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**The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker**

# Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES****Thursday, February 9, 2006****Members Present**

Honourable Brendan Bell, Mr. Braden, Honourable Paul Delorey, Honourable Charles Dent, Mrs. Groenewegen, Honourable Joe Handley, Mr. Hawkins, Honourable David Krutko, Ms. Lee, Honourable Michael McLeod, Mr. McLeod, Mr. Menicoche, Honourable Michael Miltenberger, Mr. Ramsay, Honourable Floyd Roland, Mr. Villeneuve

**ITEM 1: PRAYER**

---Prayer

**SPEAKER (Hon. Paul Delorey):** Good afternoon, Members. Welcome to the House. Orders of the day. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

**ITEM 3: MEMBERS' STATEMENTS****Member's Statement On Income Tax Reductions For NWT Residents**

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, we are having a theme day on the high cost of living, Mr. Speaker. One obvious response to address the high cost of living is to put more money directly into residents' pockets.

This government needs to respond to this problem with a serious push for the adjustment to our northern residents' deductions; an idea that has recently received a lot of airtime, especially during our last federal campaign, and it has been mentioned several times by constituents directly to me.

Everyone in this House is well aware that the federal government established a northern residents deduction in 1988 at \$5,400 per household and then increased it to \$5,475 in 1991 in zone A, which includes the entire NWT. Everyone is also aware that rate has remained the same since.

Residents of our three territories, and the northern regions of some provinces, receive this benefit. But it feels skewed, as far as I'm concerned, Mr. Speaker. While the deduction has remained the same, at \$5,475 for the last 15 years, cost of living continues to climb. It is clear to me that this deduction needs to be adjusted, and adjusted quickly. We need it to reflect current market rates, not the market rates of 15 years ago, Mr. Speaker. Not only should that be a consideration, this adjustment needs to be on an annual ongoing basis to reflect real times and real costs.

Our northern deduction -- that is, our northern residents deduction -- needs to be indexed to market inflation rates to avoid erosion of our dollar that continues to grow in expenses upwards every day in this territory.

For every \$1,000 that the deduction is increased, Mr. Speaker, that would mean \$3 million back in the NWT residents' pockets. That is \$3 million that would go a long way to help pay for groceries, go towards the high cost of rent, oil bills, mortgages and utility bills, Mr. Speaker, just to name a few. These simple steps would have real impacts in our residents' pockets; impacts that could be felt throughout our NWT.

Canada is beginning a new session through the new government and they said that they would look at new tax adjustments and alterations that reflect different priorities. This needs to be a priority, significantly pushed by this government. This issue needs to be brought to the forefront. So, Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time, I will have questions for the Minister about trying to make differences for our northern residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

**Member's Statement On Action Required To Combat The High Cost Of Living**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I am once again going to speak about the cost of living here in the Northwest Territories. It is an issue that all Members of this House share in addressing the concerns of the people that we represent.

Regular members passed a motion last year calling on the government to take some immediate action on the rising cost of living. This, at that time, was precipitated by the geopolitical and natural disasters that were pushing fuel costs to unprecedented levels.

The GNWT has acknowledged that it had to look in the mirror and challenge itself on its own consumption while, at the same time, offering residents incentives and programs designed to help ease the pain of these inflated prices. Prices have backed up somewhat but, as a government, we must continue to push forward with the programming and new innovative ways to cut back on consumption. It is an excellent idea to offer a break for residents servicing their furnaces, but it would make more sense to do this in the fall when people would be doing that, instead of the dead of winter, so you would have more uptake on it.

Energy prices are just part of the issue of the rising cost of living here in the Northwest Territories. The motion last year also put pressure on the government to publicly discuss their plans for dealing with the high cost of living. We have had that meeting just a few weeks ago. In my opinion, the GNWT did a great job at making a case that it is a very expensive place to live. Thanks very much, guys. No one can dispute the facts, Mr. Speaker. We need to find real solutions and take the action necessary to carry them out. Some of the ideas that I have brought forward in this House that I would like to see pursued, are such things as a permanent trust fund for all residents here in the Northwest Territories, value-added industry from the oil and gas developments like a refinery, tax credits for interest paid on mortgages, and while we are

discussing that, we should include rent as well, the exclusion of GST being paid on energy bills, tax credits for northern residency and an overall exemption for the three northern territories on paying the GST.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to discussing these issues with the Premier at the appropriate time. Thank you.

---Applause

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

**Member's Statement On Innovative Ways To Reduce The Cost Of Living In The NWT**

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, Members have chosen to focus their Members' statements on the cost of living in the North. It has always cost more to live in the North, but those costs have risen dramatically with the record price of crude oil. This has affected the cost of fuel for our vehicles, fuel to heat our homes, fuel for the generation of electricity, fuel for air transportation, fuel for the vehicles by which we receive most of our goods in the North, most essentially our food. We can't change the environment in the North, but we can change how we operate within that environment. If ever there was a place where attention should be paid to innovation and cutting-edge technology in construction, mechanical systems, methods of power generation and energy conservation, you would think that it would be here in the North.

Such a high percentage of what we earn goes to pay for our basic needs: shelter, food and transportation. But I think we have been remiss in being cognizant of our harsh environment in how we live and move about in the North. We continue to build buildings with relatively little investment on the front end to avoid the high ongoing costs of operation. This is where I think the government needs to take a leading role. We need to lead by example, in ensuring that every cost-effective measure is taken to build homes and capital infrastructure that will use energy in the most efficient way.

Recently, the director of the South Slave district housing office in Hay River told me about a prototype subdivision in Okotoks, Alberta, that was set up as an example of a model of energy efficiency. Let's go down there and take a look. Let's make our next group of public housing units a state-of-the-art demonstration of real affordable housing.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Hear! Hear!

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** I would like to see some model homes in the North showcasing all of the latest methods of construction, high-efficiency heating systems, energy-saving appliances and fixtures, et cetera. I would like to see demonstration projects of retrofits to existing buildings employing every modern means of reducing costs of operation. Perhaps we haven't had enough incentive in the past, but for more than just monetary savings, to be good stewards of our environment, we should have sufficient motivation now. I want to see our government take a leading role in this and many other initiatives to bring relief to families and northerners who are being challenged right now to make ends meet with the unprecedented high cost of living in the North. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

**Member's Statement On High Cost Of Living In Yellowknife**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, no matter how you look at it, the high cost of living is a real issue for us in the North. It is simply very expensive to live in the North. Everything here costs more, and the government is doing very little to make it any easier.

Mr. Speaker, according to the 2003 Statistics Canada survey, Yellowknifers spend way more than the national average on all categories, and more than even the territorial average. Mr. Speaker, on overall household spending, Yellowknifers spend \$90,000 per household compared to the Canadian average of \$61,000 and \$77,000 for the NWT-wide. That is about 47 percent more, Mr. Speaker. Yellowknifers spend \$2,000 more on food bought from stores and \$1,600 more on food bought from restaurants. That is 30 percent more. Yellowknifers spend about \$7,500 more on principle accommodation, whether it is rented or owned. Yellowknifers spend almost \$2,000 more on water, fuel and electricity than the national average. Yellowknifers spend almost 96 percent more on water and sewage, 65 percent more on oil and gas, 43 percent more on electricity than the national average. This was just in 2003, before we have seen the latest increases, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that there is a lot more where this comes from, which is a document that the government issued. It is the survey from Statistics Canada. Yellowknifers spend \$1,000 on household furnishings and equipment, and we spend \$1,300 more on clothing. We spend \$3,000 more on recreation, \$1,400 more on personal insurance and pension contributions. The big grab is that we spend almost \$3,000 more on personal taxes.

Mr. Speaker, it may be that we spend more because we make more, but I am certain that, given the choice, we would like to pay less on these items and build up some savings, and I could also add that we are very generous people because we spend more on gifts of money and contributions, as well. Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you, pushing for a cut in northern residents' deduction from the federal government is just one thing, but it is about high time that this government does its part right here in the North to do something about this high cost of living. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Before I go on, colleagues, I would like to draw your attention to a very distinguished looking group of graduates in the gallery. They are there from the community wellness workers diploma program. They are Lucy Dillon from Tuktoyaktuk...

---Applause

Beatrice Blake from Fort McPherson, ...

---Applause

Wilfred Simon from Fort Resolution, ...

---Applause

Tina Gargan from Fort Providence, ...

---Applause

Cyndy Caisse from Yellowknife, ...

---Applause

...and Byrne Richards from Yellowknife.

---Applause

Also with them is Vicki Jacob, the instructor from Keyano College. I think that is from Alberta.

---Applause

Welcome to the House. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

#### **Member's Statement On Affordable Housing Solutions**

**MR. BRADEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Finance Minister Floyd Roland tells us the NWT is about to become a key economic driver for Canada. While this has many positive aspects, opportunities and potentials for us, there is also a considerable cost to a rapidly increasing cost of living in a very hot economy. For instance, in Yellowknife, getting a place to live at a reasonable cost has got to be the major issue facing the opportunities for growth and stability for this community. Yellowknife continues to be a magnet community, Mr. Speaker. I hear from people who come to live here from many other parts of the Northwest Territories and Canada. They have moved here for education, jobs, services and other attractive amenities of the city, but they continue to have difficulty in finding reasonable and appropriate accommodation.

The survey of average spending by community types shows that spending on shelter in Yellowknife is significantly higher than \$19,000 a year, compared to the rest of Canada at \$11,000, or the rest of the NWT communities, Mr. Speaker, at \$10,000 a year. On all accounts, the cost of living in Yellowknife significantly exceeds that of the rest of the NWT and Canada at about \$8,000 over the yearly average.

Mr. Speaker, the Yellowknife Housing Authority has some 100 applications from people needing low cost housing. In 1999, the monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment here was \$986. Last year, it was \$1,302; a 32 percent increase, Mr. Speaker. All levels of government, federal, municipal and territorial, can and should be assisting to a much greater degree in increasing the affordable housing stock.

Mr. Speaker, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has largely backed out of its mandate to be the national leader for affordable housing, so what can we do here on our own in the NWT? Across our governments, I think things are possible. Municipal governments can look at zoning and other regulatory aspects. Designers and builders can look at the way we have a tendency to blast and fill. Can we do things that are going to do a better job of fitting in with the geography? Mr. Speaker, I believe we can all be more innovative and really make a difference for housing. I am going to have questions, too, for the Minister at the appropriate time today. Thank you.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Villeneuve.

#### **Member's Statement On Support For Traditional Economy Pursuits**

**MR. VILLENEUVE:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the issue of the high cost of living in the North has always been the basis for many exchanges here in this House. This government has been both at the receiving end of the cost of living concerns from northerners for their own actions and, at the same time, advocating on behalf of northerners to the federal government about the high cost of living and why resource revenue sharing and devolution are important to addressing this concern.

Mr. Speaker, it can be argued that the cost of living in the North can work both for us and against us, depending on which area or department we are looking at. But, overall, I do not see any significant changes in many support programs of government that reflect or cater to offset the changes in a household's real cost of living. One such program which comes to mind is our support for traditional economies in the NWT, namely trapping, hunting and fishing.

Mr. Speaker, I am aware and commend this government that has made some significant improvements and positive changes that better serve the needs of trappers and fishermen in the NWT. Increases in trapper training and life skill programs within our schools, and working towards the modernization of our fishing industry to better compete on the global economy are just some of these positive steps taken. The area I want to bring to the attention is to the area of hunting and harvesting of big game, namely caribou, moose, muskox and bison.

Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that the high cost of living in our communities is definitely kept at bay by wild food that is hunted and gathered by many families in our small communities to offset these high costs of food prices at the local level.

Mr. Speaker, I want to emphasize this important contribution harvesters make to our culture and our communities, and keep this government moving forward on initiatives which will assist northern hunters and harvesters in determining and managing the short and long-term effects harvesting has on certain big game species. In other words, establishing reliable, concise and accurate baseline data is paramount to achieving a sustainable traditional economy and information from the community being the most reliable source. I would encourage our government to develop a comprehensive strategy to move forward a hunting and harvesting policy framework that incorporates the small community perspective and traditional practices. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

### Member's Statement On High Cost Of Living In Small Communities

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Today, I would like to speak about my favourite person in the whole world. That is granny from Nahanni.

---Applause

Her story, Mr. Speaker, accurately reflects the story of the high cost of living that affects all of us northerners. She is basically a healthy, elderly woman that lives by herself in Nahanni. Her family takes loving care of her and visits her often. I, too, take my time to visit when I am there. During my last visit, I went to see her and I brought her a small gift as is customary when we are visiting elders. It was a tin of snuff. It is one of her simple pleasures that she enjoys. She says to me, thank you very much. I haven't had snuff for a while. I said, you get a pension. Didn't you buy any from the store? She says, no, I have to spend all my money on bills. With that, her life is simple and basic, Mr. Speaker, and her choices, like many low income and no income residents throughout the North, is governed by her fixed income.

Recently, Nahanni Butte had their fuel delivered for this season. Typically, we do that in all the small communities. The government provides fuel trucks and stocks them up for the whole year, but, last fall, when the prices of fuel skyrocketed throughout the world, Mr. Speaker, we had to adjust the prices in the small communities. Now it is stabilized. The price actually went down, but now, in the small communities, the prices are still high, like \$1.40 in one of the smaller communities that I represent, and that is just not acceptable because we have a government that is unwilling to adjust that and fix that for them.

Mr. Speaker, all the people ever ask of us is to hear them and for us to be responsive to their needs. They see things in the national media like the federal government announcing some fuel rebates, Alberta giving fuel rebates and, in fact, even the new Conservative government is going to provide \$100 a month. That is what they are looking for. What are we going to do? I am here to ask that on behalf of our people. Mahsi.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. McLeod.

### Member's Statement On Impact Of Fuel Costs On Costs Of Living

**MR. MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, all of the communities we visited during our pre-budget tour, every one of them, and it probably applies to all 33 communities, have a real concern with the high cost of living in their communities. We listened as they spoke of the high cost of food, fuel, power and travel. Even the ability to harvest food off the land has become very expensive.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to stand up here and say that this government should be doing more, but, after listening to a presentation and hearing that this government spends \$128 million on subsidies, 10 percent of our budget, I really don't have the right to stand up here and say that. I

think what we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is start coming up with ideas. People have talked about the high cost of living for a long time. I think it is time to stop talking and start trying to do something about it.

The single biggest factor, I believe, to the high cost of living across the Northwest Territories, because we are so vast, is the high cost of fuel. It affects everything that happens in the Northwest Territories. With all of the resources that we have, Mr. Speaker, we should be able to refine some of our own fuel, and that may have a trickledown effect and bring the cost of living down across the NWT. Hopefully having a Mackenzie valley highway might help with the high cost of freight also.

