



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

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The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Wednesday, February 4, 2009****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, Hon. Robert McLeod, Mr. Menicoche, Hon. Michael Miltenberger, Mr. Ramsay, Hon. Floyd Roland, Mr. Yakeleya

The House met at 1:35 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Paul Delorey): Colleagues, before we begin, I would like to welcome you back to the Chamber today as we resume the Third Session of the 16th Legislative Assembly. A special welcome to all the guests in the gallery today and, for your information, we have two interpreters in the House today. South Slavey is on channel two and North Slavey is on channel three.

Colleagues, I trust that you have all enjoyed the winter recess and the opportunity to enjoy some well-earned time with family, friends and constituents. I hope that you returned today filled with energy and a renewed dedication for the work that we do for the people of the Northwest Territories. These are challenging times everywhere and I expect that your commitment will be tested as this House deals with issues that affect all Northerners.

I also expect that you will approach the session with the usual respect and consideration for your colleagues and for the institution that we serve. Let this Assembly be known for the quality of our debate, the respect Members show for each other and the dedication to the public good.

Before we begin, I would like to take this opportunity to mark the passing of a respected elder and former Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. I extend the condolences of this House to the family and friends of Helen M. Maksagak. Ms. Maksagak played a significant role in the history of the Northwest Territories and our neighbour Nunavut. She held the office of the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories from 1995 to 1999, the first woman and the first Inuit to do so. Ms. Maksagak then went on to become the first Commissioner of Nunavut. Ms. Maksagak was appointed as a member of the Order of Canada for her contribution to the history of both territories.

I would also like to extend the condolences to the House to all those families, friends and

communities that have lost loved ones since we last met. We are a very large Territory and a small interconnected population and we all share such losses. Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Colleagues, it is now my duty to advise the House that I have received the following message from the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, and it reads:

"Dear Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise that I recommend to the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories the passage of: Appropriation Act, (Operations Expenditures), 2009-2010, An Act to Amend the Appropriation Act, (Infrastructure Expenditures) 2009-2010, Supplementary Appropriation Act, (Infrastructure Expenditures) No. 1, 2009-2010, and Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 3, 2008-2009 during the Third Session of the 16th Legislative Assembly. Yours truly, Anthony W. J. Whitford, Commissioner."

Thank you, colleagues. With that, we will proceed to orders of the day. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 6-16(3):
SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS
PROGRAM**

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Members and the public for their interest in the Supplementary Health Benefits Program and Catastrophic Drug Costs Program. Mr. Speaker, since the details of the changes were announced last December, we have received numerous calls and questions regarding the programs. Comments were at times supportive of the direction we are taking with this new program, as a number of people will benefit from this new program.

The principle of providing benefits to those most vulnerable and who have no coverage has been well received. The implementation of a Catastrophic Drug Costs Program has also been widely praised and will ensure that no Northerner has to bear the

full burden of catastrophic expenses of prescription drugs.

However, during the implementation of the new program, gaps were identified. These gaps may create undue hardship for some Northerners who still need assistance with their medical costs. To ensure that the program meets the intent of this policy, the program design will be reviewed. As a result, we have postponed the implementation of the new program until September 1, 2009. This will provide the time needed to respond to the gaps and engage stakeholders in making the changes. We will do this by holding public meetings with stakeholders and the general public.

Let me be clear; the objectives of this policy are sound and will be respected.

The GNWT is committed to providing supplementary health benefits to eligible residents and families who do not have access to another supplementary health benefits plan.

The GNWT believes that:

- Government should make the best possible use of program resources by making a contribution towards a portion of the costs of certain supplementary health services and costs of drugs for eligible persons, recognizing that a limited budget means even eligible persons will likely have to assume some personal responsibility and incur some supplementary health costs.
- Territorial supplementary health benefits program should respect the Government of Canada's fiduciary responsibility to Aboriginal people.
- Territorial supplementary health benefits program should focus on providing benefits to those residents who are not already covered by an existing employer supplementary health benefits program or who are not eligible under any government-sponsored supplementary health benefits program (for example, Non-insured Health Benefits Program and Métis Health Benefits Program).
- Territorial supplementary health benefits program should emphasize coverage of preventative services.
- Eligibility for supplementary health benefits and catastrophic drug costs should be determined fairly through income testing.
- Territorial supplementary health benefits program should be designed in a manner that does not cause employers to reduce supplementary health benefit programs for their employees or provide incentives to opt out of third-party insurance programs.

I would like to again thank Regular Members for the comments and the public for their interest in this policy. In closing, Mr. Speaker the gaps identified will be responded to and I look forward to the implementation of this policy and providing coverage to those most vulnerable and ensuring that no Northerner is exposed to catastrophic drug costs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Miltenberger.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 7-16(3): NOTICE OF BUDGET ADDRESS

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will deliver the Budget Address on Thursday, February 5th, 2009.

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

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON FORT SIMPSON LIBRARY

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak about the current closing of the Deh Cho Hall in Fort Simpson. This building will soon be decommissioned. Government offices have been relocated to a new building. The last remaining tenant is the John Tetso Memorial Library and they have yet to find a new home.

This is cause of concern among community residents. The library is an important part of the community that provides a range of popular programs and services that promote literacy and ensures the community members have access to quality reading materials and information sources that would otherwise be unavailable.

I believe the government has the responsibility to assist the community in finding a new space for our library. We need a long-term solution to ensure that the library has a permanent home. One solution may be to renovate and expand the school library to accommodate public access. This has been done successfully in other NWT communities. This approach makes use of existing resources and encourages broader partnerships in the delivery of community services.

Reading and access to information is at the foundation of northern growth and development. Libraries play an essential role in supporting people of all ages to build their skills and knowledge. I urge the Minister responsible to work with the community to find a permanent home for this important part of our community.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MS. BISARO: Thank you. I, too, would like to say welcome back to all Members of this House. It's good to be back.

I'm going to speak today about a contentious issue; one dear to the hearts of those assembled in the gallery and dear to us on this side of the House as well. I refer to the proposed changes to the NWT Supplementary Health Benefits Program.

I can't say it often enough or loudly enough. This program has been poorly thought out, poorly presented and is based on a poor policy. Cabinet had lofty goals and, I hope, good intentions when they decided to go forward with this new program and policy. We should be providing health benefits to those who currently are left unprotected. I agree with that premise, but Cabinet didn't do their homework.

By using this policy change to fix one problem, that of a lack of health coverage for lower income workers and their families, they effectively created a bunch of new problems. Some examples: some disabled persons and people with families dealing with chronic conditions now face huge medical costs. Some of our residents aged 60 to 64 suddenly have no coverage at all. Our seniors, many on a fixed income, face a means test to determine if they will be able to continue to receive coverage.

This program is wrong on so many levels it's hard to know where to start to identify the wrongs. The means test tables show income levels which are unworkable because they're too low and require a health department expert to understand them. The Catastrophic Drug Program covers all drug costs except, oh right, you have to spend 5 percent of your income first before the program kicks in.

This policy change will cost people money. For many it's money they don't have. How does that fit with this Assembly's stated objective to reduce the cost of living for our residents? It doesn't. How does it fit with Cabinet's goal to increase the population of the NWT in order to increase our revenues? It doesn't. This proposed new Supplementary Health Benefits Program will drive our residents out of the Territory and I, for one, do not want that.

I recently heard someone say that we have a government without a conscience when it comes to the implementation of this program. I can only

agree and will have questions for the Minister of Health at the appropriate time.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you. I, too, would like to speak to the proposed and ill-conceived changes to the Supplementary Health Benefits Program here in the Northwest Territories.

Probably in my 13 years as MLA this is the most public feedback I've received on something the government proposed to do. I do appreciate the Minister's statement today, that in fact the government is willing to put this on hold -- the implementation -- and look at revising these changes so that they will be more thought out and will close those gaps as the Health Minister referred to them.

As my colleague Ms. Bisaro said, the problems with what the government proposed is wrong on so many levels and really dangerous on so many levels that it's hard to know where to start in a two and a half minute statement. As mentioned by Ms. Bisaro, thresholds were not thought out. They are far too low for people living in the North. This really affects quite a small number of people and I don't know if the government took into account what the losses and cost to our Territory would be in relation to what it costs for the supplementary health benefits for our seniors. I don't think they thought that through. That's the kind of information that we did not have access to. We had many questions. We did not get many answers. I do appreciate the work of the seniors who put so much thought into proposing good questions, which were then sent on to the department and we've been trying to get to the bottom of those questions.

We talk about attracting people to the Northwest Territories and all the things that we would do and all the incentives we would offer to get people to move here. Yet, for the relatively little cost that it takes to support our seniors living here in the Northwest Territories, it's unthinkable that we would drive seniors out of the Northwest Territories when they contribute so much to our economies. They have worked and contributed to building our communities and our Northwest Territories.

