibility and let people know there were problems with alcohol in that community. I think people like that have broken the trail to realize that as communities, you can take on more of these responsibilities by just doing something.

As someone who has represented the Mackenzie Delta region for years — ever since I've been here, since the 13th Assembly — I don't think I've talked

more about this since the 13th Assembly, until the Minister was blue in the face.

But yet again, it's an over-\$2-million facility being built. They just built another facility, just outside of Inuvik, for almost \$4 million, to help people deal with ailments that could be dealt with at the local level. You don't have to send people to Yellowknife or Edmonton, or apprehend children and send them away. There's an opportunity to work with the families, work with the children, in the local region or local community, and find workable programs that meet the needs of the people.

In the North we sometimes have great ideas, but some of these programs and services don't fit all. We have to have a system in place so you can basically restructure, reformat a program so it meets the need that is unique to that community or that group of people. As a government we talk about community empowerment. I know in the 13th Assembly, that was the big catchword of the day. I believe people had the flexibility, through block-funding agreements, to basically deliver that program as they saw fit by developing a program for themselves.

As a government we talk about the cost of health care. A lot of these issues around health care are preventable. A lot of them originate from alcohol and drugs, substance abuse, health issues related to poor eating habits — things that can be prevented. If we put the focus in that area and — realizing that this is millions of dollars we're spending in this area — if we just give the tools and the ability to community members by way of healthy living initiatives and whatnot, and also deal with mental health, alcohol and drug issues locally, a lot of these medevac costs, the costs associated with mental health care, can be greatly reduced.

An issue I've touched on before is child care, and also wellness of families — wellness of children, wellness of elders and whatnot — in our communities. Communities do take these issues seriously. They're trying to do what they can; they try to do what's best. A lot of the time they have a better working relationship with the federal Department of Health than they do with our own Health and Social Services in this government. They receive funds from federal national organizations through Health Canada, through aboriginal funding initiatives in regard to Brighter Futures. I think that trying to work with our government, our regional operations, is frustrating. Little things that could be worked out, and should be worked out, are made so difficult that a simple drive down the road — for two hours, in some cases — is a burden to people in the Inuvik office.

I had an issue around the mental health position in Fort McPherson. I fought for years for that program. It was administered out of Fort McPherson since

1991 with its own internal programs and services. But just in the last couple of months we lost that position, as the person's moved on. There was very little support from the government for that particular person. If anything, they basically forced the community to finally say, "Enough is enough; let's hand it back to the government." Now that responsibility's being delivered out of Inuvik. For a community with a population of about 1,000 people, we have to depend on mental health services out of Inuvik, which I think is chaotic. We're going backwards instead of going ahead. We're talking about self-government; we're talking about the whole idea of empowering communities.

The other area, again, is that we have these camps in the Inuvik region. We just had a new camp that opened up just outside of Inuvik; they had the Tl'oondih Healing Centre outside of Fort McPherson; they're working on the Knut Lang camp just outside of Aklavik. The whole intention behind the investments made by these organizations is to find a way to deal with community issues, community problems, outside of the community.

We, as government, have to start working with these organizations, like NGOs here in Yellowknife, in regard to the different organizations that are working hard to deal with their support mechanisms here in Yellowknife. I think that we have to do everything we can to support those organizations.

Again, Mr. Chairman, this government has to come up with a plan to work with these groups and organizations, use the infrastructure that's there, use the.... Instead of building new infrastructure and whatnot, use what facilities are available.

There has been a bit of talk about the Inuit benefit insurance stuff, which is basically dealing with the federal government. People can't lose sight of the fact that these programs are underfunded by the federal government. A lot of aboriginal people have been complaining about that for years. We can't lose sight that yes, it is a federal responsibility, but you have to realize that aboriginal health here in the Northwest Territories is, in some cases, not as high as for the rest of the residents in the Northwest Territories. We have to realize that their needs are probably higher than other people's and, more importantly, that the money they get from Ottawa, or we get from Ottawa, is not enough. We have to fight that battle with Ottawa and not among ourselves.

In closing, I did touch again on the issue of apprehensions and the amount of money we're spending in that area. I feel quite strongly that as a government we cannot go back and have the residential school scenario dropped on us again. These children, once they're taken away from their families and put into a cycle of institutional reform

— in which, basically, they go from one foster care to another foster care to another foster care — become institutionalized into the young offenders system and eventually end up in our court system.