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of wealth in our territory, and it is time we start using some of that wealth and benefit some of our people and not just industry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Members' statements. Reports of standing and special committees. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

### ITEM 6: RECOGNITION OF VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

**MR. SPEAKER:** It gives me great pleasure today to recognize a distinguished group of students in the gallery and a couple of teachers from Ecole Boreal in Hay River from grades 5, 6, 7 and 8, who are here to do a tour of the Assembly and view the proceedings, and also take in some other sightseeing tours and activities here in Yellowknife. I would like to welcome Krista Painchaud, Krysta Boyer, Gill Belanger, Desiree Boulanger-Rowe, Vanessa Roy, Eric Barry, Julia Gyapay, Mark Montinola, Alysya Gallardo, and Esther Hiebert. I would like to turn over to my colleague from Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen, to introduce the rest.

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to welcome the students from Ecole Borealis who are here today with their teachers. I would like to recognize Simon Barry, Connor Goudreau, Neesa Lelaidier, Isabella Galan, Chantel Beck, Alexis Miller, Ilona Gyapay, Sydney Danielsen, Chantay Boulanger-Rowe, and teachers Sophie Call, and Michelle Pulvermacher.

---Applause

If I didn't say your name right, I do apologize. I did my best. Thank you. It is good to have you here.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Dent.

**HON. CHARLES DENT:** Mahsi. (English not provided)

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Dent. (Microphone turned off)...my constituency assistant from Hay River, Debbie Mageean.

---Applause



Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Villeneuve.

**MR. VILLENEUVE:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize and congratulate a constituent Wilfred Simon, better known as Rabbit, in the audience on his community wellness worker certification program. Welcome to the House, Rabbit. Thank you.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to recognize the community wellness class here and congratulate them on their graduation. A constituent of mine, Byrne Richards is among this class. Vern has demonstrated great leadership in this community through his work with the Tree of Peace on the addictions work in the city. Congratulations and welcome.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. I hope we haven't missed anyone in the gallery today. It is always a pleasure to have an audience. Welcome and enjoy the rest of your tour of Yellowknife. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

#### ITEM 7: ORAL QUESTIONS

##### Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In November of last year, I wrote to Minister Roland enquiring about our northern deduction. I am pleased to say that he did reply to me with a very positive response indicating that it was his intent to seek the support of other counterpart Ministers in the territories as well as affected provinces. Mr. Speaker, my question to the Finance Minister is, I would like to know what he has done to get any headway on this matter by bringing it forward to other Ministers to bring forward a united front to Canada about our northern deduction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The honourable Minister responsible for Finance, Mr. Roland.

##### Return To Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, since writing and responding to the Member regarding the northern residents deduction, we have had a number of events occur throughout the country, the election being one. We haven't had a Finance Ministers' meeting for quite some time. There has been very little work done in that area, but it is something that we will be pursuing here in the very near future. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

##### Supplementary To Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in light of the federal election that he pointed out, our newly minted MP has pointed out that it is going to be one

of his top priorities to bring forward the concern about the deduction and the effect it has on the North. What is this Minister of Finance doing to make sure that he has a briefcase full of facts and information that will directly affect the Northwest Territories in a positive way? Is he working with his department to make sure this MP is ready to take on this challenge for our North? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Roland.

##### Further Return To Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I haven't had an opportunity to speak directly to the new Member for the Western Arctic. From within the department we have looked at the issue of the northern residents' deduction process and the impact it would have, both positive, and it would have an impact on our own revenue resources, as well, in the NWT. So we've done some work from within the department to prepare for our positioning. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

##### Supplementary To Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister had mentioned about impacts and I'd like to lay a couple facts down. I have the annual inflation rate, which is from a Canadian web site for the federal government, and it said since 1988 inflation went up 147 percent in the Northwest Territories; since 1991, on the last \$75 adjustment on that northern deduction, it's gone up 126 percent. So, Mr. Speaker, would this Finance Minister tell me today and make that commitment that he's going to put it as one of our top priorities in the next Finance Ministers' meeting, this northern deductions issue, to seek national support to bring forward a united front to the federal government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Roland.

##### Further Return To Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it'll be one of the issues, but our more critical ones are ones that I've announced already during the budget process of the fact that we need a new formula financing arrangement, we need to deal with our borrowing limit, we need to deal with resource revenue sharing. The northern residents' tax deduction will be something that impacts not only in the Northwest Territories, but the other two territories, our neighbours, as well as many of the provinces that would have parts of the zones that fall in their area. It is something that I will raise with them and proceed to try to move forward with. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Short supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

##### Supplementary To Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the response by the Minister, but I do want to underscore

the fact that territorial residents, residents of Yellowknife, need real life solutions that they can feel in their pockets immediately, Mr. Speaker. So I'd like to hear how the Minister is going to put this into their little bucket of priorities, because I think this is something that we could move quite quickly on that people will feel immediately, rather than waiting for this resource revenue sharing agreement. So we need to hear what type of priority the Minister is going to put on this issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 365-15(4): Progress On Northern Residents Deductions**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to have the tax system changed takes a fair bit of work and coordination with other jurisdictions. One of the first things to do is to contact other jurisdictions, which we have done. In principle, a number of them are supportive, but want to see more details as it would affect their equations, as well. So it is one of the areas that we have started to make some contacts with and then have to have further discussion. But it is something that affects other jurisdictions, as well, and we have to work together on that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

**Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Honourable Joseph Handley, the Premier. It gets back to, again, my Member's statement from earlier and it has to do with the cost of living. I know that the issue of arctic sovereignty has been an issue that's been in the media quite a bit lately. The appetite for the Government of the Northwest Territories to attract and retain residents here is something that I think is very important. We have to make it advantageous for residents to live here. Although this year's a little bit different, we can't keep relying on our nice weather to try to attract people to live here, Mr. Speaker.

So I'd like to start off by asking, I know my colleague Mr. Hawkins asked the Finance Minister about what the plans were, and obviously there's an excuse now with the new government in Ottawa and all of a sudden things are stalled. We're working with the new government. But what about the last two-and-a-half years, Mr. Speaker? What has the government done to address the high cost of living here? I guess the first question I'd like to hear from the Premier is, when will the government start to get to work on some of the issues that I've raised in my Member's statement and other Member's have raised in this House? When can residents here in the Northwest Territories expect this government to deliver on some of these things? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Premier, Mr. Handley.

**Return To Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say first of all, that, as one of the Members has mentioned, we are spending \$128 million a year; an average of \$3,000 per resident as a subsidy. So every day we're doing what we can to help with the cost of living. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, there are a number of initiatives underway. The one the Minister of Finance just referenced, that is with the northern residents' deduction. That is one that we will be looking at as an immediate way, assuming we can attract the federal government's interest in it. We also have a number of long-term issues we're dealing on. Energy costs is a big one, looking at hydro. Transportation costs. We're looking at creative proposals on Corridors for Canada and connecting Canada from Coast to Coast to Coast to reduce the transportation costs. One the honourable Member has mentioned often is reducing the cost of government, and that's one that's very much in consideration all the time as we're doing business as a government. Mr. Speaker, there are a number of other things we're doing on increasing employment. We all know that if more people are working, more people are earning incomes, then that is going to help to meet the rising cost of living in the North.

So, Mr. Speaker, there's a whole range of things we're doing all the time and we don't grumble about the subsidies we have to provide, the \$128 million, but it is an ongoing cost to our government and a necessary one. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

**Supplementary To Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to go down this line of questioning, but I think the door's been opened slightly, so I think I will attempt this. I know the number of \$128 million that the government spends on subsidies has been mentioned before. I think the reason we spend \$128 million on subsidies is because our residents need some help, Mr. Speaker, and there's a good reason that we spend that money. We also spend \$440 million a year, that's 44 percent of our annual budget, on salaries and benefits for employees. I'd like to ask the Premier, what game plan has he got to try to address government spending in the size and growth of government so that we can spend more money on the people who actually need the money, Mr. Speaker? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Handley.

**Further Return To Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While it may seem that a lot of that money that we're spending on government employees is somehow not getting to the people, I have to say that the biggest piece of that money goes to people who are working in the social fields. In education, the teachers, in health and social services, the health workers, the doctors, those people who are helping our people to have healthier lifestyles and to be able to become much more self-sufficient. So a lot of that money

goes toward helping our residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

**Supplementary To Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my contention all along with the growth and the size of government in the Northwest Territories is that it's not sustainable over the long run. I'm wondering if the government's ever done any types of calculations to try to figure out what that cost is going to be going forward, or we just continue to grow for the sake of growth, Mr. Speaker. Again, 44 percent of our annual budget is a big piece of that budget. I'd like the Premier to answer that question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Handley.

**Further Return To Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just say that we never have government growth just for the sake of growth. I don't know anybody who's ever put that argument forward to us and saying give me more staff just for the sake of more staff. We put the staff in positions where we feel they can help us in our government objectives. Those are shared with the Members and that's the purpose of our budget debates. So, Mr. Speaker, we're prepared to defend every position that we put in government. If we're not able to defend it successfully, we'll remove it from the budget.

Mr. Speaker, there isn't another government, possibly with the exception of Nunavut, who spends as much on the subsidies to residents as we do. Mr. Speaker, let me say that there is over \$6,000 a year per resident that is lost to us in resource revenues. It goes to the federal government. We don't see it back. That's why resource revenue sharing, Mr. Speaker, has to be an important piece. That's worth at least \$6,000 per resident that we don't see. That will continue to be our top priority. Of course, government spending is an issue to us all the time, as is reducing transportation costs and so on. But the big one is to get the money that is earned in the North to stay in the North to help our people here. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Short supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

**Supplementary To Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't argue that with the Premier, but I think the other part of that is debatable in terms of government growth. It's very interesting if you watch the progression of the budget how certain departments might lose positions and then miraculously they're replaced with other positions. Any chance this government -- and I've watched it the last two-and-a-half years -- has had to make substantial changes in the size and growth of the public service, it's chose not to do it for whatever reason, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Premier, how do we tackle this issue? How do we get more money into people who actually need it on the

ground? I'm not saying no to subsidies, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like the Premier to answer that question. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Handley.

**Further Return To Question 366-15(4): Innovative Ways To Reduce Costs Of Living In The NWT**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, the direct answer to that is through our review of the main estimates. As we go through department by department, then I encourage all Members in this House to point out to us where we shouldn't be spending money. I know some of them do it and we listen and take that into consideration as we build our business plan. So, Mr. Speaker, its collective wisdom in this House that sets the strategic goals of this House. It's our wisdom here that sets what the budget will be. We all share that responsibility as we go through the main estimates. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

**Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, a lot of housing programs have emerged over the years and I'd like to direct my questions to the Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation. We have programs for homeownership, emergency repairs, seniors' repairs, a number of different programs. Does the NWT Housing Corporation have a program directed specifically to the need of renovating your home to conserve energy? A lot of people have older homes and they could save a lot of money if they could replace their doors or windows, or upgrade their insulation. I'd like to know if there has ever been, or is being contemplated, any kind of a program for homeowners under the NWT Housing Corporation for energy conservation. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister of Housing Corporation, Mr. Krutko.

**Return To Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**HON. DAVID KRUTKO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have been able to access federal funding on the new affordable housing initiatives that we have in place. The federal government has announced \$1.6 billion in which we were able to access \$1.3 million of that to assist people doing retrofits in regards to energy-efficient upgrades to make their homes more energy efficient. So there is a national program that we're able to access through CMHC. We are now having those resources and we'll be able to not only assist people to improve their housing conditions, but also making them more energy efficient.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

**Supplementary To Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't too clear from the Minister's answer if that's a program that's being planned, or if it's already in place. If it's already in place, could the Minister please share with

us how people who need to upgrade their homes to make them more energy efficient could access those dollars? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Mr. Krutko.

**Further Return To Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**HON. DAVID KRUTKO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have been working nationally with other Housing Ministers from across the country. As part of the plan nationally, we've heard announcements made in The National, from the federal government, that they are looking at assisting people to do retrofits, but it is application-based. The people who want these programs, to be able to access this funding, have to apply for it through the different programs that we have, and one of them you touched on was...(inaudible)...in regards to, and we also have emergency repair funding programs. Again, we are working with our federal colleagues to find new ways, and a lot of these dollars that I mentioned are coming by way of Bill C-48, which was \$1.6 billion. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

**Supplementary To Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my Member's statement I made reference to the initiative of the South Slave housing district office investigating this concept of a high energy-efficient subdivision for which there is a prototype in Alberta. Prior to constructing the new homes that are on the books with the NWT Housing Corporation, would the Minister commit to following up on that concept, perhaps going to Okotoks, Alberta, with some of the representatives from the Hay River office looking at this before you embark on any more construction? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Mr. Krutko.

**Further Return To Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**HON. DAVID KRUTKO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'll definitely commit to the Member. We are interested in that type of construction, but also there is a national program which I believe we're allocated one unit as a test unit for the Northwest Territories, which is basically called zero-emission homes where it admits zero pollutants into the air. This is a program federally. We were allocated money to try one pilot project, but we have not received that money yet. So we are looking at that. So I'm willing to work with the Member to look at what's happening in Alberta. There are a lot of strides across the country to look at energy-efficient homes. So I'd like to leave that door open with the Member in Hay River to take a look at that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Oh, I'm sorry. That was my...

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It's Thursday.

**Supplementary To Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Oh, it's Thursday. Oh, my gosh, I get another question. Okay. Sorry about that. So with respect, then, going back to the idea -- and I have to commend the Hay River office for being on top of this -- going back to the idea of actually going down to Okotoks and looking at this, I mean, it doesn't cost a lot of money to go look. I didn't get a firm answer. Before we embark on the next round of new housing units and before the design is complete and the plans are in place, would the Minister agree that we will investigate all possibilities, particularly this one that's come to my attention, before we start building more houses? I think it's 100 and some million dollars that we have for houses. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Mr. Krutko.

**Further Return To Question 367-15(4): Energy Efficiency Programs For Homeowners**

**HON. DAVID KRUTKO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I will commit to the Member that I will sit down with her and look at an arrangement to look at these units in Okotoks and see exactly how we can implement some of that technology in the North. So I'm committed to that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

**Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my questions on high cost of living and high cost of doing business to the Minister of Finance. Mr. Speaker, it's been stated here many times today that the government subsidizes \$128 million worth to our people. But if that's not reducing the cost of things for people, obviously it's not. You go to Tuktoyaktuk or Aklavik, you have to spend many dollars to get a loaf of bread. Prices are going up and up in Yellowknife and one of the things that I've been talking about is cost of doing business.

Mr. Speaker, one of the suggestions posed here is that we should ask the federal government for reduction in cost of living exemption in income tax. I do understand that there are costs to that. Could the Minister of Finance tell this House about, because our tax system is linked to the federal government that if the reduction does go ahead there will be less money coming into territorial coffers, as well as the federal government. Could the Minister just explain that, please? Thank you.