I have very serious concerns about this. I don't like the timing of the implementation amounts that are going to wait until September 1st, because everyone knows that we all are going to be gone and summertime is not a good time to get in touch with

a lot of people and a lot of stakeholders. I think the government should do more than postpone and defer the implementation of this. I think they should take it right back to the drawing board. I don't think that this should negatively impact any senior living in the Northwest Territories. The program is flawed. It's not good enough to say that those who can pay should pay. That is not a good premise for what they're doing.

Times are very difficult for everyone, including seniors. This is not a time to be stressing them out with these kinds of changes.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION SHORTCOMINGS

MR. BROMLEY: Greetings. Once again we gather to address people's priorities. The world is a different place since we last saw it in October, 2008. While the current recession brings hard times, the financial world will rebuild in just a few years. In contrast, the environmental and social deficits we are accumulating will last generations and can take hundreds of years to rebuild. Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity to begin to do things differently. To do so, we need good leadership and a new approach that will communicate and serve the best of our basic human values.

Mr. Speaker, a good government and good leadership begin with good communication. Unfortunately, this government's communication record is a crime against our people. It has become so atrocious that it now begs some kind of final resolution. From the vast upheaval over planned reductions that we failed to implement, the program reviews we have yet to see, the multi-year notice to affected employees, and now to the fiascos on supplementary health benefits, the reform of boards and agencies, and the Opportunities Fund, we have put our people through unnecessary and painful angst, fear and frustration.

The lack of good communication can be caused by a variety of factors: a lack of regard for the public and Regular MLAs, a lack of vision on which to provide context and direction for action, a lack of in-depth information and analysis and a lack of appreciation for the simple need to communicate. All of these unfortunate reasons may have been a plague during the past 14 months, but I can assure Mr. Speaker and the public, these reasons are both often and precisely pointed out by Members on this side of the House and, of course, the public.

Northerners are not adverse to change. In fact, they want to get things done and they want us to act on the critical issues before us. However, we want to see that their government is operating on the basis of well-researched and well-conveyed communication and with real opportunities to participate in meaningful ways. When we sweep away universal coverage of our senior supplementary health benefits, then we move to a fully income tested system of determining benefits without giving people a voice, we fail in our work.

This government needs renewal. We need to gel. We need good leadership. Mr. Speaker, let's get it together and begin to meet the expectations of our people. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you. I would like to welcome everyone back to the House and also the visitors we have in the gallery. I would like to speak today about the proposed changes to supplementary health benefits in the Northwest Territories. I would like to begin by thanking all of those who I have spoken to in person and those of you who have e-mailed, phoned and faxed your concerns to me over these proposed changes. I have received more and more calls and concerns over this issue than any other single issue in the five years that I have been a Member of this House. I am very thankful for all of the input that I have received. It takes a great deal of courage to speak out, and a special thank you to those of you who have shared your own unique personal situations with me and other MLAs.

A couple of days ago the Minister of Health issued a press release stating the implementation of the changes would be delayed from April 1st of this year until September 1st. This certainly shows that the Minister and government finally have woken up and realized that there are many legitimate concerns out there on the proposed changes to supplementary health benefits. However, I am very sceptical of the date of September 1st, which will come right on the heels of a summer recess where Members go back into their ridings and into their regions. My belief is that between now and September 1st, I do not have the confidence that the work, analysis and meaningful consultation can take place on such a large issue. I believe that the delay is intended to take the heat off of the government and off of the Minister in this session and that the intent is to pursue it on September 1st with the changes, without a real chance for Members to ask questions and be involved in this

process. What type of consultation can take place over the summer months when many are enjoying spending time with family or away from home?

The real answer is to send this back to the drawing board, get some real answers, consult and engage the public in a meaningful way and put all of the information on the table. The Minister has been quick to say that the proposed changes will be cost neutral, but she has never provided any evidence whatsoever to back this claim up. I understand and appreciate the gap that exists with lower income earners and families. I believe, as a government, we should address this gap. However, it should not be on the backs of seniors and families coping with chronic illness.

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

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. RAMSAY: Mr. Speaker, the income thresholds proposed are miserably low. Means testing individuals or families dealing with chronic illness is something we certainly need to re-examine. As a government, we cannot continue to make half-baked policy decisions that detrimentally affect the psyche and feelings of our residents. We need to keep people here in the North, not keep looking for creative ways to drive people away. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Member for the Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CONSTITUENCY CONCERNS IN THE SAHTU

MR. YAKELEYA: There are so many issues addressed to Members of the House in terms of the important issues that are coming up in this session here. I want to put forth in terms of the economic crisis that is happening in Canada, the Northwest Territories and people in our region, that for certain some things that have shifted from our people in our communities and have shifted in other areas that this government sees as a priority.

Lately I have been getting some calls from my region about what is going to happen, what is going to get done in our communities to feel some security by this government in terms of one looking out for them and helping them with the part of the recession. The population of unemployed people are very high in our small communities. There are basic needs that are being discussed and studied. Nothing is really happening in some of the areas of my region. Mr. Speaker, the economic stimulus that we are hoping that we could hear from this government through these budget sessions...I am going to be asking questions on what is being done

for our people in our communities, such as dearly needed infrastructure for our communities.

Now we come from different parts of the Northwest Territories where there is actually, within the Northwest Territories, have and have-not communities. A case in point, RCMP. There is not one type of indication from this government saying that they are going to have one in Colville Lake. Other communities are also asking them for the same type of basic service that other communities take for granted. We talk about roads and some communities have discussions on maintenance of roads. In the Sahtu we don't know what a road is all about because we don't have roads into our communities.

Working with our seniors, also, in terms of their basic health care, Mr. Speaker, these are basic services that we want for our people and putting our people first. I will be asking questions throughout the Assembly in terms of what is going to be done for our people in the Northwest Territories and I will stand up for my people. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you. It has been an interesting couple of months since we last met in this House. A lot has happened. My big issue, which is a major concern to me and my constituents and residents of the Northwest Territories, is the announcement made by the Minister of Health and Social Services two weeks before Christmas, that the Department of Health and Social Services would be eliminating their four very popular supplemental health benefits program, programs which are currently available to all residents of the Northwest Territories, specifically the extended health benefits for seniors program, the Specified Medical Conditions Program, the Additional Drug Assistance Program and the Indigent Program. The Minister mentioned that these programs would be consolidated into a single income tested program that would provide assistance to low-income families and residents who do not have medical coverage through their employers.

On the face of it, providing to these low-income families is the right thing to do and a good idea. The problem is that Cabinet, in their infinite wisdom, decided that the cost of the changes must be on the backs of NWT seniors who live on fixed incomes and families with members who suffer from chronic conditions. This is a bad decision. The proposed program is a bad program fourfold and will create

more problems than it fixes. Ultimately, I believe it will cost more than it saves.

Clearly the Cabinet did not do the research or cost analysis to identify the ramifications of implementing such a thoughtless program. I know this because I and other Members have continually asked for research and cost analysis information that Cabinet should have used to make an informed decision. To date, they have been unable to provide anything. Personally, I don't believe that any research or analysis exists.

Fortunately, we have a slight reprieve. The Minister has announced that she is deferring the implementation date. She has indicated that some elements of the proposed program might create undue hardship for some Northerners. Mr. Speaker, the Minister has indicated that the program design will be reviewed before the program is implemented on September 1, 2009. There are several problems with this.

First, the right thing to do, in light of the hundreds of concerns raised by residents of the NWT and the lack of evidence that Cabinet used any real analysis or financial information to make a decision, would be to eliminate the proposed program altogether. To go back to the beginning and design a program to support low-income families without adversely affecting those receiving support through existing programs. It's the right thing to do for seniors and those with chronic medical conditions.

Second, the timeline proposed by the Minister is ridiculous. There is no way that a comprehensive research and effective consultation followed by program design, final review and implementation can adequately be done by September 1, 2009. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. ABERNETHY: I won't take too long. I have two sentences left.

This is clearly nothing more than a delay tactic. If the timeline is upheld, the Regular Members won't have an opportunity to debate the program until after it has been implemented. This is inappropriate. Mr. Speaker, I'll have questions on this topic for the Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CONSTITUENCY ISSUES AND CONCERNS IN TU NEDHE

MR. BEAULIEU: Mahsi cho. [English translation not provided.]

Mr. Speaker, today I want to make a Member's statement to the people of Tu Nedhe, to advise the people of Tu Nedhe of the items that I will be working on in the next 25 days while I sit here in the Legislative Assembly. I will be working on the fact that the homeownership program in housing, which is a major issue in Tu Nedhe, seems to be progressing very slowly. I find that the programs are not assisting the people that they are intended to assist at this time. In the Northwest Territories there are approximately 17,000 residents and about 3,000 of those residents are residents considered to be in need, yet the NWT Housing Corporation has made a decision that four programs could cover the needs of all of those various needs across the Northwest Territories.

I also want to talk about the Income Support Public Housing Program, which has put 2,200 to 2,400 residents in the Northwest Territories who have never been on income support in their lives on income support. I want to ask the government why that is continuing and why the last government was allowed to put 2,200 to 2,400 residents on income support and this government continues to carry that through.