I asked the Minister the other day: what do you do with a child who's a ward of the state, basically in permanent care of this government, when they turn 18 years old and find themselves in jail? I think the response was, "Well, we're not responsible for those children after they turn 18." The problem is that these kids were under your care all through their teenaged life. As soon as they get into trouble and end up in our corrections system, we wash our hands of them. I feel it's unjust to that person who was taken away from their family, put into that scenario from one foster care home to another and ended up in a corrections facility. To me, that's exactly what we saw with the residential school scenario.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will be asking the Minister questions in these different areas as we come to them.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: I'll try to be succinct here. I'd like to start off my general comments by also stating that it's nice to see that the Minister's engaged and listening to the concerns of the Members. She's been very proactive in visiting the communities and making herself very aware of the issues that are facing the Health and Social Services Department. I know from experience that this is not an easy department, and yet she seems to be approaching it with some degree of energy and enthusiasm. I have mentioned to several Members — and not to her face, but several other Members — that it's reassuring to me that we have a Minister who's very engaged in the issues and who maybe can't always give us exactly the answers we want but at least knows what we're talking about when we ask the questions and raise our concerns.

Hay River is very fortunate. We have had a few challenges in the staffing area. Overall, we have had a fairly stable complement of staff in the Hay River health and social services area. We were fortunate to have Greg Cummings down there acting as a public administrator, and he continues to do so today. He helped Hay River through a very difficult time. That was much appreciated. Now, with the arrival of our new CEO, Paul Rosebush, I think we're on a fairly even keel there.

Mr. Chairman, the condition of the Hay River hospital is not good. I would like to have seen the capital for the master redevelopment of the Hay River hospital and Health and Social Services programs that are run out of there sooner in the

capital plan. We have issues with everything from bats to mould to sloping floors to just an ineffective, non-functional layout of our hospital. I would have liked to have seen it earlier on in the capital plan.

The fact that Hay River is outside the GNWT-wide health and social services system is also a challenge. Somebody made reference to it earlier tonight, when somebody may wish to transfer to Hay River. The flexibility is reduced by the fact that it is a separate union, so people can't transfer their service with their benefits to the Hay River Health and Social Services Authority. That creates some limitations in terms of deploying staff who may wish to....

You know what? I'm just going to stop right there. I have things to say, but I'll do it at another time. Something I'm saying or doing here is making the Premier laugh, making my colleague and my seatmate laugh, and it's very distracting and very hard to concentrate. So I'll save my comments on Health and Social Services for another time. Thanks to the Minister, at least, for listening.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. All right. Thank you for your patience. Minister Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I will try as best I can to be brief and say a few things on the Hay River hospital capital plan. I believe last year's development plan was approved and finalized and submitted by the public administrator, Mr. Cummings, and is going through the planning process.

On the question of all the statements made by Mr. Krutko: I do appreciate the passion and commitment he has for the future of the T'loondih Healing Society. I share that with him. As I stated in the Minister's statement and then in answers in the House, the arrangement we have there is quite temporary. It is a temporary measure until we find, waiting.... We want to hear from the community as to the proposal of it. I don't mind going back there to meet with the society again, when I have some time, to see if we can work out a proposal. The reason we have service from Inuvik office is that we do need to provide mental health and wellness services to the community of Fort McPherson. Right now the T'loondih Healing Society cannot do that.

Also, I just want to mention that in between sessions, I have had the good fortune of travelling to all the communities in Nahendeh, Beaufort-Delta and Fort Resolution, and Hay River a couple of times. I'm just really struck by the difficulties these authorities have and the challenges they face, especially in Nahendeh, Deh Cho region and the Beaufort-Delta, in terms of providing health care services to communities that are so scattered. I do think that the staff and the health care and social

services staff we have in the regions are doing a tremendous job. Obviously, there are always day-to-day, case-by-case issues that we need to address.

Because there were so many questions and comments made by Members on Stanton — I guess that's not surprising, because we do have five Regular Members from Yellowknife — I just want to say that I agree with Mr. Ramsay in that the Stanton Territorial Hospital master development plan is very much within the responsibility of this Assembly and of me as the Minister. I think what's going on outside of Stanton has an impact on the master development for the Stanton Territorial Hospital development plan. For example, the territorial dementia facility and the consolidated clinic that's being proposed in this budget and that we need to proceed with to pass this budget has as much impact on how the capital plan or space plan of Stanton will be.

For example, right now there are, I think, up to 18 patients in extended care who could actually be moved out of there and moved into the territorial dementia facility. That is a use of the hospital that we could be doing without.

Also, the consolidated primary clinic would be such an essential addition to how the programs are being delivered. That will have an impact on use of the space and the human resources in the emergency section, even diagnostic imaging work that's being done at the hospital. The plan is that some of that work will be done at the clinic.