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

**Return To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, to get into the actual detail of our arrangements with the federal government and tax sharing arrangements would take up a significant amount of time. The Member is correct, though. There is a link to the way our tax is calculated between just ourselves and the federal government. For example, for every \$1,000

increase in the northern residents' deduction, that would impact us directly by about \$1 million. So that would offset, we would lose that much revenue for that kind of a change. As well, the arrangement we have with the federal government, we've had to do some calculations in that area and, again, because we're linked together, there would be another spin-off to that that would not be on the positive side for ourselves. But the immediate impact we look at is approximately for \$1,000 of increase in that deduction amount, would impact us by negative \$1 million. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

**Supplementary To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess we should be mindful as legislators that whether it's a tax and income tax reduction or GST or cost of living, I mean, there's benefit to getting more money into people's pockets, but also we have to look into the cost-benefit analysis of the reduced income to government and that's always a big issue here.

Mr. Speaker, I think one way we could deal with the cost of reduction is to help small businesses reduce the cost of living. The Minister of Finance indicated that he is working on a package to deal with that, but he didn't give a commitment as to when we should be expecting to see that. I would like to know if he could give a more specific date on that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have done some work with the Department of ITI in the area of support to small businesses. It's early in the process of trying to see if there are ways where we can look at the small business tax rate as well as some of the other support we have in place, and how we can offset one to the other to help create or keep small businesses being competitive here in the Northwest Territories. I don't have an actual timeline laid out, if it would be six months from now that we'd be able to come back with a package. We'll have to look at the impacts of some of these other changes, as well, that we've announced. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

**Supplementary To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**MS. LEE:** Mr. Speaker, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask the Minister to put more discipline on this exercise. Mr. Speaker, we have been talking about cost of living for residents for many years now, throughout the time of this Assembly. One of the ways to reduce cost of living for people is to reduce the cost of doing business for small businesses. When it costs more to get a cup of coffee, get a hamburger, get a pizza, go out to eat or buy clothing, that all adds up to the cost of living. These taxes for the small businesses here are higher than our neighbours in Alberta or B.C. So why can he not look at a

package that would help our small businesses? He's had about three years to deal with that. Could I get him to commit to bringing it to us in the next couple of months? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the small business tax rate can affect business in a number of ways. One is just the general percentage that we would apply. The other is the total amount that would apply for that initial rate before the large corporate tax portion would kick in. So there's a number of ways we can do that. Again, we will continue to do our work and try to have something for Members to look at before or around our spring session. We'll try for that. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

**Supplementary To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've raised this issue a lot this week, but I cannot say, I cannot emphasize enough that the small businesses in Yellowknife are struggling. They've had it with the high cost of fuel, power, to hire people, to keep people, and the paper burden. They could really do with a break here. I would really look forward to seeing a package and have the Minister come within the next two months to review a change, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister give me that? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just stated earlier, I'll try to have something put together for Members to review by our spring session. Thank you.

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

**Supplementary To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Am I to understand that the Minister is talking about the June session? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 368-15(4): Impact Of Tax Sharing Arrangement With Federal Government**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

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

**Question 369-15(4): National Childcare Strategy**

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask some questions with respect to National Childcare Strategy that's being proposed by our federal government. Our low income and non-income people in

the small communities really won't benefit from this strategy. I was just wondering if the Minister responsible will be prepared to also bring a hammer to Ottawa and say, look, in the North we need this to support our families and our communities and get them to work and get them to school so we can have a workforce there, Mr. Speaker. If the Minister can respond to that, please. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. The honourable Minister of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Dent.

**Return To Question 369-15(4): National Childcare Strategy**

**HON. CHARLES DENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know in early discussions with other jurisdictions around Canada that a number of provinces in particular are very strongly pushing the new federal government to continue with the Childcare Program that had been announced by the previous government. It would certainly be, I think, in our interest to see that program continue. I have already asked that our department work with the other two territories to ensure that at least if other jurisdictions are going to see the second year of funding for that program, that we also see that funding and that it reflect the commitment that the Conservative Prime Minister made during the campaign, that we would have base plus funding for the North. So we are going to try and make sure that we at least get two years' funding out of that program. But I would agree with the Member that it would be in the best interest of low income northerners to see the program that had been previously negotiated continue.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Dent. Supplementary, Mr. Menicoche.

**Supplementary To Question 369-15(4): National Childcare Strategy**

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm in absolute agreement that we're going to have to continue with the way we were going with the National Day Care Strategy that the new federal government is going to nix, basically, and provide everybody \$1,200. But money is not the answer for our smaller communities, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to know when would be the next opportunity for our Minister to reflect our interests and our needs at the national level. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Mr. Dent.

**Further Return To Question 369-15(4): National Childcare Strategy**

**HON. CHARLES DENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I understand it, tentatively the provincial and territorial Ministers responsible are looking at a meeting in April. It would be expected that the federal Minister responsible would also attend and we would hope to take the issue up with the federal government at that time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Dent. Supplementary, Mr. Menicoche.

**Supplementary To Question 369-15(4): National Childcare Strategy**

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to add that a lot of the needs coming from the communities are infrastructure. So something like \$1,200

or \$100 a month for each child under six really doesn't address the needs in the communities of having that space available and that infrastructure alone. So if the Minister will also reflect the need for infrastructure funding when he does meet with the Minister, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Mr. Dent.

**Further Return To Question 369-15(4): National Childcare Strategy**

**HON. CHARLES DENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd be happy to take that message to that meeting. I am aware that the current plan would also involve some credits to employers who provided spaces for childcare. As I understand it, the credit would be in the area of \$10,000 per seat. Again, if that is going to be the route that we're going to see followed, I would take the argument that we should see more, a higher rate for businesses in the North, and I will take to the federal government the point that we don't have very many large employers in our smallest communities. So we need to have some kind of accommodation to help us make that program actually deliver more seats in our smallest communities. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Dent. Final, short supplementary, Mr. Menicoche. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Villeneuve.

**Question 370-15(4): Support For Traditional Economy**

**MR. VILLENEUVE:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. As I stated earlier today in my Member's statement, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make a few facts known that the harvesting activity in the NWT is on the rise with the rising cost of living, too. More people are relying on harvested meat and fish. Forty percent of northerners, or 17,000 people in the NWT, are harvesting these days, and 20 percent of our total population are harvesting all of their needs for their meat and fish. That's quite a significant number, Mr. Speaker. My question I wanted to ask the Minister responsible for Industry, Tourism and Investment, or ITI, with the conflicting stories that we get in the newspapers and from locals about, from traditional long-time northerners, some outfitters and tourists and transients, and new northerners, as I like to call them, there's always conflicting stories on estimates of herd numbers and harvesting practices. So I just wanted to ask the Minister what methods of information gathering or researching is his department embarking on to give us a more realistic number on herd development and harvesting. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. The honourable Premier, Mr. Handley.

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** ...(inaudible)...be referred to the Minister for ENR. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Premier. The honourable Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Mr. Miltenberger.

**Return To Question 370-15(4): Support For Traditional Economy**

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we've been engaged for some time in doing census on the barren land caribou, if I can

use that as a specific example. We did some collaring and tracking and we got those numbers. We, as well, have been working with harvesters to get their first-hand accounts of what they're seeing on the land, the condition of the caribou, the number of calves, the issue of predators and those type of matters. As well, we've got an investment to, in fact, redo the census numbers on this herd that we just did, as well as update the information we do have on herds that are somewhat out of date, to confirm the numbers so that we can make the best possible decisions. We've been working collaboratively now for the last five, six months with the various co-management boards up and down the valley where there are land claims settled. As well, we will be soon working with the Wekwegi board, which is now in place and operational, to look at those specific issues in this part of the country. We're working with the outfitters and the other user groups -- Akaitcho and the Metis -- on the caribou issue to make the best informed decisions that we can. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Supplementary, Mr. Villeneuve.

**Supplementary To Question 370-15(4): Support For Traditional Economy**

**MR. VILLENEUVE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for that, that they are doing something with the various co-management boards. But just with the issue, I know there's a lot of research and monitoring done with the caribou in the NWT, the various herds and everything. Just my examples were more specific to something like bison, which we see everyday on the highway, and there really hasn't been any changes in harvesting policies for bison anywhere in the NWT, yet the numbers of bison have grown significantly, especially in the sanctuary here. I'm just wondering if the Department of ENR is looking at maybe reviewing their harvesting policies and practices for bison in the Mackenzie sanctuary for people, say, even in Liard and around the Hook Lake area with respect to...Bison are coming close, Mr. Speaker, and they're just getting to be quite a few of them. So is the department looking at bison, also?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. Miltenberger.

**Further Return To Question 370-15(4): Support For Traditional Economy**

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we are. We are intending to look at a broader bison strategy, recognizing that there are specific herds to be incorporated within that plan, similar to the approach we're taking with barren land caribou. Our attention, right now, has been focused somewhat exclusively on the issue of the barren land caribou, but we have also started the work on the bison, as well. We also have work underway looking at the woodland caribou, as well. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Supplementary, Mr. Villeneuve.

**Supplementary To Question 370-15(4): Support For Traditional Economy**

**MR. VILLENEUVE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just with working with the co-management boards in the various regions I just want to know if the Minister can put

something on the record that his department, with the traditional harvesting policies, I guess, that they might come out, would they be seriously considering a policy framework which originates from out of the small traditional community lifestyles and practices as opposed to what our biologists, and our administrations, and our bureaucrats seem to be steering policies these days? So would the Minister commit to that practice? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. Miltenberger.

**Further Return To Question 370-15(4): Support For Traditional Economy**

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can unequivocally commit to a process where we're going to use and work with the department and the co-management boards and they can take advantage of the best information we have, be it from biologists or the traditional harvesters and traditional knowledge on the land, so that we can blend that together in the best possible program to maintain herd health be it with caribou, or with bison, or the woodland caribou. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Final supplementary, Mr. Villeneuve. Oral questions. The honourable Member from Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

**Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon are for the Premier and it's in relation to the housing mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories and the initiative that's been undertaken under his direction to look at the government's housing mandate and how we're going to revise and redirect this very essential part of our job. It is a job, Mr. Speaker, that I hope is going to be approached with vision, with energy, and with a very long-range goal. So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to ask about, I guess, the expectations and the marching orders, the starting orders for this mandate setting group. I'm wondering if it will be enabled and empowered to look across government departments, Mr. Speaker, for their involvement. For instance, there's MACA with lands, ECE with training, ITI with construction and engineering. Will this new study group be mandated to look across the government for involvement and experience and contribution to the new housing mandate? Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Premier, Mr. Handley.

**Return To Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The mandate of the committee that is looking at the Housing Corporation is to look at how the Housing Corporation can best deliver the programs that it is delivering. The committee will go and hear from people. Members have said we need to hear from local housing authorities; we need to hear from mayors and councils, band councils, from residents, from people across the Territories. They'll listen to say what changes could be made to the Housing Corporation in order to have more effective delivery of housing.

Mr. Speaker, it wasn't going to be the mandate of this committee to begin to look at organizational design and how you might move this piece from here to there and so on. I see that as being a second step, once we determine the Housing Corporation's new role. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. Braden.

**Supplementary To Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**MR. BRADEN:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps we need to do a little bit of housework here between the Executive and committees. I guess I'm wondering about the efficiency of sort of going around the circle twice here, if we're just going to take a look at existing programs, many of which, Mr. Speaker, I don't believe are very effective and are really not producing all that many results for us. This is why I'm looking to see, is the Executive ready to undertake a broader scope? Not just looking at how to fix or patch the Housing Corporation, but to really take a look at our long-term mandate as a government to deliver housing. So I'd ask again, Mr. Speaker, is this something that the Executive is prepared to look at to say, well, just how should we initiate this, what are our objectives through this, and can we be more efficient and more visionary about our approach?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Handley.

**Further Return To Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I see it as in two steps. First of all is, what is the mandate of the Housing Corporation; second is, how should it be structured. So, Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt at all that as the committee goes around, someone is going to ask, for example, why do we have a Housing Corporation. Why a corporation? That issue will be discussed in terms of why it's structured as a corporation. No doubt that is going to be part of it. But our initial focus is going to be on how do we best deliver the housing programs that are needed by our residents. Then the second piece of it, and it may blend into that second piece, is how do we structure or restructure an organization, or organizations that are going to be able to achieve that mandate. So, Mr. Speaker, in the end, it may look very much like it does now, or it may look quite different. So, Mr. Speaker, yes, we are going to be visionary on this and, yes, we're going to leave nothing unturned as we begin to look at it. But I see it as being two phased, and I intend that we will complete that, for sure, within the life of our government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. Braden.

**Supplementary To Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I guess I remain to be convinced of why we should be looking at one component, largely a technical and a corporate component, of our mandate to deliver housing. We're going to set this up, lock it in place, and then go about the visionary exercise. I think it should be exactly the opposite. Let's determine what our overall

government function and mandate should be, and then design the Housing Corporation to suit that need. I think the Premier is going about this entirely in reverse of really what makes good sense. Would the Premier be ready to come back to committee and rethink this direction, Mr. Speaker?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Handley.

**Further Return To Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we're having a communications problem here, because when I listen to Mr. Braden, I'm hearing him saying the same thing I am; that we decide what we want to do. How do we best deliver the housing programs, and then we design the corporation, the department, the body that's going to deliver it. I'm saying the same thing. But we have to know what the purpose is going to be, what the programs are going to be it's delivering, and then fit it. It would be like building a building and then trying to decide whether it should be a house or a store or an apartment or whatever. You've got to know what the purpose is first, and that's what we want to do as part of the review of the mandate. Then the structure comes after that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Third supplementary, Mr. Braden.

**Supplementary To Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**MR. BRADEN:** Mr. Speaker, we'll continue the communication game here, and I'm sure we will find a way to achieve our ends. They are, I believe, common ends. You know, one aspect again, and I'll focus very briefly, Mr. Speaker, in the visionary part of this. We're in an emerging self-government environment, Mr. Speaker, where First Nations and their own mandates and development corporations I know perceive and a want to be involved in this. Are we going to keep an eye on our mandate and how we go about it with these emerging self-government interests as well at the table? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Handley.

**Further Return To Question 371-15(4): Development Of New Mandate**

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Mr. Speaker, yes, we will. The direction to the committee is to go and speak to the local housing organizations, speak to mayors, to chiefs, to MLAs, to community organizations, to standing committees. We will speak to everybody about what the mandate of the Housing Corporation should be and, eventually, about what the structure of the organization should be. So, Mr. Speaker, yes, there will be opportunity for anyone who is interested to have input into this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. Oral questions. The honourable Member from Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I received a number of calls on this matter and it appears very clear that the passport matter isn't going away in



regards to the selection of Team NWT. Sport North was very clear early on in the process that you needed a passport to be able to be eligible for the January 6<sup>th</sup> NWT trials. Many parents ran out and got them in a timely way. So, Mr. Speaker, I'm concerned, as my colleague Mr. Villeneuve was concerned yesterday, that possibly our best athletes didn't bother trying to go to the trials because they didn't have passports or they couldn't get passports in time. So my question to the Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs is, when was this known, why did this change come about, and how was it communicated to the parents, coaches and athletes in relation to the NWT trials? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The honourable Minister responsible for Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. McLeod.

**HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I didn't hear the question. Can I get the Member to repeat the question?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Hawkins.

**Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you. Apparently the question took him off his feet, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is, and I won't go all the way through it again, but my question is, is the fact that we had parents out there who ran out and got passports in a timely way. But I'm concerned that some of our best athletes didn't bother trying to attend the trials because they didn't have passports or they couldn't get them in a timely way. So my direct question to the Minister is, respectfully, when and why did they know about this change in relation to the NWT trials, and how was that communicated to the athletes, coaches and parents? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The honourable Minister responsible for Municipal and Community Affairs, Mr. McLeod.

**Return To Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD:** Mr. Chairman, there is no change in the requirement for a passport. The host society has indicated that they will do their best to allow the athletes into the country with a birth certificate and a general identification card. We are still insisting that all the athletes have passports, so we have not moved on that. We are looking at a plan B and we are negotiating and talking to the host society and the state of Alaska to ensure that we can get into the country in the event that some of our athletes or some of our mission staff may not have their passport in time. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

**Supplementary To Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll first say that should have been the plan all along because, you know, if you're either from a small community or you're from a big community, if you're on income support or whatnot, you may not be able to either afford or get a

passport in a timely way. But, Mr. Speaker, there's a concern among a number of parents out there that they followed the rules, which is they ran out and got passports, although the Minister had just said that they're going to try to work around it. The feeling is, the rules have changed. So what are we going to do to compensate these parents who ran out and got passports, when the Minister is saying that we're finding ways to work around it? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. McLeod.

**Further Return To Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD:** Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure where he's getting his information from. The rules have not changed. Every athlete was required to apply for a passport. The deadline was at the territorial trails. The problem that we're encountering now, a small number of our athletes have not received their passports and in some cases the Government of Canada, the Immigration department, is seeking more information, and we are concerned that information may not get there in time. But everybody has followed the rules; everybody has applied for their passports. The majority of the athletes have their passports, and the mission staff and everybody else that's going. There's a small number that don't have it and we are working on a plan B in the event that they don't receive their passports in time. We have no intention of reimbursing anybody, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

**Supplementary To Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I appreciate that we sort of seesawed on this issue, because it sounds like we're still going with plan B, although plan A may not work. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to get clarity. If they do not have their passports, are we still going to support those athletes going forward, because it seems unfair for those parents who ran out and got passports for kids and they're not being compensated, because it sounds as if plan B will still get the kids into the country of the United States. So what are we doing, plan A or plan B? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. McLeod.

**Further Return To Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD:** Mr. Speaker, it would be premature to say we're working on plan B until plan A doesn't work. So we are still anticipating that the majority of our athletes, and maybe all of them, will have their passports in time. But in the event that one, or two, or whatever the number is, do not receive the passport, because there have been some athletes that have been notified that they have to send in more information, then we'll take in plan B. Plan B we need to start working on now if we're going to have a plan B. So we are talking to the host society; we are talking to the people that would make the decision whether or not they would allow us to have some athletes accepted into the country with a birth certificate and a general identification card. We're doing it now because some of our athletes do not have a general

identification card, so we have to get that in place. So those things, we have to make sure are in place before the athletes start travelling in early March. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Final supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

**Supplementary To Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague Mr. Villeneuve said yesterday...and I believe in the principle, this is not a kick against the Minister, the department or Sport North, but this is simply based on fair treatment. Did our best athletes come forward because of the concern of not having a passport and fair treatment of parents? Mr. Speaker, the Minister had said plan B: birth certificate and general ID. Will that be the policy, or is that how we're going to get these extra kids in there when we originally told everybody you needed a passport or don't bother going to the trials. I need a clear answer. Passport or no. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. McLeod.

**Further Return To Question 372-15(4): Passport Requirements For Arctic Winter Games**

**HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know if that decision's going to be ours at the end of the day. Anybody with a passport will get into the country. That's fairly definite. People without passports, we are trying to get a methodology of them being able to get into the country. So we have to do that now. We have to ensure they have their birth certificate and a general identification card, and that's still not a guarantee they're going to get into the country. We have not changed our position. We still want all the athletes, all the staff, all the mission staff, everybody to have a passport. But failing that, we don't want to have to send athletes home after they've gone through all this process. So there is a small number there that we have concern with and we're going to work with on it to see if we can have them enter the country.

But having a passport is not a new thing for Arctic Winter Games. We do it for every Arctic Winter Games where we have to go to a different country. It's not a new requirement. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Oral questions. The honourable Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. McLeod.

**Question 373-15(4): Reducing Costs On Goods And Services**

**MR. MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my Member's statement I was speaking about the high cost of living and how I thought the businesses, the high cost of fuel and that...There were some ways, some ideas we could come up with the businesses to help...or not help. I am not implying that. I am saying subsidize the businesses because they may just end up with the money in their pocket and keep the prices the way they were to begin with. I would like to ask the Minister of ITI if there has ever been a study specific to the Northwest Territories, or survey with northern businesses, asking for ideas and creative ways that they may come up with bringing the prices down on

some of the goods and services in the Northwest Territories, especially food? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister responsible for Industry, Tourism and Investment, Mr. Bell.

**Return To Question 373-15(4): Reducing Costs On Goods And Services**

**HON. BRENDAN BELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very good question. I am aware of the work annually that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business does where they survey northern businesses to ask them about some of the impediments of doing business in the North. Typically, they identify things like labour costs, energy costs, regulatory burden, tax burden. But a specific study that we've conducted, I am not exactly sure. I will talk to our regional staff. It is possible that we could go out and solicit some input. Using the chambers would probably be effective, talk to northern business about their business challenge and biggest hurdles. I tend to agree with the Member; the answer isn't direct subsidization which does really nothing, except for some short-term relief. I think it's to look to some longer-term structural answers and I am thinking around energy and some of the discussions we've had about gasification of communities, getting communities on natural gas or other issues, hydro, things like that, Mr. Speaker. I think it's a good point and it's certainly something I could have my regions look at. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Bell. Supplementary, Mr. Bell.

**Supplementary To Question 373-15(4): Reducing Costs On Goods And Services**

**MR. MCLEOD:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Mr. Minister. I think I heard some kind of a commitment there from the Minister that he will instruct his department in house to go and do a bit of a survey with some of the northern businesses to see what we can do. Did I hear a commitment there? Am I correct?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Bell.

**Further Return To Question 373-15(4): Reducing Costs On Goods And Services**

**HON. BRENDAN BELL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will speak to the deputy minister about it and we will go out and talk to our regional staff and have them engage in a discussion with regional businesses. I think we can use the chambers to help us with some of this, to ask them about some of the challenges of doing business and see if there aren't some ways that we can bring costs down. Of course, the Member is right; we want to make sure if there is some way to reduce input cost, that that is passed on, in terms of prices of food, passed onto our consumers, especially in our smaller communities where it's, obviously, very, very expensive to buy groceries. I think energy is an obvious one, one of the first things that comes to mind and we can do some work in that area. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Bell. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

**Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the questions going back and forth on the theme topic today, which is high cost of living, I am not sure if anybody listening today and walking away from this is really getting an idea about whether or not government is willing, able or has figured out anything that could help our people out there. I am not sure if anything is going to be done about what to do about having to pay \$20 for a box of detergent in Tuk, which is what I saw there. What would we do about a family in Yellowknife who has to spend every cent of their household income just to live? For the government to say we spend 100 and something million dollars in subsidies, so we are doing our job, and people over there are thinking, great, the government is spending a lot of money. I don't even know the logic of saying the government spending that money has something to do with the cost of living, or that building hydro has something to do with reducing the cost of living.

So as the Minister of Finance, as he is burying himself in the books and thinking about cost of living questions, is there anything that he thought of that could actually help people with the cost of living issue? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Minister responsible for Finance, Mr. Roland.

**Return To Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as I had addressed during the budget process and laying out the issues that we have to face, subsidies work in the short term not in the long term. We are going to have to do things differently and it's about how we use our energy, the cost of producing that energy. They are big things. It's not going to be immediate. The transportation systems, communication systems, have to be improved to reduce those types of things.

Mr. Speaker, when travelling in the Nunakput region, stopping in the community of Paulatuk and visiting their Northern Store and looking at their produce section and one tomato costing \$4.67 sends a message to us. Yes, we have to do something differently. But much of what we can do or try to improve on is going to take a significant amount of time and investment of cash. Short term, subsidies will work, but we try to do things, for example, with our own employees. The northern allowance package deals with different zones within the territory to try to deal with those high cost of living areas. That works for us, but doesn't work for the private sector, I realize that. So there are things we are doing and looking at and some of the things are going to be more far reaching and cost a whole lot in the area of investment. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

**Supplementary To Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**MS. LEE:** A simple economic principle would suggest that the government paying the subsidy is keeping the artificial prices and artificial economy, really. That does not bring down the cost of things. It just helps people in terms of how much they have to pay out of their own pocket. It really

doesn't address getting money from resource revenue sharing or anything. I am not hearing any fresh idea from the Minister about what he's prepared to do, something for our residents, with respect to this enormous cost of everything. I would like to know if the Minister could give us anything at all. I can't think of anything either...

---Laughter

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Whoa!

**MS. LEE:** But he's getting the big bucks, so maybe he could explain something.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the immediate term, we are dealing with the issues of subsidies, even though we recognize in the long term, they are not going to be the fix-all for the situation. As a government, if we don't change the way we do business in the long term, trying to carry on with the subsidy process that's existing will drive us into bankruptcy. So we are going to have to look at the investments we make, long term, around hydro, how we produce our electricity. For example, Mr. Speaker, one of the things we are doing, and continue to do, is in the Territorial Power Support Program that works with those residents who pay a higher power rate than within the capital. So that's one of the areas. Income support or housing programs, those are short-term solutions that we will have to continue to deal with and continue to pay the forced growth cost. It's things like hydro and transportation systems, and we have to work with the federal government in those areas to get some support. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

**Supplementary To Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think in the long run, the things that will bring down the cost of living are a healthier economy, free competition, more supply to meet the demands of goods. As long as there is one store that brings goods from thousands of miles away and they charge whatever they want, things are not going to go down. We need to create sustainable economies, and I am not hearing how...and housing issues. Lack of development and ability of this government or anybody to bring the cost of housing down, and I am not hearing any talks from the Premier or the Minister or anybody with aboriginal governments and leadership in the North about how we do bread and butter issues rather than spending all our time talking about big ticket items, which is important but can't be done in isolation and separation from the rest of the bread and butter issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, even I would like to have a Tim Horton's in Inuvik, or a Wal-Mart many people would like to have, but a lot of those organizations, even within their setup of businesses,

require a certain population to make that business work. That's one of the problems we face. Small, isolated, remote communities are high cost centres. That's one of the things we have to deal with. That's why we see so many subsidies in place. So the fact of trying to create that economic condition to develop is one thing we wrestle with as a government. How much of our programs do we spin off and try to create an economic situation? In some cases the Member has touched on, it is a false economy to a certain degree because we are driving that economy through much of our expenditures. We are going to have to look at that. We are going to work on it within a number of departments to try to make something come around and hopefully create a small business environment that just helps them to prosper. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Time for question period has expired, but I will allow the Member one short, final supplementary question. Ms. Lee.

**Supplementary To Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**MS. LEE:** Thank you. I will try for a specific question here. Yesterday I learned that MACA has basically given up trying to come up with lots to reduce the cost of housing, for example. Could I ask the Minister of Finance, as Minister of Finance, to talk to the Cabinet about how we deal with the cost of lot development so we can deal with the cost of housing, which I think is the biggest driver of the cost of living. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Roland.

**Further Return To Question 374-15(4): Government Action On Reducing Costs Of Living**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Member has raised the issue of housing and the impact in the Northwest Territories, talking about being visionary, we are trying to work on a package that might actually put more housing in the communities, drop the cost of living in that area, and that's the Novel concept.

---Applause

Put subdivisions in those communities and put homes on the ground for families. That's one of the areas. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Question period has expired. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to opening address. Replies to budget address. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

**ITEM 11: REPLIES TO BUDGET ADDRESS**

**Mrs. Groenewegen's Reply**

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I have never done a reply to the budget address before, but I think, according to the rules, I can talk about anything that touches on the budget for as long as I want.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Whoa!

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** So I hope my honourable colleagues won't all get up and run out of the House.

**MR. SPEAKER:** (Microphone turned off)...replies to the budget address is 20 minutes and it has to be on the budget. Mrs. Groenewegen.

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will definitely respect that and keep it to 20 minutes.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to raise the subject of the Legislative Assembly. I am not going to stick to exactly how it relates to the budget, but it is a budget item, and it is a department item, and it is an expenditure of this government to fund this Legislative Assembly. So today I want to talk about that.

Just recently, we've had a review of the compensation that MLAs are paid to do our jobs, and that certainly is a component of that Legislative Assembly budget, and all the indemnities and the supports that we get to fulfil our jobs as MLAs. Mr. Speaker, I have concerns about some of the changes I have observed. I have been here 10 years and, lately, I have begun to notice that there is a bit of an erosion, it would appear, in terms of people's commitment to this process. I am a big supporter of this process here that happens on the floor of this House for the public to view and for us to debate and raise issues on behalf of our constituents. I think it's very important to public government that this process take place. So, first of all, let me say I am a big supporter of it.

However, I am disturbed by what I see as an erosion of people's understanding of the significance of this. Now things have changed recently, and not to be critical, but when I used to stand up in this House, even if nobody was listening to me, at least I knew my constituents at home were listening to me because for that two hours, we knew that we were going to be televised on APTN and people in our communities and every community I have ever travelled to talked about watching us on television. Maybe they are just looking at what we are wearing that day or our little idiosyncrasies when we stand up here in the House. They comment on everything. But at least they were following what we were doing.

So that gave some level of expectation on people's part, on us, that we were going to stand up and say something intelligent and say something representative of their issues, and people wanted to hear that and they liked that. I know that the powers that be are working on trying to replace that with something equal, if not better, to allow people to engage in what we do here in this House.

I notice there are a lot of things going on in the North right now that might be a lot more exciting than what's going on here. You listen to the news this morning and the highlights on the news were Imperial Oil's meeting with the folks in Fort Good Hope and Colville over their access and benefits agreement. There was a big news item and interview this morning on the Dehcho land use planning process meeting that was going on in Hay River. The emerging aboriginal governments and their issues related to politics and economy are starting to take a much higher profile in the Northwest Territories and people are following that to some large extent, which also goes to whether or not people are watching or care what we are doing.

There are also a lot of things going on in the economy that has captured people's attention. People say that when the economy is bad, everybody pays attention to the politicians and what the government is doing. When the economy is good, nobody really cares. We just aren't the big show in

town that we used to be because of the resource development and the private sector is doing so well.