I want to ask this government why there is dust in the communities. Why is there no way of controlling the dust? There's dust all over the communities. It's a health hazard to elders and everything and yet nothing is done about that. Simple solutions could be looked at.

I want to talk about the youth and the need for youth workers in the communities, how the youth need assistance to be able to get out of their current situation and the situation of problems we're having with youth; how elders are dying outside of their communities, away from their family, away from their friends and so on. Why are there no proper addictions services, mental health services in the communities?

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to speak about important things like the cost of living in the communities of Tu Nedhe. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. The honourable Member for Nunakput, Mr. Jacobson.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
CONDOLENCES TO FAMILIES EXPERIENCING
THE LOSS OF LOVED ONES

MR. JACOBSON: Today I'd like to give condolences to Jeannie Keevik's and past-Commissioner Helen Maksagak's families. They were sisters. A couple weeks ago Jeannie passed away up in Tuk. I'd like to give condolences to her brother Albert Binder, her sister Ruth Pulk and their families, Stanley Keevik and all the Keevik family up in Tuk. Growing up in Tuk, I grew up two doors down from her. We called her little Nanook. She'd always have a smile and would give you words of encouragement and always looked out for everyone. She will be missed.

Condolences to all who lost loved ones since our last sitting in October. To everyone in the Northwest Territories, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

One thing I'd like to say, too, is Little Nanook would always tell us, "Listen to your elders." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Jacobson. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
IMPACTS OF ECONOMIC DOWNTURN
ON SMALL COMMUNITIES

MR. KRUTKO: Thank you. I'd like to welcome everybody back to the House. Mr. Speaker, our constituents are reaching out to each and every one of us in this House to improve the economic nightmare we are all going through in regard to the recession, the high costs of living, power costs, energy costs and, more importantly, the overall costs of living in the Northwest Territories. People are talking in our communities and in our ridings about this government's direction in regard to income supplementary programs, dealing with the supplementary health benefits which are basically putting more pressure on our seniors, and board reform which isn't really needed at this time, also housing in general, from social housing to homeownership. We have to wake up to the political reality of the economic situation we find ourselves in today.

The federal government and every government around the world are trying to find ways to work their way out of the recession. We have to do everything we can to improve the quality of life for the residents of the Northwest Territories and not continue to bail out companies that are not present in the Northwest Territories to the tune of \$30 million plus.

Mr. Speaker, we do have to find initiatives that will stimulate the economy today. We have to look at the possibility of looking at tax reform, looking at reducing the cost of fuel in our communities and also looking at the number one cost in the communities which is power. I know there's talk about a joint arrangement in regard to a purchase deal with ATCO Power, but the overall issue is what are we going to do for the residents of the Northwest Territories to improve the cost of living.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. HAWKINS: I rise today to give my voice to the clear opposition to any changes to the Supplementary Health Benefits Program. Mr. Speaker, taking away from seniors, taking away from families, taking away from everyday people is wrong and this needs to stop. At present, we're all well aware that there's a deferral of this policy on the table, but we're not fooled over here. We know deferral just means delayed implementation, so please don't fool us with this.

Mr. Speaker, I stand with the seniors, I stand with the everyday people on this problem. I'll stand with them until the end because they are just trying to get by and this government has found a way to make it just that much harder. The changes to the health plans are bad, period.

The objectives are not sound; they were flawed from the beginning. There has not been real hard work done to show that they just do not have any more money. Show me that the last straw has finally hit the ground. Show me that every stone has been turned and they found every dollar and there is no more to find. Show me what work has been done on those 4,000 absentee health care cards and show me you've put a stop to that fraud. Show me the act of kindness this policy delivers. Show me the fairness and equity that this policy has demonstrated, because I can tell you there is none. Show me where you finally put an end to the endless deficit at Stanton and Beau-Del. Where has this government gone to find savings such as using generic drugs instead of brand names?

Mr. Speaker, let me put some numbers on the table: 50 people equal a million dollars in transfer payments to this government. That's 25 families of two. That's 12 families of four. People are looking at the door and they're saying if this government doesn't want us, if this Territory doesn't want us, I'm sure other places in Canada will welcome us. Mr. Speaker, there's been talk about the gaps in the

system. Just like Jerry McGuire says show me the money, show me the gaps, Mr. Speaker, because we've only heard about the gaps, but we haven't seen the facts.

There are a lot of things that get wrapped up in this problem. What about the lost volunteer time? We all know that our seniors are one of the biggest contributing sectors in our economy to volunteerism. All of that will be gone; the multiplier effect.

We know practically one job affects four people. That is a serious worker effect to our economy.

Mr. Speaker, may I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement?

---Unanimous consent granted

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you. I support the delay only to find a way to derail this. I do not support the delay as a way to further implement this plan. What we need is clear, concise, honest and open consultation, as has been said by many of the Members today.

If this government finds ways to make the cost of living here worse, who is going to want to stay? It's hard enough attracting people to the North who are new, if we can't keep the people we have dedicated here.

In closing, I think this is the wrong path. The people have spoken. I don't know how many more names on a petition or any piece of documentation the Minister needs, but all she has to do is just tell us and we'll get every single one of the requirements that she needs to stop this policy.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had the opportunity to meet with the executive of the NWT Seniors' Society at lunch hour and I'd like to just recognize...I know there are lots of seniors in the gallery and I am sure they will all be recognized in due course, but I don't want to take up all the time. I'll just say President Tom Wilson, Mr. Leon Peterson from Fort Smith, Ms. Barb Hood, executive director of the NWT Seniors' Society, Esther Braden is sitting next to her, Ms. Eileen Collins from Hay River and Mrs. Bea Campbell from Fort Smith. I see other members sitting there next to them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

MR. ABERNETHY: There are a lot of people I'd like to recognize in the gallery, but for the sake of time I'll just focus on three constituents. I'd like to recognize Bob Malloy, Loretta Gamble, and Theresa Crane.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. The honourable Member for Deh Cho, Mr. Michael McLeod.

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: I'd like to recognize a number of people from my home town of Fort Providence who are here for the first time, I believe, to watch the Assembly in action. We have Chief Berna Landry. Welcome to her. Some elders: Daniel Squirrel and Sam Elleze. We also have Irene Lafferty joining us and Michael Vandell is here, president of the Bridge Corporation. Victor Tambour is also somewhere in this building. I've seen him around. Also I'd like to welcome my sister-in-law Melody McLeod and Carter, who is here to witness his grandfather in action.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: I'd like to recognize Mrs. Eileen Collins in the gallery today. She's president of the Hay River Seniors' Society and vice-president of the Northwest Territories Seniors' Society and has worked tirelessly to articulate the concerns of Hay River seniors with respect to supplementary health benefits and many other projects she's undertaken.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Member for Thebacha, Mr. Miltenberger.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: I'd like to recognize Ms. Bea Campbell as a past president of the NWT Seniors' Society and Mr. Leon Peterson, current president of the Fort Smith Seniors' Society. Welcome to the Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you. I would, too, like to recognize many people in the gallery: my constituents Loretta and Dick Abernethy, the Zaozirnys, Arlene Hache, and my lovely wife, Marianne. Big wave there. I also see Mr. Rick Edjericon, chair of the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board. Many of the elders that I would also like to recognize, and city councillors Lydia Bardak, David Wind, Dave McCann, possibly others. Welcome all.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Member for Yellowknife South, Mr. Bob McLeod.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you. I'd like to recognize my wife, Melody, of 35 years, and my oldest grandson who turned five on Monday and he's not here because it's his birthday present, we're just trying to get him started early. Also, some relatives and friends from Fort Providence: Irene Lafferty, Chief Berna Landry, elders Danny Squirrel and Sam Elleze. My Yellowknife South constituent Gayla Wick, and a long-time colleague, Floyd Adlem.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: I would like to recognize pretty much everybody in the gallery. I can't see anybody from where I'm at, so at the risk of leaving people out, I'm simply going to say welcome to the House to all the residents of Frame Lake.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

MR. RAMSAY: Later today I will be submitting a petition on behalf of the NWT Seniors' Society, so I wanted to recognize the president of the NWT Seniors' Society, Tom Wilson, secretary Leon Peterson, vice-president Eileen Collins, past-president Bea Campbell, and treasurer Blake Lyons, as well as Barb Hood, the executive director. Also, I'd like to recognize Ms. Arlene Hache, recently named to the Order of Canada. Congratulations and thank you very much for all your dedication and hard work on social concerns here in the Northwest Territories, Arlene. Also I see there's councillor Lydia Bardak, also a social advocate. Welcome to the gallery today and welcome to everyone else that's in attendance.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I also would like to welcome Mr. Tom Wilson, a Nahendeh resident of Fort Simpson and, for the third time today. It's a pleasure to see him in the gallery.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. I'd also like to recognize a constituent of mine in the gallery today: Mr. Roy Courtoreille, regional vice-president for UNW. Anyone else that we may have missed in the gallery today, welcome to the House. I hope you're enjoying the proceedings and it's always nice to have an audience in here.