The midwifery program, the counselling program.... Right now, Great Slave Clinic in Yellowknife has been a little bit of a mini-consolidated clinic. The plan for the big one is that we'll be able to consolidate four clinics and put them into the consolidated clinic and be better able to use the resources and spaces and all the other issues that go with that.

I want to comment on the newspapers, because it is really unfortunate. The NP policy that we have has been a little bit misunderstood in light of what's happened or some of the coverage and public exposure that the two NP positions at the hospital have received of late. I want to tell you that the training of nurse practitioners, hiring, recruiting and retaining them is a key piece to our future health care delivery system. I've had occasion to meet the newly trained NP of Fort McPherson and Yellowknife Health and Social Services authority, for example. I think Fort Resolution has newly trained NPs too. So it's a practice that we need to continue to do more of. It's just that I think the recent situation at the hospital might have made it sound like we may not be as.... It's an anomaly, I think, and I don't necessarily agree that the fix we have there is a short-term situation. What

happened at Stanton with the NPs reminds us that we need to work more closely and do better planning and implementation. We need to make sure that all different parties are talking to each other and making sure our NPs are placed. Although we did receive one-time funding or temporary funding from the federal government to implement these NP positions, the plan was always to incorporate these NPs into the operation. In order to do that, we need the health authorities, all the practitioners that work with them, the management, the workers, and everybody to work together to incorporate them.

I could advise the Members here that the department and I myself are committed to the future of NPs as an essential part of our health care delivery system. We may not be able to have all the NPs placed exactly where some NPs might want to be, but there's no question that we will continue to use and place NPs in primary care settings, and that is a very important part of our work.

Mr. Chairman, I took very detailed notes of everything all the Members have said. I think all these are going to come back in our line-by-line questioning, and I'd be happy to provide more detail. With that, I'm just going to end my response to general comments there, although I have to say that I want to thank Mr. Hawkins for the good words he gave about the capital projects that we moved on the territorial dementia facility and the consolidated primary clinic in Yellowknife. It appears that it may take me nine weeks to respond to a letter, but it only took me seven months to get these projects on the books. I'll make sure that he's invited for a photo opportunity when they finally open. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): Thank you, Minister Lee. Does the committee agree that there are no further general comments? Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Motion that we report progress, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): A motion is on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and is non-debatable.

Motion carried.

Chairman (Mr. Abernethy): I will now rise and report progress. Thank you, Minister Lee, and thank you, witnesses. Mr. Sergeant-in-Arms, please escort the witnesses out of the Chamber. Thank you very much.

Report of Committee of the Whole

The House resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Can I have the report of the Committee of the Whole, please. Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee has been considering Tabled Document 37-16(2); Main Estimates 2008–2009, Volumes 1 and 2; and Committee Report 6-16(2) and would like to report progress with four motions being adopted. Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. The motion is on the floor. Do we have a seconder? The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Item 22, third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, Item 23, Orders of the Day.

Principal Clerk of Committees (Ms. Russell): Mr. Speaker, Orders of the Day for Wednesday, June 4, 2008, 1:30 p.m.

Orders of the Day

- 1) Prayer
- 2) Ministers' Statements
- 3) Members' Statements
- 4) Returns to Oral Questions
- 5) Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
- 6) Acknowledgements
- 7) Oral Questions
- 8) Written Questions
- 9) Returns to Written Questions
- 10) Replies to Opening Address
- 11) Petitions
- 12) Reports of Standing and Special Committees
- 13) Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
- 14) Tabling of Documents
- 15) Notices of Motion
- 16) Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
- 17) Motions

18) First Reading of Bills

Bill 9: Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 4, 2007–2008

19) Second Reading of Bills

Bill 10: An Act to Amend the Pharmacy Act

20) Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

Bill 8: Appropriation Act, 2008–2009

CR 2-16(2): Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the Report of the Auditor General on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation Public Housing and Homeownership Programs

CR 3-16(2): Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the 2006–2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner

CR 4-16(2): Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning Report on the Review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates

CR 5-16(2): Standing Committee on Government Operations Report on the Review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates

CR 6-16(2): Standing Committee on Social Programs Report on the Review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates

CR 7-16(2): Standing Committee on Economic Development and Infrastructure Report on the Review of the 2008–2009 Draft Main Estimates

TD 37-16(2): Main Estimates 2008–2009, Volumes 1 and 2

21) Report of Committee of the Whole

22) Third Reading of Bills

23) Orders of the Day

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Madam Clerk. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Wednesday, June 4, 2008, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 8:40 p.m.