So I don't know what people are saying about us right now. I am not really sure what we are saying. I am not sure what we will be remembered for. MLA McLeod talked about legacy, what will the 15<sup>th</sup> Assembly be remembered for. I am not sure yet. We are more than halfway through our term and I still don't really know what we will have accomplished in the bigger scheme of things by the time we get to the end of this term. I don't know if we have too many priorities and maybe so many priorities that nothing is a priority. The thing we need to ask ourselves is are we going to be remembered as a status quo maintenance government and we were just an extension of the bureaucratic function of managing programs and services and departments? That's a possibility, too.

So I don't know how many people are paying attention to what we are doing, but one thing I do know is, we do spend a lot of money to ensure that this process takes place with a certain amount of decorum and a certain amount of dignity on the floor of this House. We have rules and this is something we fought very long and hard for to wrestle away from Ottawa. We did not want authority and administration being carried out in Ottawa, so we wrestled for years to evolve to this point where we would have the privilege of doing what we do everyday that the House is sitting here in Yellowknife.

We do spend this money partly to encourage feedback and participation in the democratic process. We want to hear people's input. They hear what we are saying and they might have a comment on what we are saying, so that is a part of the purpose of this Assembly.

So the Assembly and the public debate that ensues in this House, we hope to our constituents, demonstrates that there is accountability. I think that's also a big part of what we do.

People think that this is an entrenched institution now, the Legislative Assembly and what happens here, and that we have this and it's not going away. I hate to say this, but from what I have observed over the last couple of weeks here, I would say it's a very slippery slope when people start to not take this as seriously as they should. I am not criticizing anybody and I say this to myself as well, but I really do think that we need to respect each other and we need to respect the work that needs to be done here. I think it needs to be paramount. We do get paid a lot of money to come here and do this job. A lot of it is constituency work and, yes, we are on call 24 hours a day. People say did you have a break, were you on holidays? No, we weren't; we were in our communities. We are there for everything. We are there when somebody is sick. We are there when there are issues that arise in the communities. People look to us. We have to be there to respond to that role.

When division took place, we discussed how many Members we needed in this forum in order to make it work, and the number 15 was suggested. I was never in support of 15. I think that we can barely make this thing effectively with 19, and there is an Electoral Boundaries Commission right now and if they came back and said we needed more MLAs, I don't think I would necessarily disagree with them. There is a lot of work to be done. There is a lot of committee work, but we also need the critical mass of people because we feed off of each other. We also inspire each other to do our jobs. We may not want to admit that,

but I'm sorry, I believe the way we do our jobs inspires each other and when somebody, for whatever reason, drops out of the mix or is not there or visible, it changes the dynamics. One region not represented and one person not represented changes the perspective of how we do our work. That's how important each one of us are to this process.

Yesterday, we struggled along. For various reasons, our numbers were down and it was difficult. It put a lot more strain on everybody and it was much more subdued. It wasn't lively. It wasn't exciting. I kind of missed that. I am not following my notes here at all.

I guess, in summary, Mr. Speaker, I think we just need to kick things up a notch around here, if I can use that term. I could do more and I am going to try to do more to realize that. As I said, I don't want to criticize anybody, but people want to hear good debate. People like it. They want to hear the issues aired, whether you are on one side of the issue or the other. They want to hear the issues debated.

Even a little bit of controversy can get people engaged in what we are doing. It makes us a little bit more passionate about it, and then they become more passionate about it. I hope we haven't distanced ourselves or become disinterested in the many needs in the North. We should be able to get very passionate about the needs in the North. Sometimes when things are going well and employment is doing a little better, out of sight, out of mind. It is possible for us to become distant from the needs in the North. We need to be reminded of those needs all the time. There is a lot of work to do in order to respond to the needs of people in the North. If we have become removed from those things, we need to find ways to remind ourselves and get very up close and familiar with those needs.

We don't need people just here warming their chairs, as I said. I don't know. Actually, we do need people here to warm the chairs. Today, we had the Ecole Boreal students here watching us. If their teacher, Miss Sophie Call, if we had been in her class, I am sure there were a few of us she would have told to sit down and be quiet if that is her classroom. When she saw the empty chairs, she might have wondered if some epidemic illness had swept her class.

Maybe, as I said, people think that our privilege here is well entrenched. Like I said, I think that it would not take much for the proceedings of this House to come to a grinding halt. We watched in Nunavut. One day, they rang the bells and the quorum didn't show up. You might think, oh, that would never happen here. I think it could happen here. I think that the day that happens here, it would be a very sad day in the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker, I just think we need to put a little bit more life, passion and excitement into what we are doing all, of course, within the confines of decorum and respect in the House. This is just something that I wanted to speak of. I will bring it back to the budget again. We spend a lot of money on this process, and I think that we should do it honour by making sure we are here and doing our best. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Replies to the budget address. Petitions. Reports of committees

on the review of bills. Tabling of documents. The honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Roland.

#### ITEM 14: TABELING OF DOCUMENTS

##### **Tabled Document 86-15(4): The GNWT's Responses To The Report On Pre-Budget Consultations**

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following document entitled, The Government of the Northwest Territories' Responses to the Report on Pre-Budget Consultations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

#### ITEM 15: NOTICES OF MOTION

##### **Motion 13-15(4): Northern Residents Income Tax Deduction**

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I give notice that, on Monday, February 13, 2006, I will move the following motion: Now therefore I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, that this Legislative Assembly supports an increase of the northern residency deduction; and further, that this Legislative Assembly supports ongoing annual indexing of the northern residency deduction to keep pace with the cost of living; and further, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier and Minister of Finance will immediately begin work with their counterparts in the other territories and affected provinces, as well as northern Members of Parliament, to collectively make the case to the federal government to increase the northern residency deduction.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time, I will seek unanimous consent to deal with this motion today. Thank you.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Notices of motion. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. Motions. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. I seek unanimous consent to deal with the motion I gave notice of earlier today.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. The Member is seeking unanimous consent to deal with the motion he gave notice of earlier today. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may continue with your motion, Mr. Braden.

#### ITEM 16: MOTIONS

##### **Motion 13-15(4): Northern Residents Income Tax Deduction, Carried**

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. WHEREAS average annual spending on food in the Northwest Territories is approximately \$2,000 higher than the Canadian average;

AND WHEREAS average annual spending on housing in the Northwest Territories is approximately \$2,400 higher than the Canadian average;

AND WHEREAS average annual spending on utilities in the Northwest Territories is approximately \$1,200 higher than the Canadian average;

AND WHEREAS the Nunavut and Yukon territories, as well as the northern zones of several provinces, also suffer from costs of living far above Canadian averages;

AND WHEREAS it is in the national interest that Canadians continue to reside in and relocate to the North thereby adding weight to Canada's assertions of sovereignty in the Arctic;

AND WHEREAS the Parliament of Canada has in the past recognized the high cost of living in Northern Canada by providing for northern residents' deductions in the Income Tax Act of Canada;

AND WHEREAS the maximum northern residency deduction has remained unchanged at approximately \$5,475 since 1991 despite increases to the cost of living;

NOW THEREFORE I MOVE, seconded by the honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, that this Legislative Assembly supports an increase of the northern residency deduction;

AND FURTHER, that this Legislative Assembly supports ongoing annual indexing of the northern residency deduction to keep pace with the cost of living;

AND FURTHER, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier and Minister of Finance will immediately begin work with their counterparts in the other territories and affected provinces, as well as northern Members of Parliament, to collectively make the case to the federal government to increase the northern residency deduction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. The motion is on the floor. The motion is in order. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. The honourable Premier, Mr. Handley. To the motion.

**HON. JOE HANDLEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that this is a motion that is important to everybody in the Northwest Territories as we approach that period of time where we are going to be filling out our income tax and realizing that little bit of savings that we put together that is going to have to go to pay for the shortfall on taxes that we have to pay out to the federal government and to the territorial government. That affects everybody. That affects all of us.

Mr. Speaker, we, on this side of the House, certainly support this motion and support all of the elements of the motion. But, Mr. Speaker, we will not be voting on this motion only because this is direction to the government. Mr. Speaker, I want to reinforce that we do support this motion, but will not vote because it is direction to our government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Handley. To the motion. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I will start with acknowledging the Premier's support of this. This was a motion that actually we started talking about very early in our preparation last week for our sessional business here. In collaboration with the Premier and the Finance Minister, we have something that this whole Assembly can support. Acknowledging that we won't see the Premier and the Cabinet voting because of this technicality of directing them to do something does not diminish the support and appreciation that we have and that I have for doing this.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we avoided in this was actually setting a dollar amount by which we feel this allowance should be increased. This is something that we link to our desire that our sister territories, Nunavut and the Yukon, will also come in. It is also an acknowledgement, Mr. Speaker, that, as different taxation pictures are changed or amended, there are consequences. This is something that we have to be mindful with this change. In a federal taxation, it would result in a potential reduction in payments or contributions that are made from the federal government to the NWT, so we need to be mindful that there is a consequence here.

Further to asking the Premier and the Finance Minister to work with the counterparts in the other territories is what would seem to be the need for a concerted, well-orchestrated and unified effort to get this message through to the new government in Ottawa. Some news accounts of a few days ago that would indicate that this is just not on their list, even though it has been raised by our new Member of Parliament I believe in at least the last two elections. This is not a new idea. We are going to have to link arms if we are going to get something done on this.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I believe that making this adjustment can be one of the most effective, simplest and direct methods of enabling every Canadian who is living in a high-cost jurisdiction to see some recognition from the national government, from Canada, that there is a consequence, a cost, to living in northern Canada, and that it is something, in the interest of sovereignty and of making the very best of the opportunities that are up here, for northerners and for Canada. This is a very strong and positive thing that can be done and should be done for northerners, for the rest of Canada to take on, recognizing that this is an increment that makes sense, that is sustainable and that would be good for northerners and good for Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. To the motion. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, will be supporting this motion in its entirety only because it is about time that our federal government recognizes, once again, that the costs, indeed, are that much higher here in the North. Yellowknife, of course, is impacted quite a bit, but even more so in the smaller communities. A lot of the bigger costs are as I spoke about and continue to speak about and how it is due to transportation and fuel costs. It has a huge bearing on it lately, as well. If there is a way of putting money back into our northern residents instead of taking it out, I think this is one of the ways that our federal government is going to recognize that. There will

be more money for our residents in order to run their households in the smaller communities.

I would like to be very supportive of ongoing annual indexing that it speaks about in the motion. If that was in place the first time instead of them just enabling legislation to give us the northern residency deduction in the taxation act back in 1991, our indexing, it would have helped a bit. It would have helped a lot, actually. I think the estimate said that if it was indexed, we would have been around \$6,800 for a northern residency deduction if they indexed it from 1991.

That is something that should have been in there. I would like to see it brought up again with our federal counterparts as they deliberate their new budget shortly, or in their term at least, Mr. Speaker. With that, I am very supportive of this motion. I look forward to its passage. I look forward to our honourable Premier carrying this torch to Ottawa along with many of the other needs and requests that are specific to the North that will help us improve the lives of our people and our communities. Mahsi cho.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. To the motion. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier today in my Member's statement, since 1988, our cost of living, according to the Canada Statistics, has risen 147 percent. Mr. Speaker, that means if you could have bought a can of Coke in 1988 for a dollar, it would almost cost you \$1.50 for that same can of Coke, Mr. Speaker. That is a shave for the cost of living. Mr. Speaker, this motion is about getting real money into the pockets of our residents, so we shouldn't be laughing or scoffing on any side of this House on this matter, Mr. Speaker. Everyone should be lending a helping hand regardless of Cabinet, if they want to sit there, make fun or joke about this issue while we are trying to raise... This side of the House is trying to lift this issue forward and say we need to do real solutions. This is a real effort here to get real money into every taxpayer's pocket who has to pay for oil, rent and everything. This affects every family.

Mr. Speaker, Yellowknife used to be known as one of the most expensive cities in Canada, but it has been quickly replaced in the most recent years by Fort McMurray. Mr. Speaker, the cost of living in Yellowknife is horrendous. Yes, we are blessed with some nice rates when it comes to pay but, Mr. Speaker, it is just deplorable the way it costs to buy a home in this town. We need ways to help offset those costs. This demonstrates, Mr. Speaker, that we are doing something. This demonstrates today that we are not sitting on our hands and watching the cost of living skyrocket with just sitting in silence. So, Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this motion; a real motion that hopefully will make real differences to the residents of our Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. To the motion. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, will be supporting the motion that is before us today. I will get back to a few things I mentioned during my Member's statement as a reason why I support this motion. Obviously, I am in favour of tax credits. This is one way I think that the federal government and our

territorial government can realize that we can give people who want to live here or relocate here an advantage for coming north and living in the North. I think, as I mentioned, arctic sovereignty is a big issue nowadays. It is important that we try to attract and retain people to live here.

The other big reason is the increase is overdue, in my mind, Mr. Speaker. In 1988 and again in 2003, figures and statistics will clearly show that the Northwest Territories tax filers paid more federal income tax as a proportion of total income than the average Canadian did. If that doesn't tell us that this deduction increase is long overdue, then nothing else will, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage everyone to support this motion and to work with our other two sister territories to get this on the agenda in Ottawa and to support our new Member of Parliament, Mr. Bevington, in his pursuit to have this increase. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. To the motion. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, wish to speak in favour of this motion. Following what my colleague from Hay River South said, I do believe that a motion like this is an important statement. It is a formal motion coming out of an elected body of a territory in Canada. It is a message to the new federal government. It is a multi-partisan pan-territorial message to the federal government that is very specific. It is a message to the new MP for Western Arctic, Mr. Bevington. It is sort of an assignment we are asking him to undertake. He has already made a commitment to do that, but, certainly, we are putting some wind behind him so he knows that he has the support of this House with respect to this issue. It is also a message to the Premier to work with the other territorial Premiers to push this agenda. It is also a message to other northern MPs, of course, because we know that this cannot be achieved without the support and help from everyone. I think it is an issue that has the consent and support of everyone in the North. I am very optimistic that this will go a long way in pushing this forward in what is assumed to be a short time of this government as this being a minority government.

Mr. Speaker, I believe this is a motion that speaks to our desire in this Legislature to do something to help with the high cost of living and doing business in the North. We are asking the federal government to take a few million dollars less from our income tax, which I know they are not going to miss at all because they are just not going to miss it. It is just so little, but it will make a huge difference for everyone in our territory.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Braden mentioned earlier that we are reluctant to give a figure on how much the increase the reduction should be. I think the Member's statement earlier stated quite clearly that almost everything here, whether it is fuel, water and sewer, oil and gas, housing, everything is at least 30 percent higher. I think 30 to 50 percent of it. I think water and sewer was about 90 percent higher. I don't think it is far beyond being reasonable to suggest that it should go at least up to \$8,500. That is about 30 percent, about a half an increase. Given that, about 50 percent increase from what it is now. Given that there has not been any kind of increase since 1991, that is a good figure for the federal

government to work on. With that, Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to support this motion. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms. Lee. To the motion. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

**MRS. GROENEWEGEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to speak in favour of the motion. I don't think that this increase in the tax credit would be the be-all and end-all. I don't think people will look at it and say I think I will move to the Northwest Territories so I can get a tax credit. However, it is one thing in what should be a number of things which could make the cost of living, and living in the North, easier.