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

Acknowledgements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 1-16(3):
50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY OF
THOMAS AND DENISE MANUEL

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last Saturday in Fort Good Hope a special couple celebrated their 50th golden wedding anniversary. Thomas and Denise Manuel celebrated in Fort Good Hope with family and friends from the Northwest Territories and I understand they had a wonderful time. So on behalf of the people of the Sahtu region, I'd like to congratulate Mr. and Mrs. Manuel on their 50th golden wedding anniversary and we wish them another 50 years more together.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 51-16(3):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a question for the Minister of Health and Social Services today. We over the years have asked many times for the Department of Health to review supplementary health benefits to see if something could be done for those folks that are working but do not receive coverage or benefits from any other source. I'm referring to mostly families who work for the private sector and don't have employee sponsored insurance programs and we thought that was a good thing.

The Supplementary Health Benefits Program was reviewed. Little did we know that inadvertently there would be this means testing which would affect so many of the seniors in the Northwest Territories. We did not know that would be part of the review and that the outcome would be this.

I would like to ask the Minister of Health and Social Services, what was -- for the benefit of the people of the North who may not understand why -- the motive for means testing supplementary health benefits for seniors in the Northwest Territories over the age of 60 years?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess the Member's question on the motive can be answered by the intent of the policy. The intent of the policy is to cover or expand the supplementary health benefits to those who do not have them right

now. We have a segment of the population right now, better known as lower income working poor, who may be self-employed or working for employers who do not have employer's coverage and are not getting those basic supplementary health benefits. We have situations like over the last few months where we've had people who need an artificial prosthesis that we were not able to approve, because that doesn't qualify under the existing health benefits.

I get asked at least once a week from Members to approve this or that or some of the discretionary issues. We have discovered that under the current program the only eligible factor is the age and your specific condition under the Supplementary Health Benefits Program and it would be helpful to consider one's ability or inability to pay. That is why the income testing was introduced. If the Member was to think that is the motive, that is why we have introduced the income test as one of the factors to determine the eligibility.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: That is the kind of comment that I was referring to in my Member's statement. When we keep hearing from the Minister of Health and this government that those who can pay should pay, but the fact of the matter is that for many, many years this government has provided support to seniors living in the North, where it is more costly to live. There could not be a worse time to be taking this away from seniors. It's costly to live here. Most are on fixed incomes.

I would like to ask the Minister, did anybody figure out how much money the government was going to save by implementing this? Was that considered at all? Because I would think it would not be a great deal of money that the government would be saving by this.

HON. SANDY LEE: I think that is one of the misunderstandings out there, and that is that somehow these changes are being introduced as a cost-saving measure. It is not. It is not a cost-saving measure. We do not implement health programs that way. Our health programs for every government are demand driven. When somebody gets sick, we pay for their care. When somebody needs a prescription, we pay for them under supplementary health benefits. So this is not a cost-cutting measure. We wanted to include a segment of the population that was not included before.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: When you consider the other types of supplementary health benefits insurance and support that's out there, government employees are covered, people who work for large corporations are covered, the Metis health benefit covers some folks, the non-insured health benefit covers some folks. When you calculate, take all the indigent people who are covered, when you take

them all out of the mix, how many people are there in the Northwest Territories who are not receiving supplementary health benefits?

HON. SANDY LEE: The people that are included are those who are making \$50,000 net income, or those who are not over 60, who are not defined as a senior, who don't have a specified condition, who do not work for an employer with a third-party insurance, who are not eligible for Metis health benefits or the indigenous aboriginal health benefits. So we estimate -- and these are hard because our population fluctuates so we cannot say in specific numbers -- but the analysis has shown that we exclude about 10 percent of the population on lower and working poor. We have families who cannot have their children go for dental care. Remember you have working poor and low-income families. I, as a student, would have not qualified for dental care and eye care and such.

Our intent was not to exclude seniors or a whole bunch of people. This was to expand the program and improve the program. As I have already stated, we understand that we need to work out the details better and we are committed to do that.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: It's interesting to hear that this was not a cost saving. Here's my question: How many seniors in the Northwest Territories over the age of 60 years who are not covered by any other health insurance does this change and policy going to affect? How many seniors in total?

HON. SANDY LEE: As I have already stated in my public statements, the income test threshold has been revealed to be too low; that a vast majority of our non-seniors are making a much higher income than that threshold. So we expect that if we were to implement the programs the way they're outlined, we may be excluding about 5 percent of top earning seniors from the basic Supplementary Health Benefits Program. But we have introduced the Catastrophic Drug Cost Program as a safety net so that nobody in the North will have to pay more than 5 percent of their net income for the Catastrophic Drug Cost Program.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

QUESTION 52-16(3):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MS. BISARO: Thank you. My questions are addressed to the Minister of Health. I'd like to thank the Minister for her statement earlier today and for her announcement earlier this week, and that's that the new Supplementary Health Benefits Program has been delayed. In my opinion, it's not nearly long enough. I agree with some of the comments

made earlier by my colleagues, that April 2010 is a far better date.

This delay is intended to respond to the gaps that have been identified through consultation. So I'd like to ask the Minister how she will ensure meaningful, comprehensive and open consultation on the implementation of this program. What is the plan and what is the schedule?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can advise you and the Members that that is in fact one of the main topics that were under discussion between myself and the executive of the NWT Seniors' Society. As I stated in my Member's statement, we are committed to doing consultation with the stakeholders. The Seniors' Society has suggested that maybe we should have a workshop so there can be back-and-forth exchange.

I have learned since this program had been announced last December that the families and individuals in the North come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, with all kinds of unique health needs and conditions where they had been accessing this program. I could tell the Member and the House and the public that my department and myself, as the Minister, are completely committed to doing a meaningful consultation so that we achieve the intention of this policy, which is to cover a vast majority of our citizens who are in need, as well as expanding the programs to those who are not eligible right now.

MS. BISARO: I would like to thank the Minister for her comments. It's nice to know that consultations are going to be happening with the NWT Seniors' Society, but they're not the only group of people who are affected by this policy change. There are many people who are not seniors who are also affected by this change. I need to emphasize to the Minister that there has to be consultation with them as well, because they don't have an organized group to be consulted, as such.

I'd like to know from the Minister that as this consultation progresses, as the schedule goes through, will the Minister guarantee to this House that all ideas and comments will be seriously considered; that the Minister remain open to making changes to this policy and to the implementation plan.

HON. SANDY LEE: Yes, we will be talking to all stakeholders, not just the seniors. I was just using that as an example. I say yes to the follow-up questions that the Member asked.

MS. BISARO: I want to emphasize to the Minister that I said "changes to the policy." I believe that in the Minister's statement earlier today that she made a statement that the policy will not change; that the policy is the base for the program changes that she wants to be implemented. I would like to ask the Minister again if she is open to changes to the policy, which to me means changes to the income testing, that that can possibly be dropped.

HON. SANDY LEE: I believe my statement was that we would keep the policy intent, which is to make this policy more fair and equitable. Income tests are a mechanism to achieve that, but obviously all the details are up for discussion. So we will go to the public with what we have learned, we will ask the public about what we need to consider, what we need to change. I have learned a lot in this process. I have made it clear from day one, December 19th, when I got the first e-mail, I learned new things and I responded to everybody, saying thank you for giving me that information, I will take that into consideration and we have lots of items under consideration and we will take some more and we will incorporate them all to make this program a better program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Final, short supplementary, Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to say that the Minister has often been heard to say that we have a Cadillac health program here, and that being said in comparison to other jurisdictions. Can the Minister promise on September 1st, 2009 an NWT resident will not pay any more for health benefits here than someone living elsewhere in Canada? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SANDY LEE: I believe there was somebody else who was quoted to say we have a Cadillac program. Mr. Speaker, I think there is no dispute by seniors and everybody that we do have a very good program for seniors, not only for health benefits but for housing, property tax exemption and such. I have told the NWT Seniors' Society that we are committed to making sure that we have a very good package of programs for seniors. So I will continue to work on that principle and I am sure everybody else will make sure that I do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

QUESTION 53-16(3):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. ABERNETHY: My questions today are for the Minister of Health and Social Services and are based on my Member's statement from earlier this afternoon. I was wondering if the Minister of Health could tell me what, if any, financial analysis was prepared and utilized by Cabinet to help them make an informed decision and responsible decision to implement the Supplementary Health Benefits Program announced on December 18th, 2008.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, it's general knowledge that these program changes were consulted on, discussed, debated in this House and outside this House between 2003 and 2007. The policies were changed in September of 2007. I do not have all of the calculations on what came about to achieving that. I have been responsible for implementing those, but the policy objective was not a cost-cutting measure and it is not necessary to make sure that we stay within whatever is budgeted under the Supplementary Health Program. So it is wrong to say we are making these changes on the backs of the seniors. That is not correct.