Not so long ago, one of the diamond companies decided to forfeit the deduction that they would take from the paycheques of their employees if they flew them from southern Canada to the mine. I think it was \$250 for a round trip, but they decided to do away with that. So not only was that a distance end of people to live in the North, that was actually taking northern families, like living in Tlicho communities and work at a diamond mine, they were looking at southern Canada and the suburbs of Edmonton and going, hey, this is cheaper for us to leave the North. Pretty soon, it is not only a matter of attracting to the North, it is trying to keep the people who were born and raised here to live in the North. This is just one small piece in what needs to be done to make living in the North more affordable. I will certainly be in support of it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. To the motion. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Villeneuve.

**MR. VILLENEUVE:** Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I rise, also, to offer my support for the motion for the very fact that my colleague Mr. Ramsay stated, and various other colleagues, that it is an old policy. It is 15 years old. It is due for some change. I think it is right around the time when the Liberals took over government that no changes happened.

---Applause

Now that we have a new government in Ottawa, I think that there is a good chance that we could realize some unprecedented changes and some requests that the territorial governments, Nunavut and Yukon, come together and push at the national level. I think we will get a better response given the new government that we have in place in Ottawa.

I don't think that the changes, like the northern residency deduction, would have any real significant consequences on our negotiation process with resource revenue sharing and devolution and on the federal transfer initiative that we are going for. I think the change is very insignificant. It is only going to be beneficial for northerners. I think that would make, on a national level...I know that the Conservative government was stressing during the campaign that they want to strengthen rural Canada and they recognize the remoteness and the uniqueness of Northern Canada and that the hardships and the high cost of living that we live with. I guess any small, positive change like this for northerners will be regarded for



northerners and by northerners as a really positive step to addressing the high cost of living in the NWT. I think that it is something that this government should really adamantly pursue and look forward to resolving before the end of this sitting. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. To the motion. I will allow Mr. Braden some closing comments to the motion. Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The support demonstrated across the chamber today indicates this is something that we are all committed to. The Premier and the Finance Minister can continue to count on our support. I would hope that as they do our bidding and talk to their counterparts in the Yukon and the Nunavut, those assemblies, too, will come behind us, our Members of Parliament, that we will see this very long-overdue and progressive thing come into reality. I welcome the vote, Mr. Chair.

---Applause

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. To the motion.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

---Applause

Motions. Before we go on, colleagues, I would like to ask you to join me and I am sure our honourable Finance Minister in welcoming to the House his wife, Shawna, and kids Mitchell and Samuel.

---Applause

First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. The honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Roland.

#### ITEM 18: SECOND READING OF BILLS

##### Bill 20: An Act To Amend The Income Tax Act, No. 2

**HON. FLOYD ROLAND:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Weledeh, that Bill 20, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, No. 2, be read for the second time. Mr. Speaker, this bill decreases the general corporate tax income tax rate effective July 1, 2006. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Roland. The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak in favour of the bill. The need to keep current and competitive with tax changes in other jurisdictions in Canada is a bit of a challenge. In some areas, it can have its share of risk, as well. Was it two years ago that we changed our corporate tax rate upwards? This bill is going to reduce it now, again, as we are keeping pace with the changes in other parts of Canada.

One of the things that we will be looking into as this bill moves into committee is the potential consequence to the NWT in making these changes. While I am speaking in favour of the principle of the bill, Mr. Speaker, there may be other consequences or concerns that will be brought back to the Assembly and into the further debate about this bill. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Braden. To the principle of the bill.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Question.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Question has been called. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Bill 20 has had second reading and, therefore, stands to a committee. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Bill 18, committee reports 5, 6 and 7, with Mrs. Groenewegen in the chair.

#### ITEM 19: CONSIDERATION IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF BILLS AND OTHER MATTERS

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** I will call Committee of the Whole to order. We are considering Bill 18, Appropriation Act. Mr. Menicoche.

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The committee wishes to consider the Department of Health and Social Services.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Does the committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you. We will do that after we take a break. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Okay. I call Committee of the Whole back to order. We're on the Department of Health and Social Services, general comments. On my list I have Mr. Hawkins. I mean, not Mr. Hawkins; Mr. Menicoche. I got you mixed up. Sorry.

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Hang on.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Sorry, Mr. Miltenberger. I was getting such pressure to hurry. Mr. Miltenberger, would you like to come into the...I mean, would you like to bring witnesses into the chamber?

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Yes, I would, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Does the committee agree that we should let Mr. Miltenberger bring witnesses into the chamber?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Agreed. Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, would you please escort the witnesses to the witness table.

Mr. Miltenberger, would you please go and take your place at the witness table.

Okay. Thank you. I do apologize that we forgot for one moment only. Welcome back, Mr. Murray and Mr. St. Germaine. We'll now proceed with general comments. Mr. Menicoche.

**MR. MENICOCHÉ:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just with respect to the Department of Health and Social Services, another one of the big departments that plays a large part in my constituency, Madam Chair. I've got a very spread out constituency. I've got six communities, four small communities, and quite often -- "often" the key word here, Madam Chair -- is that programs, and guidelines, and policies that work in the larger centres just don't apply in the smaller centres and the smaller populations. Even Fort Simpson, as well, which is my biggest population centre of around 1,200 residents. But constituents get frustrated over guidelines and policies about travelling for medical travel, and having escorts and translation services along with the escort services, especially with the elderly population. That's predominantly the makeup of my constituency, Madam Chair, is that it's largely aboriginal and quite often the elderly and the older people, their southern Slavey dialect is their first language. They're getting increasingly frustrated because they are still going to get attention in the health centres and medical centres and it's still happening that nurses and doctors are asking them questions and they're kind of nodding in compliance, but they're not really understanding, Madam Chair. I think part of it is that when I first came to this Assembly I fought hard to get our cultural awareness programming. I think, primarily, I went through the Department of Health and Social Services first, but I believe it has to be an ongoing program, ongoing cultural awareness training that has to be ongoing perhaps on a yearly basis or for the new employments. It's not only Health and Social Services that the elders are having problems with. But there's a start there and it's just a basic understanding that even though it appears that they're understanding English and acknowledging what they're saying, they're not really doing that. I think it's more politeness, Madam Chair, that the people are agreeing.

As well as another huge event that occurred in my riding over the holidays was that there's a couple young girls in Wrigley that I'm still not quite sure on whether they got misdiagnosed or else there was quite, anyways, Madam Chair, there was quite a delay from an incident that they had to the time they got treatment. I think it was three or four days. Both of these girls were involved in an incident or accident with a snowmobile and they had broken legs, but it wasn't determined until about three days later. That's just something that's not acceptable. Granted, I'm not too sure what the reasoning behind it was, but I'm looking for a proper assessment of what happened there and just to prevent against that type of occurrence again. Even though I disagree with the way it all turned out, but there must be a way to assess a situation, provide a root cause, and then learn from that and move on. People just don't want to see those things happening.

What if it's more severe the next time? Who's going to explain that? That's just what I'd like to say. I don't want to see it get worse or something else, a worse incident happen and somebody gets either misdiagnosed or else put off until the next day type of approach. Quite often that was one of the biggest complaints when I got elected, was

that elders were actually being sent home with aspirins thinking that aspirins will cure their ailment, when actually they're really sicker than they thought they were. But this kind of practice is improving, and I continue to speak for it. It's one step forward and two steps back, or whatever. But we still have to keep looking at these and assessing them and finding out root causes and improving service delivery to our constituents, Madam Chair.

Another very important aspect to elderly health care in the Nahendeh riding was the establishment of a dialysis machine in Fort Simpson. I see it's moved further down the capital plan. I don't know what the reasoning for that is, but as our population ages, it becomes more and more important for more and more people to receive the treatment they need from the dialysis machine. In fact, when I first came here, we actually had to move a resident of Simpson over to Yellowknife to be close to treatment for dialysis. In fact, he's still here and I continue to visit him often. But his greatest heartache is that he knows he needs the treatment, he knows he needs the machine, he knows he has to be here, but his greatest malcontent, Madam Chair, is that he talks to me in Slavey and he says *sehotii*, which, in my language, means "my cousins" and "the people that care for me." I don't see them all the time like I do back home, but when they do come here, his children come see him when they can. They make the effort to drive over here and see him. But it's just people who are stuck here for long periods and I'm not quite sure if we can provide some kind of assistance for families to come see him other than vacation trips. I'm sure there are other areas they can go with their hard-earned vacation money. But if we can provide some type of assistance to bring families here just to be with them... I know that we're extending every effort, as well to get him to our home community and back home for visits, but some of the visit barriers is that the best time to send him home is on a Friday and then back on Sunday. But his treatment is almost daily, so he needs that treatment on a Saturday and his visits are a threat to his health. In fact, the department was gracious enough, I went to them and said let's get this guy home. He hasn't been home for awhile. But when he actually did go home, he just dug right into all the wild food that was presented to him, all the bannock and the breads and the chicken soups and the rabbit soups, but it was just too much for his system and he actually got sick from that. But it's just not being able to have that machine there. If that machine, the dialysis machine was there in this particular case, then, of course, there would be no need to run him back and forth and he can have that care and attention back home in the community of Fort Simpson. So this is what I'm thinking, the reasoning for the movement of that dialysis machine there, Madam Chair.

One other aspect of care for elders is that, I know that the ministry has gone to great lengths to improve their respite care in the communities. It goes a long way with helping our families, helping our elders or helping those in need to stay in their communities. Indeed, too, in the smaller communities, Madam Chair. Quite often it's been brought to my attention that even though our elders are being sent home to the home communities, it's there, too, that they need that respite care, and we just don't have the medical staff or the attention to help spell off the parents or the sons and daughters that are helping the elder maintain a presence and maintaining their house in the community. Because even moving from Nahanni Butte over to Fort Simpson, or Trout Lake to Fort Simpson, that transition

from a very small community to Fort Simpson is great indeed.

It's much like the impact of people from Simpson or Norman Wells having to stay in Yellowknife. I think the main thing is that you're being away from home. However, Madam Chair, just with respite care in the community, I don't know how to do it, but there must be a way we can get specialists into the smaller communities to spell off our families that are taking care of their elders. Quite often the easy way is to get that elder back to Fort Simpson for a couple days. Sometimes that works, but oftentimes, if we can do it, maybe we can send that specialist into the smaller communities, like Jean Marie or Trout Lake, and pay attention to that respite care that's offered in those communities.

Just with that, I'll just close on this note, Madam Chair, and allow the Minister and the ministry to respond to some of the points that I've brought up and how we can continue to improve service delivery to our communities. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'd like to acknowledge, firstly, the diligence that the Member from Nahendeh represents his constituents, both by e-mail, but he's also very prolific in terms of bringing the issues through the channels in letter writing. All good issues that we attempt to deal with.

In the issue of the medical travel and the escorts and translation services, for the most part we believe we have a system that functions the way it's supposed to, but there are always the circumstances where things don't work the way they're supposed to, or there may be an escort required where initially maybe it was determined that there wasn't. We attempt to address those, as well. Nahendeh and the Deh Cho have the benefit of having a very good board with a strong CEO and a lot of capable local staff that are very familiar with the concerns. So I acknowledge that there's always going to be a need for us to constantly look at trying to improve the services and address those circumstances where things don't work properly.

We have made a commitment, as well, to the issue of cultural sensitivity and awareness training, and it is an issue that's not only germane to the Member's riding, but it's a circumstance that we want to make sure is addressed adequately and with sensitivity across the whole territory.

The issue of the circumstance in Wrigley with the two young children is one where there's been an initial review done and we are currently getting it reviewed by a third party. We will be reporting back on that circumstance. As the Member indicated, there are many factors at play in that particular circumstance and we want to make sure that we do this carefully, in the right way, so that we can come up with a clear assessment to ensure that whatever didn't work properly does work properly in the future and that we don't necessarily repeat things.

The issue of dialysis is one where there is a plan that we want, not that we want, we recognize that there's a growing need across the North and we are, this year, '06-07, we are going to be putting dialysis into Hay River. In 07-08, coming forward after this budget, there will be built

into the budget the resources to set it up in Simpson for the region. We recognize the inconvenience, not only the inconvenience, but the significant stress of having to relocate on a permanent or semi-permanent basis from your community and family has on the individual as well as the families. So we do have a commitment. We're doing this in a staged way, predicated mainly on its availability of resources and trying to live within our means. But the Member has raised a good point and I want to reassure him that it is on our to-do list, as is the issue of midwifery, which he raised earlier, as well.

As well, we have been piloting in Yellowknife the respite care program for social respite for those of families who are taking care of individuals and they may need, from time to time, some support or a break. This current budget addresses the issue of moving that project from a pilot basis to an ongoing program and then, once again in '07-08, we're intending to build resources into the budget to start expanding the program outside of Yellowknife. This will be the continued use of the federal dollars that has been agreed to from our various meetings with the government starting back in 2004. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. At this time I'd like to recognize in the visitor's gallery Chief Ron Pierrot. He's also the vice-grand-chief of the Sahtu, and with him Sharon Kakfwi and Richard Epelon. I hope I said your name right. Welcome.

---Applause

Next for general comments for Health and Social Services I have Mr. Ramsay.

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to see the Minister and his colleagues with him today to discuss the Department of Health and Social Services. I just start off my comments, my general comments, by saying I still am impressed with the level of service that is provided to the majority of residents here in the Northwest Territories and I think the Minister is to be commended for that. I know it's a challenge, especially in the smaller areas, to deliver the service, but I think we do the best that we can. I know here in Yellowknife the health care system is top notch, continues to be top notch and I think the Minister is to be commended for that.

There are a few areas, Madam Chair, that I just wanted to discuss while I've got a chance; some areas, perhaps, that we might be able to improve upon. If I hear any criticism at all here in Yellowknife, it has to do with the emergency room at Stanton and the length of time some people may have to wait there to see somebody, see a doctor. I think that's something, I know the Minister mentioned it in his opening comments to us yesterday that they are working to reduce wait times at Stanton's operating room and in the emergency room. I guess one of the questions I would have is, you know, how are you going to go about reducing wait times in the emergency room and in the operating room? That's the first question I'd have. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, in regard specifically to the operating rooms, we are looking at doing some very basic things in terms of making use of the available space and

reorganizing so there's no down time. In the past, if there were numerous cancellations, we would just wait for the next patient to show up maybe two hours later. So we're looking at how we book people so that there are people on standby that if there's a space that comes up, it's put to use. So we've brought in some human resources, a sergeant major as it were, to help schedule the use of the operating room. If and when demands increase sufficiently, we also have the option that we've already done some work on in terms of a third OR that would give us the ability to do a lot more things, like the dental surgery, and be more responsive in terms of giving the doctors that require operating room time access. So in those two areas those are some of the ways.

I'll speak briefly...

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Can I ask to keep the...I mean, I don't mind if people talk to each other, but I don't want to hear it over here with my earpiece on. It's very distracting. So, whisper. Thank you. Mr. Miltenberger, carry on.

---Applause

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I'll speak, as well, briefly to the emergency room, then I'll ask the deputy to maybe give a little more detail on the OR piece.

In regards to the emergency room in Stanton, what we have set out is a fairly, it is, by necessity, a comprehensive plan and it works back from the consolidation of the clinics, proposed consolidation of the clinics in the downtown core of Yellowknife, that will see significant improvement of service. There would be extended hours, people would be able to see a doctor almost within a day or two because we're going to deal with the issue of 15 percent cancellation rates, the fact that they can't do a lot of basic testing and procedures that clinics in any other jurisdiction can do without having to go to Stanton, which we anticipate, based on our research, will lessen some of the load on Stanton emergency. We will have enough resources in this process to do some necessary upgrades to Stanton emergency, as well, just to look at how it's structured and the flow and the use of nurse practitioners as point of first contact to do the initial assessment. So the emergency room improvements are going to be tied to that other process, which we're developing now as we speak, that will improve the services as a system and not just trying to look at the status quo at the emergency room, which would be a very expensive, but at the end of the day an unsustainable option of just trying to keep going and doing what we're doing. Madam Chair, with your indulgence, I'll ask the deputy to speak a bit more in depth, if he would, about both the OR as well as emergency, if he would care to add anything in case I missed anything. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Murray.

**MR. MURRAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. On the operating room, one of the items that Stanton has been working very hard on in the last couple of years is cross-training of their nursing staff. Why they're working on that and how to fix the operating room is more of the staff that we can cross train will make it easier to do things like open the third OR on a full-time basis; if we can have more staff with that kind of special skill and training.

In terms of the operating room and the third OR opening, we've been doing some work as part of our response to the national wait times initiative that's out there and working with Capital Health to get a good handle on how long our surgical wait times are, both here and in Alberta, to make sure that they can be managed better. With the OR review that was done, Stanton projected that with the same staff that they have today they can move from doing 2,100 surgical procedures to about 3,000 a year with no additional staff, but just by scheduling better, as the Minister mentioned, but also in terms of better organization of the flow-through of people, the scheduling of people, making sure that, in effect, almost overbooking so that if they ended up having to stay an extra hour or two to finish a procedure, at least they wouldn't have the down time with nobody available to do a procedure with.

In terms of the emergency room, the one thing I'd mention that the Minister didn't say was part of the budget here in the emergency room is including nurse practitioners. One of the things they've done to try and get a better handle on the emergency wait times, they did a fair amount of work of implementing a triage system whereby when patients come in they speak to the nurse and they're categorized, if you will, in terms of urgency of need. By bringing in nurse practitioners, some of those lower-end cases that don't need to see the doctor but don't have a clinic to go to at night or that type of thing will be able to see the nurse practitioner at that point in time.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Murray. Mr. Ramsay.

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank Mr. Murray and the Minister for that. I'm going to have to get back on the list here, Madam Chair, but I'll ask the Minister this question. It's very hard to come to a number with the budget being presented the way it is on what exactly does the Department of Health and Social Services spend as a percentage on salaries and benefits and the administration of health services here in the Northwest Territories. The way it's set up here it's hard to tell because a lot of the money goes to the various authorities and there's not a lot in terms of compensation and benefits that's presented in the budget itself. I'm just wondering, do you have any kind of ballpark on what it is you spend on an ongoing basis for salaries and benefits, and has the Minister got that type of information?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Some quick ballpark figures by Mr. St. Germaine indicates probably in the range of \$110 million out of the 265 that we're asking for. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Ramsay.

**MR. RAMSAY:** So just about half, then; almost half. Okay. Well, that's good. One of the other, well, I've got a few seconds here, I'm going to squeeze one more in. The other thing that the Minister mentioned in his opening comments to us was the \$26 million for program delivery support and that was to include HR services such as recruitment and training. I just wanted to ask the Minister, with the start-up of the new HR department, I mean, it's CHRS now, but on April 1<sup>st</sup> it's going to revert into its own department of HR. I'm just wondering how the correlation

works between what you're trying to do with the health care system with recruitment and retention and what's going to end up being the new department of human resources. Do you work in conjunction with them, or do you work in isolation of them, or how exactly does that work?

I guess the other thing I would like to ask in part to that is when you're talking about recruitment and retention of health care professionals, do you actually have on staff, let's say, I know nurses have been a staffing issue for a number of years, but do you have, like, nurse on staff that would help you recruit and retain actual nurses, or is it just left to HR staff to deal with? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we work collaboratively with HR and we have a lot of the people that we had in our operation transferred over. They have recognized that we have a very large common that we're constantly staffing and they have people dedicated to that. As well, money that's reflected in this budget were actually funds, some of those funds were transferred to the HR shop that's been set up, but I'll ask the deputy minister, Madam Chair, with your indulgence to elaborate further on the detail. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Murray.

**MR. MURRAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. A couple of comments. At the present time, we continue to hold the budget in the department for the recruitment and retention activities. So the funding is showing up in this budget, several million dollars for the bursary programs and those kinds of things. The administration of the program is done to renew human resources organizations. Your specific question about the nurse recruitment, I do not believe at the present time we have a nurse recruiter that's a nurse. They did have one in the past and I believe it was vacant and then someone else is doing that job at the present time. I can get more information on that.

We have about \$6 million in our budget that's related to various human resource programs primarily directed at nurses, but also nurse practitioners and health and social services professionals. On a weekly basis, the department works very closely with the HR folks, they come to all our management meetings, they come to all our meetings with the joint Senior Management Committee, which is all the boards, CEOs, as well as all the departments. So that part has actually worked very well.

The other thing that the HR group has done is they've actually expanded the number of people they have working on Health and Social Services because with the number of staff, we have -- 1,200 across the system -- we're a sizeable piece of the government's human resources and they realize that they need to give greater attention and they've been working towards that.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Murray. Next on the list I have Mr. Hawkins.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate having the Minister here before us with these opening comments. As the Minister knows, I don't sit on the Social

Programs committee, so if these questions seem familiar, it's just for information, albeit out of the woodwork. But, Madam Chair, in the Minister's opening comments on page 5 he talked about the need to emphasize on prevention and encouraging people to eat right. Now it's no surprise the Minister has heard me bring up the concern of eating healthy in schools on a number of occasions and I will continue to raise this point until, as far as I'm concerned, we see this going somewhere on this problem. I've stressed to the Minister that I would like to see us reach a point where we come up with a policy that helps work with the Department of Education to eliminate junk food machines out of our schools. When we talk about trying to get more participation, more exercise into our kids and yet we're still allowing them to graze over those junk food machines. I commend some of the school boards that have taken the steps on their own in order to exercise their right to get rid of them. So would the Minister tell me where they are on the policy, if it's coming forward or his perspective on getting rid of the junk food machines out of our schools to ensure that our kids have a healthy atmosphere? Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Health and Social Services is working towards a timeline for April 1<sup>st</sup> where we wanted to make sure that the facilities that we fund and operate, the hospitals and various other facilities where dispensers and users of healthy food products that would not contribute to the very problems we're trying to cure, and we're working on that and we're going to be coming forward with an update on that in the not-too-distant future. That has been a direction that's been given. With all due respect to the Member's question, he would have to ask the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment to speak specifically to the issue of healthy eating in the schools. As the Member indicated, many school boards have taken the initiative to do that, but that is purely within the purview of the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Dent.

**HON. CHARLES DENT:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have met with all of the chairs of the boards of education from across the Northwest Territories and we have agreed that this would be a way in which we should move. All of the boards are examining their policies and how they might ensure that people who are in the schools are encouraged to follow healthy eating practices.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Dent. Mr. Hawkins.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to both Ministers. It's excellent news to see we're moving forward on this problem and to encourage people to eat healthy. Environment, I think, is a key component to making sure people eat healthy because I think people get accustomed to the fact that sometimes you can buy a can of pop a lot cheaper than a can of juice. So sometimes the wrong choices we're cornered into them and it's good to see that we're working on providing a healthy environment. So I'm very pleased to see that.

I guess my next question to the Minister, again, I don't sit on the Social Programs committee, but Stanton was supposed to bring forward their master plan by the spring of 2004, I think originally. It got pushed back and pushed back and I don't see anything here. As far as I'm concerned, at one time there must have been changes that were required. They identified something years ago and I'm worried that we're falling behind on its master plan on keeping Stanton totally up to date with the ability to provide services to the best of their ability, and that's emphasizing that something must have been identified to strike a master plan. So why are we so far behind on delivering this master plan and when can this House expect to see, and discuss, and debate a master plan of the future development to ensure that our Stanton facility is up to date as it is our territorial hospital? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm sure the fundamental fact that it impacted on the planning for both for Stanton, Hay River and Fort Smith was the fact to give recognition that we have to look at these facilities not as standalone operations, but as parts of a broader system. We did a facilities review, as well, to look at things that weren't contemplated as we looked at individual facilities. Those things being a number of acute care beds, the type of services provided by the various hospitals and health centres. That work has, for the most part, been completed. The money to upgrade and include Stanton is in the budget, as is the money for Hay River and Fort Smith. Once the facilities review was done, work has been proceeding with the planning. At the same time, the discussion we just had about the consolidated clinic has a direct impact on what would be finally decided in design in terms of the footprint at Stanton. It has to be adjusted accordingly. We anticipate that by this summer we will have the master plan done for Stanton and then we'll be moving forward. There's planning dollars in the budget, and over the next two or three years, there's a significant amount of construction that will be taking place as a result of all that work. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Hawkins.

**MR. HAWKINS:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Well that's good news to hear that there are planning dollars into this year's budget. As I see it, the longer we wait I'm concerned that services will start to be in a position where they're maybe either jeopardized or compromised at the cost of people discussing, or politics are being played with the master plan, or the difficulties of bringing it forward. So I would encourage that if we need to come forward with a couple phases to ensure it keeps moving forward, to ensure that our Stanton services that are delivered at such a high quality as they are today will continue at that level. I mean, that is a territorial hospital, it's important, as all hospitals are, that they're up to date with the services and abilities. I would just be very concerned if we delay it or drag our feet just because some shell game is being played and the hospital is being used as a chess piece for some reason. So I'm happy to hear that something is coming forward. You know, I have to emphasize in 2004, I believe it was, that there was assuredly a plan coming forward then, so we are, from the sounds of it, two years behind, but I will take the Minister at his word that

something is coming forward this time around and I welcome dollars that, again, ensure that we continue the good service that Stanton offers.

Madam Chair, I'm just going to shift gears here on doctor levels, and I've raised this question a number of times with the Minister in wanting to ensure that we continue the levels of service here. Yet again, another item I wouldn't want to see starting to compromise with the numbers changed a few years back I think under the Minister's watch under the last Assembly, which would have been the 14<sup>th</sup>, and we're still progressing with the new numbers for doctors where doctors see approximately 20 patients per day. I'd like to hear what the Minister is doing to ensure that we're seeing doctor visits still maintained at a reasonable level and reasonable access is still available for doctors when necessary. I just want to make sure that I hear the doctor mention what are they doing to ensure recruitment is at that high level, again, to ensure that our basic services are being covered in a safe and fair way. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, first I'd like to assure this House, in as strong as possible terms, that there's no way that we would ever use health programs and services as a shell game or as chess pieces. We have a very high level of service that we provide and we're committed to doing that, but we're committed, very clearly, to moving forward in a careful systematic way that recognizes that Stanton is a key piece and part of a broader system. Madam Chair, we have invested, in previous years, \$1.3 million. We're investing over \$1 million this year, and in subsequent years there will be more invested. We have money in the budget for an emergency, as well, and we're bringing forward the consolidated clinics. So we're trying to look at this in a comprehensive way that recognizes that these are all linked. If we're going to do system improvements, you can't look at any one facility in isolation.

In regards to the doctors, Madam Chair, the resources we have committed in the past are there for doctors, that we are constantly recruiting, that we are committed to providing those services not only here in Stanton and in Yellowknife or Health and Social Services, but in Inuvik and in Hay River. We've got doctors' positions funded for the Sahtu, Tlicho, as well as additional support for the Dehcho, as well as all the other services, though, the doctors are critical players in the health care system. We are also trying to design the system, as I indicated earlier, for example, with the clinic in Yellowknife, to give the doctors a greater ability to see patients more effectively by giving them capacity to do basic testing, better waiting rooms so that there is no waiting, better scheduling systems so we don't lose patients because they don't show up and the doctors don't have a patient waiting to see them. So this is an issue, but doctors are consummate professionals and dedicated to their craft and we're working with them to ensure that we have a strong system. We're putting in nurse practitioners, as well. We're going to be looking at the other end to upgrade licensed practical nurses to, as well, provide greater support. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Next on the list I have Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In the last couple of years, arguably the aspect of health delivery that has plagued our system the most and all the rest of Canada is the shortage of skilled professionals, doctors, nurses and allied health care professionals. Madam Chair, of late, it seems to have been less of an issue, at least in my telephone and my e-mail and I think less in the media too, but I guess I don't want to take that as a signal that we're over this problem. It's been described as a long-term issue for all of Canada, training up and recruiting more nurses and doctors. I'm wondering if the Minister or Mr. Murray could give us a bit of a snapshot. How are we doing? Are we managing to settle down on this persistent shortage of professionals ready to live and work in the NWT? Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Member was accurate in his assessment that this is a long-term problem that goes back, it's genesis has been assessed to go back to the early '90s where there were some significant mis-assessments made in terms of the need for professionals, and we have put a significant amount of resources when it comes to doctors to fund positions. We have at least half-a-dozen northern students in medical school right now working towards their MD, as well as the other specialties that they will eventually go on to take. We are also moving to a four-year degree Nursing Program and the first 24 graduates of the four-year program will come through the system this spring, which will give us a much-needed boost of trained resources because, for the last 18 months as we switch from a two-year diploma to a four-year program, there has been a very small number of graduates, but now we're over that transition period. We have about 15 nurse practitioners that are currently being trained in the system, as well, that are going to come out with a level of skill that's going to be higher, or they're going to be qualified, ready to do business. The nurse practitioners are going to bring a higher level of skill into the field. As I've indicated, we're doing initial work on trying to upgrade the LPNs, but it's a constant challenge to recruit. For example, I know some of the other professions, audiologists, speech pathologists, OT folks and we are constantly working to compete and to recruit. It's something that we anticipate we're going to be doing across the board. We also talked earlier about the need to look at a competitive nature of our remuneration packages at all levels on an ongoing basis so that, in fact, we can deal with that particular issue, as well. But it is one where we're going to be at this with vigilance and diligence for the years to come. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. At this time I'll have to recognize the fact that we do not have quorum in the House and I'll have to ring the bell. So I will give you your time again from the start, Mr. Braden.