We still seek to cover the vast majority of the seniors. We seek to cover those who have chronic conditions, who have children with disabilities. We seek to cover them and provide them with the assistance. What the policy intent is saying is while we appreciate that we need to cover seniors, we need to cover those with chronic conditions, we need to add in an extra factor which is one's ability, an ability to pay as one of the criteria. It is a policy statement on the part of the government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. ABERNETHY: Thanks for that response. I was kind of curious as to what kind of financial analysis was done and presented to Cabinet to help them make a decision, an informed decision. Clearly there was none. Just as a note, I disagree. I believe this program change is occurring on the backs of the seniors as well as those individuals with family members with chronic conditions. You are taking money out of one pocket to put it in another. So since I am not going to get an answer to that first question, I'll ask my second question.

When the Minister presented the proposed program to Cabinet in 2008, did the Minister include a breakdown of the possible ramifications of implementation? By that I mean things such as the cost of a mass exodus of seniors leaving the

Northwest Territories, the \$22,000 transfer payment, the income taxes they pay, as well as the goods and services they buy and the services they provide by way of volunteering. As well, did she include or identify any costs related specific to the entire system as a result of more people choosing to go into the hospitals for care rather than staying in their homes, because under supplementary health as it exists now, they can stay in their homes and receive treatment in this system in order to make it so they don't have to pay. They are going to go into the hospital, so it's going to cost the system more. Did the Minister provide that information to Cabinet? Because I believe that would have helped them make an informed decision, which clearly they did not. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, obviously he didn't catch my first answer. An analysis was done, policy approved in 2007. Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you that our government's objective is not to encourage people to move away, not to incur extra costs because people are not taking drugs they need or medical supplies. We are committed to improving this program. We will cover the vast majority of our population who need the support from the government and that's what the seniors told us during the consultation between 2003 and '07; that we need to make the program generous for seniors. We have tried to do that and we will make sure we will do that so as we work to improve the program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Before I go on, I am just going ask Members to respect the amount of time that we have for question period and the opportunity for all Members to ask questions. The only way we are going to do that is if we shorten up the preambles and the answers to the questions. So I would ask Members to respect that. Supplementary, Mr. Abernethy.

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Clearly it is not the motive of the Cabinet to chase them away, but their actions are, in fact, going to chase people away. The announcement in 2007, you haven't mentioned any financial analysis. You keep saying analysis. You are now moving forward and you've indicated that you are going to do consultation. You indicated that you have done consultation in the past, which clearly was more of an information session. Can you tell me how this time around you are going to do meaningful consultation with the stakeholders? That doesn't mean you are just going to tell me you are going to consult. What are you going to do so we are actually engaging these individuals?

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Abernethy, I would remind you to address your questions through the Chair.

MR. ABERNETHY: Sorry.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, Members have been provided with information on the consultation that took place between 2003 and 2007. I agree with the Member, I know how to agree to agree, and agree to disagree. I understand that Members feel those consultations were not the way they should have been. That's not to say the consultations didn't take place, because there was lots of discussions with the NGOs and seniors' groups about how to change the Supplementary Health Benefits Program. Going forward, as I have stated in my Minister's statement, in answer to Ms. Bisaro's question and to other Members and to the discussions I had with the NWT Seniors executive society, executive of the society, I am committed to doing a meaningful consultation. We have learned a lot that we need to address since this was announced in the two months, that I was not aware of before and we will go through them and we will have a meaningful two-way exchange on how to work through this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Final, short supplementary, Mr. Abernethy.

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in your announcement, you indicated, the Minister indicated that she's going to be releasing the program, the revised program on September 1, 2009. In my Member's statement I indicated that I don't believe that's a reasonable timeline. I was wondering if I could get the Minister to commit to extending the implementation date to April 1, 2010, at the very earliest and that during the research and facilitation...Sorry, and doing the research and facilitating real consultation with affected stakeholders which will result in an acceptable Supplementary Health Benefits Program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. SANDY LEE: I believe the objective of the Members and the seniors in the gallery and everybody I have talked to is to make sure this program is good qualitatively and it's not, the time is not the most important thing; it's that we do the right thing. We are committed to do the right thing and I have agreed with the Seniors' Society and the NGOs that I have been talking to, that we will have roundtables, we will have workshops, because these are very complicated issues and we will make sure that we do not cause undue hardship to those people who need our assistance and that we will have meaningful consultation. The end date is not written in stone. I don't understand. Members have been asking me for the last six weeks to extend this, change this. I do this and the difference between...I don't know. I have been open, approachable, I have been accommodating. I don't understand what the big deal is about the date. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for the Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

QUESTION 54-16(3):
NWT ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask a question to the government in terms of the recent economic crisis that is happening around the world and also Canada and possibly here in the Northwest Territories. I would like to ask the Premier to see if there is any type of regional economic stimulus from the people of the Northwest Territories as to how they could deal with this crisis that has happened before us in terms of how we can incur economic stimulus in our own regions in terms of dealing with the recession. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Premier, Mr. Roland.

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The area of the economic crisis the country has been caught in, we have been affected by a global economic climate and we have been involved for quite some time in trying to do our own stimulus. That is through advancement of the Building Canada Plan with the federal government as well as increasing our own contributions towards the capital side of it. I have had a number of regional meetings with regional aboriginal leadership on a number of factors. There has been ongoing work that we are doing through our budgeting process that would see still a substantial amount of spending. Minister Miltenberger will be delivering a budget that, I believe, will show a further investment in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

MR. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, I certainly look forward to the Minister's budget address as to what stimulus could be happening in our region in terms of the economics. I would like to ask the Premier in terms of the discussions with the regional entities of the Northwest Territories, has the Premier also looked in turn to what type of opportunities funds could be available to stimulate the Northwest Territories in terms of stabilizing or having some security for people of the Northwest Territories? There is funding out there that isn't within the privy of private Members to be involved in, but there are some funds out there that the Cabinet could look at to make available to our northern businesses.

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Mr. Speaker, the fact that there are quite a number of programs that are already being delivered by the Government of the Northwest Territories through a business development investment corporation that lends money to companies for \$2 million and under. The Opportunities Fund that has been in existence for quite a number of years looked at \$2 million and

over. In fact, the Minister of ITI is looking and has, in fact, brought a paper forward to revise that policy. Thank you.

MR. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, I certainly look forward to the department's revised policy on this Opportunities Fund, because that is one of the issues that I would like to see. One of the constituents that I got a call from yesterday didn't know about this fund and was quite shocked and said what is this government doing lending, aiding, investing, whatever interpretation we put on it to discover where in the point of \$34 million? Why is the government not supporting the northern aboriginal businesses in terms of this? I look forward to that policy. Can the Premier commit that this policy would see a significant change in terms of helping out the people of the Northwest Territories first in terms of their business? Can the Premier commit to that direction in terms of policy changes?

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of ITI is working around that policy development. We will be bringing it forward for review as they put some parameters around it. The discussion as the Member has raised, the area of the loan that has been discussed out there in the public now, in fact, has quite a number of partners and in fact quite a number of regions, groups and development corporations in the Northwest Territories that do provide corporate taxes to the Government of the Northwest Territories that employs quite a number of people that provide payroll tax and personal income tax to the revenues of this government then that feeds other programs across the Territory. So there is an investment issue that we have looked at. The simple fact, as the Member spoke of the concerns around the economic crisis that we are in, is that at times we have to look at the companies that are existing in the Northwest Territories and do we support them in remaining in business. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Final, short supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I certainly support the companies that are doing business in the Northwest Territories. I guess I am looking at the long-term standing and it's different interpretations that regional companies in the Northwest Territories in my region are sustaining, that have paid taxes, are lifelong people in my region that are looking for opportunities. When they see in the headlines in the newspaper of a loan being paid out to Discovery Air from Ontario, they get quite upset. They are asking to see who this government is looking after. I agree with the Premier in terms of employment contributions. We want to look after our people first. I ask the Premier, can he commit within this Assembly here within a

month or two weeks, can he see that these changes that would affect the needs of northern people in their businesses that are accessing this Opportunities Fund? Can he see a commitment very quickly?

HON. FLOYD ROLAND: Mr. Speaker, one thing we have to realize is that this opportunity fund is not grant money. It is money that has to be paid back to the federal government, so due diligence on any proposal will have to be done. The Minister is working on a package. He will be coming forward with a package. Let's be clear. In using this one company in talking about it, being it is from southern Canada, Denendeh Helicopters, Deh Cho Regional Helicopters, Sahtu Helicopters, Gwich'in Helicopters, Highland Helicopters, Tli Cho Helicopters, Colville Lake, Fort Good Hope, Wrigley, Deline, Tli Cho Air, Lutselk'e Air Services all part of this form a partnership of this group so, in fact, this company is quite involved with regional bodies, with development corporations that employ people in the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Roland. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

QUESTION 55-16(3):
CLOSURE OF DEH CHO HALL

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to follow up on my Member's statement with respect to the John Tetso Memorial Library closing in Fort Simpson. I sent numerous e-mails and memorandums to the government and particularly to the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment to assist the community in this matter. I would just like to ask the Minister: what stage or how far has this department gone in successfully dealing with the community organizations in addressing this very important matter for residents of Fort Simpson? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we have been working closely with the community of Fort Simpson on this particular area. We have been working with various organizations in the community. As you know, the Deh Cho Hall is in the process of closing down because of the inspection that took place. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we are working...I appreciate all of the correspondence that the MLA has sent to my department, to my attention. We are doing what we can to work with the community on finding solutions to have this community library based on if there are any vacant working units. At this time, we are exploring options. ECE is also working closely with DDEC and also Public Works.

There are scheduled meetings on February 10th with the mayor of the village, the district education authority, school staff and the ECE library services to explore additional options. One of the options is a library in the school area. Mahsi.

MR. MENICOCHÉ: The issues are twofold with the closing of the library. One, of course, is short-term space and a long-term solution which is providing resources to do renovations to a school and an additional building that can house a library. I'd just like to know, once again, how far has the department been successful in looking at short-term solutions and maybe even using the new government office building that's in Fort Simpson. Have they looked at any engineering plans? Can that building sustain library services, and include, as well, resources to upgrade the current existing Village of Fort Simpson building to renovate and beef up that structure so it can house a library? Thank you.

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: Mr. Speaker, with our department we did explore various options in the community. The first option is, of course, the Member identified the new building if it could hold the library books and so forth. Certainly, the second floor, there's space available but the weight of the books certainly cannot be feasible to having a library on the second floor. Also, PWS, I've been working closely with them and they confirm that Fort Simpson doesn't have a suitable rental space available in the community.

We've done what we can as a department in working with the community. We do continue to work on an option of the school modification, but we have to work with the DEA because we have to respect their decision as well. The school operates within the community, so we continue to work closely with them and there is a planned meeting to discuss further options.

MR. MENICOCHÉ: I would like to reiterate that the Department of ECE is responsible for library services throughout the Northwest Territories and they have made provision to assist other communities. Once again, this issue has been...We really felt it was on the backburner for awhile; they knew it was coming. I think the important thing here, Mr. Speaker, is where is the Minister looking at providing any resources in the community in the short-term to provide for library space?

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: Mr. Speaker, we did look at, like I said earlier, options in the community, whether it be a rental space, but we haven't had success to date in that respect. Certainly, we have to keep in mind about the capital planning process. Once the discussion takes place with the DEA and the school staff and also the parents and the community, we can certainly move forward on that.

Again, I have to respect the wishes of the community of how we can proceed with this. I'm more than willing to hear more from the MLA on how we can proceed with this from the community's perspective.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Final supplementary, Mr. Menicoché.

MR. MENICOCHÉ: The Minister mentioned the capital planning process, so there's indication there that he's willing to help the community with the long-term space needs of the library. I'm really pleased to hear that. When does that capital planning process begin?

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: First and foremost is the consultation process with the community and how that structure's going to look, if there's space availability within the school, the modifications, the cost factor. Those are the issues that we need to take into consideration. I will keep the MLA in contact and in the loop with the community as well. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

QUESTION 56-16(3):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. RAMSAY: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Numerous other Members have asked questions today about the supplementary health benefits and the proposed changes to those. Part of the big issue that I'm having with this is the analytical work, the work that somebody inside of the Department of Health and Social Services is, and should be, conducting on this. I don't know how the Minister and the government could go public with a policy as half-baked and disjointed as this policy is. The Minister announced it in December and here we are the first week of February, I've probably got 500 e-mails, the Minister has got a number of e-mails and calls and concerns. Obviously, the policy itself is flawed. I'd like to ask the Minister today: who exactly is doing the work on this program and this policy change inside the department? How many people have been working on this thing? Obviously, somewhere along the line people are messing this thing up in a big way, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, the policy section of the Department of Health and Social Services were responsible for designing and doing consultations between 2003 to 2007 on the

implementation of the policy with the health insurance office in Inuvik and we have obtained Blue Cross, who is the provider of insurance programs for the government to implement this plan.

MR. RAMSAY: Mr. Speaker, there are only 42,000 residents here in the Northwest Territories and I find it completely absurd that the Minister cannot answer a question about how many people this will impact. She talks about low-income earners and families. How many of those people are there in our Territory and where are they? She can't answer that question.

Also, I haven't heard the Minister give us an answer as to her assertion that this move is cost neutral. Where is that evidence, Mr. Speaker? I'd like to see it, and so would everybody else. It just hasn't been proven.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, it's hard to explain all this. The Health Care Program is a demand-driven service. I can't tell you, as the Minister of Health, who is exactly on the system on any given day. Let's just be logical. How many people are in the hospital? Well, I guess we could do that. We could do it today, take an inventory, but there are lots of people accessing this program and for all kinds of different reasons with all kinds of family make-ups and stuff.

What I want to say is, as the Minister, what you look at is the policy intent and policy objective, and cost neutral does not mean that we have \$5 million for supplementary health and we cannot spend one cent more. That's not how we operate supplementary health programs because the Member knows that for as long as this program has been around, we've been spending about \$7 million over the last number of years and we have to come back for a supplementary appropriation if it goes over. The government sets out policy objectives and what it says is that until now we have provided supplementary health benefits to those who are over 60, 100 percent. If you have a specific condition on the list, it's 100 percent. If you are indigent, 100 percent. We had no means to include income as a criteria, so the government has the right to say, okay, let us include an ability to pay or an inability to pay as a policy factor. Then once you set that out, whoever meets that criteria gets on that system and we pay for it. But since we announced that, I acknowledge that we are leaving out more people than we should. So I'm willing to change that. The catastrophic cost policy, the ceiling is too high. We are leaving out too many people. We don't want to do that because people have asked us to do that, so we are changing that. We are being responsive to make sure that we meet the policy objectives and we are helping our residents who need it.

MR. RAMSAY: Mr. Speaker, again, I do find it hard to believe that we don't know and we can't guess. Maybe now that we're looking at income testing, I think there are other ways we can model this. We can find out -- and I agree with the Minister -- if low-income earners and low-income families are the area that we need to address as a government, we should be doing that. We should find out how many people there are in that segment and find out what it costs. That's what we're asking for here.

While I'm talking about cost, I want to ask the Minister what work is the Department of Health and Social Services doing on chasing down the 3,000 to 4,000 renegade health care cards that are out there costing us money? Nothing, Mr. Speaker. That's the answer to that one.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, I can categorically tell the Member that he is wrong when he says nothing is being done about tracking down those people with NWT health care cards when they should not...We have implemented an audit program. The audit office of the GNWT has been sending letters...We've been doing auditing of all of the claims that we are receiving on NWT health care and if there are too many services being rendered outside of the provinces, we're writing them and we're asking them to document them and if they don't give us the documents we call them and we are tracking them down. We have been auditing this in a very serious way. The Member is very wrong in saying that nothing is being done because we took that issue very seriously.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you Ms. Lee. Final supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

MR. RAMSAY: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister has just announced this new work that the department is working on on the renegade health care card issue. That's news to me. Also news to me lately is the announcement that we're losing our chief medical officer and that the government had signed a physicians' contract. They don't tell us, we find out in the press. That's the way this government operates, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. I didn't hear a question there. Ms. Lee, did you want to respond?

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, the Member could go back on the record. I have announced the audit program that we are doing to keep track of health records. The medical health officer, he made a personal choice to go work in Alberta. He was going to communicate to the Members himself, but Alberta decided to announce it two weeks before so that's why the Member didn't know. With respect to the physicians' contract, we communicated to every

Member, we wrote them a letter way before it was announced in the media. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 57-16(3):
PROPOSED CHANGES TO SUPPLEMENTARY
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, I'm sort of reminded of a famous individual known as Tommy Douglas. He fought tooth and nail for health care and I could imagine his position now; he'd be rolling in his grave to find out that means testing or income testing our health care system is the way to go. I think he'd call this a user-pay system and this is sort of a door being cracked open to that demonstration.

If I could loosely quote the Minister, a minute ago she said I don't understand what the big deal is about the implementation date. Mr. Speaker, that's the whole problem. It's the implementation date without reasonable consultation. She said a delivery date must be delivered by this time and we're going to get there hell or high water. That's what that date does.

What I'm going to ask the Minister is: would she agree to this House today that she will first take off any implementation date without approval of this House, without the support of this House on any changes to the Supplementary Health Benefits Program.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While we're on the topic of Mr. Tommy Douglas, let me say that he happens to be one of my heroes because I was born in a country where there is no health care. I was born to a single mother who could not afford to keep me in an incubator, when I was born seven weeks too early, less than two pounds. I couldn't drink breast milk. She had to feed me by spoon. The doctor told her you have to watch her to see if she's going to make it. I value Canadian health care in Canada. Supplementary health care is not the same thing as the Canadian Health Plan. It is important that we value what we have and make sure that we make it work. In terms of the effective date for the consultation, I have heard from the Members and the public throughout the last two months that this is not ready. Okay. I am saying Members should just accept it when the Minister says we screwed up. Okay?

---Applause

I don't know how many times I'm going to have to say that I'm not denying anything that you're saying. We found major gaps. I'm telling you that we will take the time to work on that. I've met with the executive and NGOs and I want to tell you that between 2003 to 2007 the department met at least four times with the NWT Seniors' Society, with the idea about the changes, and the NGOs. I'm saying we will take the time. We will do our meaningful consultation. We will make sure that we cover our people who need it. There is no argument here. That's what I meant when I said, "What's the big deal?" I'm not saying that's not important. I'm saying I'm committed to a meaningful consultation.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, the Minister talks about meaningful consultation and identifying gaps. Mr. Speaker, in her own words, from 2003 to 2007 they worked on this policy in the policy shop. They also went to Social Programs for approval. They sat on this for a year and a half and just before Christmas of 2008, they decided to launch this on the public. You're telling me, after approximately five years that you took to develop a policy that is so full of gaps that you couldn't hold water back to save your life, that you're going to come up and find all the gaps and solve all the problems in six months. That's why I'm asking that six months won't do this policy justice and in fairness. I'm going to repeat this question this way: The Minister clearly says programs are demand driven. This side of the House is demanding you take off the implementation date, and if you need to bring it to consultation don't put the pressure on getting the results by time driven only, go for the results first.

HON. SANDY LEE: I've said I am committed to a meaningful consultation. We have received some really good information that we need to revisit. It's pretty simple what we need to fix right now. There are some glaring things that we need to fix on what's proposed; income threshold and the eligibility for catastrophic drug program. We will do a meaningful consultation to make sure that we have fixed this program and we will take the time we need to. I've agreed to consult on the process. We're going to have an exchange and workshops so that you don't have a situation where people go and have a meeting and then not give enough time or a means to give feedback. I think I agree with the Member, that we will do what's necessary to improve this situation.

MR. HAWKINS: I'm glad the Minister agrees and officially put it on record that she will now take off the time deadline on consultation and implementation.

HON. SANDY LEE: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, September 1 is the target date, because it is helpful in any exercise to have the end date. We will strive to get the work done. We will strive to

have most of the work done before the summer. We will make sure we do meaningful consultation with the public and the stakeholders.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Final supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, again, I realize this Minister's trying to be the superhero of health care, but let's take off the pressure of an implementation date to make sure it's done properly. Will the Minister take off the implementation date? Secondly, and finally, will the Minister bring the policy to the House for House approval before any implementation is enforced?

HON. SANDY LEE: Yes, I mean, that's the regular process. There's nothing new about that. We don't do any of these without going to the committee, Mr. Speaker, and we never have.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

QUESTION 58-16(3):
SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS

MR. BROMLEY: I'd also like to follow up with the Minister of Health on the supplementary health benefits questions. I'm wondering what the Minister has heard from the public that is valid, in her mind for review. What are the significant problems that have been identified by the public and that will be part of this review?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Minister of Health and Social Services, Ms. Lee.

HON. SANDY LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the announcement of this policy, I happened to have travelled to Fort Simpson, Inuvik, Sachs Harbour, Paulatuk, Ulukhaktok, and I have to say, when I explained that the changes are meant to expand the program so that we include a group of people that are excluded, people agree with that. When we say the senior cut-off is \$55,000 net, and for most people that is a really good income on a retirement, because that means you have to make about \$75,000 to \$80,000. The gaps that we have found are that we need to revisit the income threshold itself, whether it's too low or not, the difference between a couple and a single versus members of family, because we understand that there are all kinds of different characteristics and make-ups of a family, and the other gap that we have found is that catastrophic drug costs only covers drugs. We have learned that often the biggest cost item is not necessarily the drugs; it's the medical equipment, medical supplies, if you have diabetes, all the stuff you have to use. So we need to make sure that those are included in the

catastrophic drug medical equipment and supplies program rather than just drugs.

Another glaring error that, not error, but the issue that we need to look at is the fact that you don't qualify for the Catastrophic Drug Program until you have spent 5 percent of your net income. People are telling us that is way too high. So we need to revisit that.

I believe with all the number crunching and everything, we can make it so that most people are covered. The vast majority of people are covered, and who are not covered, if it makes sense, I believe that people could see more about why the government felt the need to change this.

MR. BROMLEY: There are a few others that I've heard of, but one I'm very interested in is the universal coverage and stepping away from that towards the income testing. A lot of my constituents have brought that up with me. Canadians in general want health care, they're willing to pay for it, and our tax system is already addressing availability to pay, which is not addressed with the income testing approach. So will universal coverage and moving away from income testing be up for part of the discussion in this public review?

HON. SANDY LEE: The fact is we do not have universal coverage for supplementary health right now. We don't. So we're not moving away from universal coverage. The whole point is the impetus of changing this is the fact that we have a group of working poor, as we call them, or low-income families, or if you have a job that doesn't have third-party insurance. So the self-employed. We have a group of people who are not covered under the existing system. So it is not accurate to say that we have a universal program. We have a universal program for those who are over 60. We have a universal program for those who have a specified condition that is eligible on the list.

We have to decide, as a society and as a government, whether we can afford to pay for everything to do with health issues for everybody all the time. There are implications to that: governing and making policies about making choices. I think for most people they would say the focus has to be on people who need it the most. Right now, under this program, we are excluding those people.

MR. BROMLEY: Of course, it is a matter of degree with universal coverage and income testing. We're moving away from some degree of universal coverage and more and more towards income testing.

I like what the Minister had to say, that those are the issues. Will those issues be part of this public review? The public would like the opportunity to

comment on that. There are lots of design ways that Canadians have figured out how to pay for health care, regardless of what their income is, so that it is universal coverage. That needs to be part of this discussion. Will the Minister commit to including that?

HON. SANDY LEE: Unless the Member has information that I'm not aware of, there is no jurisdiction in Canada that has a universal coverage for supplementary health benefits. In fact, programs like home care services, which the NWT provides as a core service universally, is not included as supplementary health coverage. There is no jurisdiction in Canada that covers 100 percent for anybody who is over 60. There is no...It's a supplementary health benefit, is what it is. It is supplementary. It's extra. It's not part of the Health Care Plan. So universality does not apply here.

We do have a more generous program than most other provinces and territories, and I believe it's a goal that we want to meet. But we are trying to fill the gaps so we can include those who are not currently part of the program.

MR. BROMLEY: I hope that will be part of the discussion, because I think there are still a lot of opportunities to be mined there. Finally, I guess, will the Minister commit to following, as a review process, the model that was used in the review of the Income Support Program, which was a highly successful public consultation process?

HON. SANDY LEE: I have asked the department to look at that process to see if we could borrow from that. I'm prepared to make a commitment to the Members here, that I will come back with an outline of how we propose to do the consultation and where the meetings will be and how they're going to take place for the next little while. So consultation and consultative approach as we go forward to improve the changes are very much at the table and I'm prepared to work with the Members and the public to do that.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Member for the Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

QUESTION 59-16(3):
AIRPORT RUNWAY EXTENSIONS
IN FORT GOOD HOPE AND DELINE

MR. YAKELEYA: I'd like to ask questions to the Minister of Transportation in terms of transportation issues in the Sahtu. I would ask the Minister if he's had any type of discussions with the request for additional runway lengths in Fort Good Hope and Deline. I know this is a pressing issue for the two communities and the airline that's located in the Sahtu in terms of the benefits of having additional runways. We appreciate the additional length of

paving to 900 feet, but I think they're asking for an extra 500 to 1,000 feet. Can the Minister confirm in the House and for the people in the Sahtu in terms of this type of inquiry being imposed to his department from these two communities and the airline?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. The honourable Minister of Transportation, Mr. Michael McLeod.

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the Member that we did have discussions. In fact, he was there. We certainly did engage in some discussion with the communities about runway length. This has been an ongoing issue for some time and we have not had any further discussion prior to the ones we had where the Member was in attendance. We have received some correspondence since then. We have made some commitments to do some further investigation and we were not able to engage for several months. Since then we have received information in written form and we will be responding to them.

MR. YAKELEYA: Certainly through the memberships and we certainly appreciate the time and records that the department has gone out of its way to assist the two communities. We want to ask, in this type of discussion here, when the department, in terms of responding to the additional requests of the two runways, specifically Fort Good Hope and Deline, in terms of additional runway requirement lengths that they're asking for. Because we've already talked about some partnerships and we are looking forward to this department to respond in a positive way that will see a benefit in terms of stimulating the economy in the Sahtu region.

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Apparently a response to that letter to us is being drafted as we speak. We will be reinstating a number of issues that we had discussed. There has, however, not been any further discussions, as we had agreed to have our technical people sit down and explore what the options are out there. We still have the same concerns about extending the runway further than the 3,900 feet. It will cost a lot more. We haven't explored to see how much that is, but it's in the millions of dollars. There are other issues that come as a result of that, and we wanted to have an opportunity for our people to work together with the Sahtu communities to talk about that and see if there are any opportunities for partnerships or arrangements. We wanted to find out that there is very limited opportunity to find additional resources and have that discussion also. We haven't had opportunity, since this new year has started, to sit down with the people from the Sahtu.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The time for question period has expired. I will allow the Member a short supplementary question. Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was the essence of us having some further discussions. I look forward to a commitment from this Minister to direct his department to start making arrangements with the people in the Sahtu in terms of partnership business proposals, ideas in terms of how can we seek additional dollars to extend these two runways in the region. Because once you do that, you will see enhanced service in terms of aircraft and...

MR. SPEAKER: Do you have a final supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya?

MR. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister commit to all these good reasons why we should have a meeting ASAP?

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that in order for us to have meetings, we need both parties to engage. We had agreement already. We waited seven months. Our technical people were not able to coordinate their schedules. It's difficult. We have to make decisions. We have to plan our budgets. We have to be able to sit down and look at the realistic challenges and see how we can overcome, before we can start planning anything. If there's still desire from the communities we had talked to, I would be happy to meet with them.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Item 8, written questions. Item 9, returns to written questions. Mr. Clerk.

Returns to Written Questions

RETURN TO WRITTEN QUESTION 1-16(3): OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF HIGHWAY NO. 4

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Mr. Speaker, I have a return to Written Question 1-16(3) asked by Mr. Beaulieu on October 24th, 2008, regarding the operation and maintenance of Highway No. 4. I am pleased to provide the following:

1. The total length of the all-season section of Highway No. 4 is 69.2 kilometres.
2. The total length of the sections of Highway No. 4 that are either paved or chipsealed is 28.3 kilometres.
3. The following amounts were the budgeted amounts of O and M expenditures on Highway No. 4 for the 2004-05 to the 2006-07 fiscal years:

2004/05	\$132,401
2005/06	\$197,543
2006/07	\$179,821

4. The 2006 Census did not specifically indicate the exact number of full-time residents along Highway No. 4, but instead grouped Highway No. 4 residents into a category called "unorganized population in the Fort Smith region." This category has a total population of 339 people and includes all people living outside of the NWT communities south of Wrigley, of which the majority would be full-time residents along Highway No. 4.

For the 2011 Census, the number of Highway No. 4 residents will be separated from the unorganized Fort Smith region.

The 2006 Census, however, did specifically indicate the population of Dettah, which has 247 full-time residents.

RETURN TO WRITTEN QUESTION 2-16(3): COMMUNITY FUEL RESUPPLY

I have another return, return to Written Question 2-16(3) asked by Mr. Bromley on October 24th, 2008, regarding community fuel resupply.

Later today, at the appropriate time, I will table a document titled Summary of Marine Resupply – Petroleum Products. This document provides the cost of the resupply of fuel in 2008, including the cost per litre by fuel type for each of the NWT communities serviced by the petroleum products division.

In addition, it should be noted that annual fuel resupply to all NWT communities serviced by the PPD has been completed for this year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Item 10, replies to opening address. Item 11, petitions. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

Petitions

PETITION 1-16(3): CHANGES TO SENIORS' HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to present a petition dealing with the matter of changes to seniors' Health Benefits Program. The petition contains 727 signatures of NWT residents, broken down from the following communities: Fort Good Hope, 35; Inuvik, 57; Fort Resolution, 25; Fort Smith, 320. That's a total 727 signatures. The petitioners request that the GNWT stop the implementation of the Supplementary Health

Benefits Program and Catastrophic Drug Program, and that the Government of the Northwest Territories conduct public consultations with all groups in the Northwest Territories before implementing any changes to seniors' programs.

---Applause

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

PETITION 2-16(3):
CHANGES TO SENIORS'
HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to present a petition dealing with the matter of changes to seniors' health benefit programs. The petition that I present contains 779 signatures of Hay River residents. The petition is requesting that the implementation of this program not proceed until substantial consultation has taken place, as the signatures that Mr. Ramsay has read. Seven-hundred and seventy-nine. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Item 12, reports of standing and special committees. Item 13, reports of committees on the review of bills. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Reports of Committees
on the Review of Bills**

BILL 1:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE
HISTORICAL RESOURCE ACT

BILL 3:
INTERNATIONAL INTEREST IN
MOBILE AIRCRAFT EQUIPMENT ACT

BILL 4:
PUBLIC LIBRARY ACT

BILL 5:
PROFESSIONAL CORPORATIONS ACT

BILL 7:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ACT

MR. BEAULIEU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to report to the Assembly that the Standing Committee on Social Programs has reviewed Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Historical Resource Act; Bill 3, International Interest in Mobile Aircraft Equipment Act; Bill 4, Public Library Act; Bill 5, Professional Corporations Act; and Bill 7, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act.

The committee wishes to report that Bill 1, Bill 3, and Bill 7 are now ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole and that Bill 4 and Bill 5 are now ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole, as amended and reprinted.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

BILL 6:
SPECIES AT RISK NWT ACT

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee has been considering Bill 6, Species at Risk NWT Act, and wishes to advise that additional time is required to complete this review.

MOTION TO EXTEND 120-DAY
REVIEW PERIOD FOR BILL 6
CARRIED

Therefore, in accordance with Rule 70(1) and (3), I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Nunakput, that the 120-day review period for Bill 6, Species at Risk NWT Act, be extended to the first sitting day of the spring session.

---Carried

MR. SPEAKER: Item 14, tabling of documents. The honourable Minister of Public Works and Services, Mr. McLeod.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 10-16(3):
SUMMARY OF MARINE RESUPPLY -
PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, further to my Return to Written Question 2-16(3), I wish to table the following document entitled Summary of Marine Supply - Petroleum Products.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Item 15, notices of motion. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 7-16(3):
SUPPLEMENTARY HEALTH BENEFITS
PROGRAM

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice that on Friday, February 6th, 2009, I'll move the following motion: Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Hay River South, that this Legislative Assembly recommends that the Minister of Health and Social Services stop the implementation of the proposed Supplementary Health Benefits Program and develop a new policy

and program to cover low-income families who do not have supplementary health benefits coverage through their employer;

And further, extend the September 2009 implementation date to April 2010;

And further, conduct comprehensive consultations with Northerners about the ways to improve the Supplementary Health Benefits Program and services offered by the department, including whether or not means testing should determine eligibility;

And further, ensure that full research into the program's complete costs and full implications is undertaken and presented to Northerners including:

1. the cost to the NWT of families moving south; and
2. increased costs on the health care system resulting from more people accessing services within hospitals;

And furthermore, further involve the standing committees of the Legislative Assembly in the review of new policy proposals before any implementation is considered.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MOTION 8-16(3):

REVOCATION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF
THE PREMIER AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you. I give notice that on Friday, February the 6th, 2009, I will move the following motion: Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, that pursuant to subsection 61(2) of the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act, this Assembly formally revokes the pleasure of the Assembly from the appointments of the Premier and all Members of the Executive Council effective February 9, 2009, at 1:30 p.m. MST;

And further, that this Assembly recommends that a Premier and Executive Council be chosen without delay and that the Commissioner be notified of the recommended appointments at the earliest opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Item 16, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 17, motions. Item 18, first reading of bills. Item 19, second reading of bills. The honourable Minister of Justice, Mr. Lafferty.

Second Reading of Bills

BILL 2:
SETTLEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL
INVESTMENT DISPUTES ACT

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Range Lake, that Bill 2, Settlement of International Investment Disputes Act, be read for the second time.

This bill implements the 1965 Convention on the Settlement of Investment Disputes Between States and Nationals of Other States.

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 2 has had second reading.

---Carried

Bill 2 has had second reading and stands referred to a committee.

Item 20, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Tabled Document 7-16(3), Ministerial Benefits Policy. Item 21, report of Committee of the Whole. Item 22, third reading of bills. Mr. Clerk, item 23, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Mr. Speaker, orders of the day for Thursday, February 5, 2009, at 1:30 p.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Budget Address
3. Ministers' Statements
4. Members' Statements
5. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
6. Returns to Oral Questions
7. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
8. Acknowledgements
9. Oral Questions
10. Written Questions
11. Returns to Written Questions
12. Replies to Opening Address
13. Replies to the Budget Address
14. Petitions
15. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
16. Tabling of Documents
17. Notices of Motion
18. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
19. Motions

- Motion 5-16(3), Executive Council
Accountability and Performance Review
Process
- 20. First Reading of Bills
- 21. Second Reading of Bills
- 22. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of
Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 7-16(3), Ministerial
Benefits Policy
 - Committee Report 2-16(3), Standing
Committee on Rules and Procedures Report
on Matters Referred to the Committee
- 23. Report of Committee of the Whole
- 24. Third Reading of Bills
- 25. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk.
Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until
Thursday, February 5, 2009, at 1:30 p.m.

--ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 3:31 p.m.