---Ring of the Bells

Thank you. Mr. Braden, under general comments you have the floor.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Let me go to the washroom first.

---Laughter

**MR. BRADEN:** That was on the record. That was not Mr. Braden speaking, Madam Chair. It was somebody else.

Madam Chair, could the Minister, with regard to his description of the various professions, advise how we are increasing and expanding our ability to grow our own workforce, and that is the very best kind of solution.

I guess what I am trying to do is get a quantitative idea of at least the degree of severity. Are we at 20 percent below our ideal capacity of registered nurses? Is there any kind of data like that? If it is not readily available, we can defer on that question, Madam Chair. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Right now, for allied health professions, which include audiologists, dental therapists, laboratory technicians, nutritionists and such, we have about a 22 percent vacancy rate. For social workers, we have about a 23 percent vacancy rate. For nurses, I believe it is somewhat worse right now. It is 27 percent. I would point out, Madam Chair, as well, that all of this information we shared with committee. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you. Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** So all things given, Madam Chair, are we making headway on this trend? Are we seeing things going the right way? By and large, are they static? Are they going the wrong way? How are we doing? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, we, by necessity, are optimistic that we are going to stay on this issue and look at filling the vacancies, recognizing some of the factors both locally, nationally and internationally that are affecting us. Very clearly, we do have some serious challenges. We have significant challenges for nursing, for example, in small communities. I talked earlier in the House about some of the options we are looking at in terms of trying to set up our own northern float pool where we can invest the resources here so we don't have to pay the very stiff rates that we are charged by agency nurses. We are working with the college to look at the recruitment issues when it comes to social workers, to deal with and try to improve enrolments and get more northern social workers in the field to fill the vacancies we have there, as well.

We are trying to track and setting up processes to work with all of the students that we have in the Northwest Territories that are going out to school that are going to be taking courses in colleges, be it for pharmacy, radiology or lab technicians, so that we can, in fact, connect up with them and encourage them and make them job offers to come back to the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Madam Chair. One aspect related to this that I have some experience with in a couple of constituency situations is that, in the Nursing

Program, while we have worked hard to build up the capacity through Aurora College to give nursing students the basics, there is also a professional requirement that when they go into the workforce, there is the capacity in our hospitals and our clinics to guide them through various aspects of their training. If I understand it correctly, this is what is called preceptorship. It has become at least a perception that I have, Madam Chair, is that we have a bit of a bottleneck or maybe a major bottleneck in our system in that we do not have enough professionals or activity going on in our hospitals to be able to take the number of graduates and put them to work in our own hospitals. One constituent of mine has found that she has had to leave the NWT because, while she was trained up here, there was just not the capacity or the wherewithal to put her to work here.

Is that a correct perception of how we are doing in this particular area? Do we have a bottleneck in our hospitals and clinics in terms of bringing our nurse trainees onto staff and into the workforce, Madam Chair?

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, in Stanton and the other facilities requiring nurses, as well as the many community health centres, we have capacity to take. We need every nurse that we can graduate. We have set up or are trying to set up the processes for mentorships to do the preceptorship to give them the extra additional experience they need to be able to go out. Working in hospitals is one thing. Getting to work in community centres where they are doing a tremendous amount in terms of independent nursing, we are working on that. The issue is convincing a lot of the nurse graduates to be prepared to move outside of the larger centres. Clearly, Stanton will take, as well as Inuvik, Fort Smith and Hay River, the nurse graduates. If there are gaps in our system in the ability to do that, it is not because we don't have the capacity, but if there are things we should be doing that we are not, then we will move to address those. Very clearly, we are spending millions to train the nurses. The whole key is to keep them in the North and in our northern facilities.

Madam Chair, with your indulgence, I would ask the deputy to speak a bit further and give a little more detail on this issue. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Murray.

**MR. MURRAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have just a couple points to add. When the program and the guarantee was made by government to hire all the nurse graduates from the Aurora program, the government gave us funding to carry those positions as extras, as supernumerary, in the various facilities while they are doing the training, and the preceptorship and the mentoring part of it. That changes, depending upon the skill set of that individual. Some take longer periods. Some may be right out the door and ready to go. The authorities don't have to carry them as well as a regular complement. What happens is they will be hired into permanent jobs over that year once they have had their extra training in the preceptorship and all that process is carried on.

There are also mentorship programs for those individuals within Stanton and the other hospitals. So there is a mentor, a senior person, who works with them, and where their individual issues may be, that they have to spend more time on. Then, because the Member mentioned this last night briefly when we were here before committee, I did talk to Stanton this morning. They assured me that they would take all 24 graduates if we let them as a system, because they know, over the year, there will be additional turnovers. They also know they have to work and cooperate with the other authorities like Inuvik and Deh Cho. If some of these graduates are willing to go to the small communities, work with us to mentor them into those jobs, as well. As a broad issue, I haven't heard of that kind of a bottleneck.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Murray. Next on the list I have Mr. Ramsay.

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Picking up on where Mr. Braden left off, I have a few questions in regard to human resources. First of all, the questions are specifically regarding nurses. I know I have a written question in to the Minister and his staff on what the rate of locum nurses in the Northwest Territories is, where we are getting them from and how much money we are spending on them. As the Minister knows, I am a big fan of training our own people to work in health care and health care professions. I think the Northern Nursing Program, and now it is changed to the four-year program, but I think something like that has really been a success story here in the Northwest Territories. I would encourage any more funding or help that can be put in that area to try to train our own people to work in our hospitals and our health centres to be undertaken.

What I don't completely understand, and that is why I want some historic information on this, is why are we bringing more locum nurses into the Northwest Territories today? This is seven or eight years after the start of the Northern Nursing Program. Are we paying more today on locum nurses than we did pre-development of the Northern Nursing Program? I think that is a question that I would like to have answered. I would be interested in seeing the historical data on the locum nurses and how much money the government is spending on them. That is just something I look forward to seeing. I am glad Mr. Braden was talking about that.

The other thing I wanted to touch on is human resources related. A number of employees were taken out of Stanton hospital and relocated to the corporate human resource services. I don't know the exact number of employees that that was, but I have heard the deputy minister, and the Minister spoke of it. There is \$6 million inside the budget of the Health and Social Services to deal with HR functions and the fact that they are looking at actual expansion of that. I am not saying that is a bad thing. What I am trying to get at is I am not a big fan of duplication, as many Members will know. If we have taken employees out and put them at corporate human resource services, what are they being tasked with? Are they still looking after Health and Social Services employees, or are they doing different jobs now and they are being replaced inside the Health and Social Services? I am just trying to understand how that all works. Are we just moving people out and bringing new people in to deal with HR concerns with Health and Social Services? Thank you, Madam Chair.



**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Miltenberger.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. With your indulgence, I will ask both the folks here to assist me. I will ask Mr. Murray to speak to some of the agency fees where we have some numbers that we can share with Mr. Ramsay, which are also before committee, as well as some of the background on the agency nurses. I will then ask Mr. St. Germaine to speak to the \$6 million and how that breaks out. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Murray.

**MR. MURRAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In terms of the use of, as the Member calls them, locum nurses nursing staff in the government are all employees of the GNWT. As such, they will primarily be hired as casual employees, not as locums. We haven't used locums as we are today, except for the study in 2004-05 when we started using agency nurses. The agency nurse issue is a fairly recent phenomenon to help us to ensure that none of our nursing stations or basic services would have to be closed.

A few years back, there were situations where nursing stations would have no nurse. Even though we are paying a premium for agencies, and it is a hefty one, at least we are able to provide emergency basic services in our communities. In terms of the agency fees, in 2004-05, the total agency fee, if you will, was \$580,632.58. Year to date to the end of November, it was \$354,000 to the current year we are in.

If I could, I would just like to comment a bit about this. Stanton used to have their own HR shop just as the department did and all the health authorities and departments. In the consolidation, Stanton staffing and paid staff and those types of employees actually moved to corporate human resources. The staff that managed the recruitment and retention programs were within the department structure. So the people that were in Stanton doing HR services were basically staffing officers, pay and benefits people and that type of function. It was very much frontline, whereas the main recruitment and retention, because we do that as best we can on a system-wide basis to all of the authorities, was coordinated through the department. The staff that were in the department are also part of a consolidation. The agreement that was reached between ourselves and FMBS on the HR consolidation, because, obviously, we are keenly interested in recruitment and retention, is the money and the control of the programs stays with the department, but the expertise, if you will, is within the HR unit because they can draw upon their expertise in other areas to assist us.

That is the general structure of how Stanton services. Stanton, as part of the corporate HR consolidation, has a unit that works in HR and provides services back to Stanton. That includes staffing offices and pay and benefits people. One of the main issues and one of the main reasons why Stanton was actually, at the time, very supportive and still is supportive of a consolidation, is because of a high volume of casual nurses and things like that, and staff turnover. Stanton was experiencing their own problems with processing pay and benefits for employees. We are very anxious to work with the HR section to start addressing that backlog of HR issues. I am pleased to say that, where it is taking a lot of extra

time and effort out of the HR staff, we are slowly bringing those issues down. There are still issues. We still hear cases where individuals aren't getting the assistance in a timely fashion, but there are less of those now than there were three years ago. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Murray. Mr. St. Germaine.

**MR. ST. GERMAINE:** I will just add some details. We transferred to corporate HR \$6.2 million representing the human resource staff from the authorities and the department which will be 36 to 40 staff. We have retained approximately \$6 million to deal with recruitment and retention activities which are the mentorship program and so on that have been previously discussed. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. St. Germaine. Mr. Ramsay, I am just going to give a few more minutes for some Members to come back in the House. If I ring the bells again and we don't get a quorum, we are going to have to wrap it up for today, but we are a quorum right now. We will let Mr. Ramsay conclude. If we don't get enough Members in here on the next ringing of the bells, I think we will have to call it a day. Mr. Ramsay.

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank Mr. Murray and Mr. St. Germaine for the clarification. I think I have it a little bit more straight right now. I am really happy to hear that Health and Social Services is still responsible for the recruitment and retention aspect of it. I would encourage you to go out there. I know it is a big piece of work.

The one thing that I don't want to see happen, and I don't know if it is because of the new setup with corporate human resource services, but it being a lot easier to call 1-800 nursing than it is to actually go out and hire a nurse and find somebody. These issues are more having to do with corporate human resource services and some of the issues that I have heard from people, like nurses moving to town that perhaps are married to RCMP, or teachers trying to find work with the GNWT and the government is bringing in nurses, obviously, on the agency basis and these nurses that are moving to town don't get any reply or don't seem to get anywhere with our human resources staff. They fax their resume in three or four times. No response. No answer. That is the kind of thing that I think we have to try to avoid if there are nurses here on the ground. We should be trying to get them on staff.

One other thing I wanted to mention. I know my time is out, but it is real quick. I was encouraged to see that the department had come up with some funding for respite care for families. The Minister should be commended on that. That is just a drop in the bucket. I think we really need to have a commitment on the government's behalf to address the concern that many families have there for respite care for their children or loved ones and families that need some extra help. Again, I want to say I am encouraged by that.

One other thing while I have the floor here. I am not on Social Programs so I don't get a chance to ask too many questions on health, so I like having the chance.

Funding for a third position in respiratory therapy, this is an issue I have raised with the Minister in the past. Before we used to have two and we only fund for two positions in

respiratory therapy, and it doesn't allow for the coverage that's needed and we've had a third person in there. It was on a temporary basis. It was a term position and we found enough funding to have that person stay on an additional six months, but I think it's really important that we try to identify some funding to get the third respiratory therapist on stream and in a permanent capacity. This person was another northern person who grew up here, in terms of recruiting and retaining, and we recruited him and we have to try to retain him. So I would like to see that funding try to be secured for respiratory therapy, as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** I would just remind Members that when your 10 minutes are up...I don't want to have to say your time is up and we are pretty lenient about going over, but let's not ramp up the number of issues we are going to discuss. I will let Mr. Miltenberger respond to that.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, with regard to the difficulties the honourable Member mentioned where he is aware of some circumstances where nurses living in the communities are having trouble getting employment, I would be happy to look at those because, very clearly, we are trying to set up a system where we hire northern nurses. We would like nothing better than to never have to bring in an agency nurse because we have sufficient staff in the North. So I would be very happy to get the names, and if there are problems, I would be happy to look at that and we'll track them down to make sure we miss nobody.

In regards to the respite program, Madam Chair, there is a commitment by the government. We have been involved in a pilot. When I came on in 2002, there was clearly a need for social respite. We made the initial commitment. We've done the pilot. This coming year, we've got another \$200,000 in the budget and then 400 next year, the following year is 600, the year after is 600, to give us greater capacity to expand the program outside of Yellowknife. We've also managed to deal in Yellowknife with the waiting list that has developed because of the clear need and popularity of this respite program. So we are clearly committed to this. It's a good investment to us to help people looking after their loved ones at home as opposed to having to have them institutionalized.

With regard to the respiratory therapist, I will let Mr. Murray provide the detail. Clearly, we are interested. We've made some arrangements for a six-month extension and I will let Mr. Murray speak to it. If there is nothing left to say, he can speak to the detail. Madam Chair, with your indulgence.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Mr. Murray.

**MR. MURRAY:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Perhaps the only thing I would add in terms of respiratory therapist is Stanton only has the funding for the two and they have agreed to find the money for six months because this is an area where you can expect turnover, so they are planning on carrying it.

There is also a program being looked at in other areas where services could expand to keep that person busy full time. Part of the issue right now is with the workload there, the feeling is he probably isn't free full time, but with

travel, visits to communities and other things, we will be able to keep the gentleman busy.

**CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen):** Thank you, Mr. Murray. General comments. Next I have Mr. McLeod, then Ms. Lee and then Mr. Braden again. Mr. McLeod.

**MR. MCLEOD:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a few comments and a couple of questions that I would like to ask the Minister. I have 10 minutes, but I doubt I will be using that, and whatever is left, I will donate to my colleagues.

---Laughter

Next to the concerns we have with housing, the biggest concern we always hear from constituents in our travels is on the health care. It's awfully hard to say anything negative about health care because it is an essential service and it's a difficult service to try to deliver and keep everyone happy. A lot of concerns I seem to get are with the medical travel. I had some concerns from constituents who thought...One lady in particular thought she had to pay to go for a check-up. The Minister is aware of it. This is a long-term northerner, someone who has been here probably over half her life.

Hiring northerners is an excellent idea of seeing more and more girls getting into the nursing field. I think it's an excellent idea. It would be nice to have our hospitals all staffed with northerners. The one concern I do have is a lot of the agency nurses who come in seem to have so much more benefits than the nurses who are hired locally and live in the Territories. Some of the ladies have a concern with that and I don't blame them. It's costing a lot of money to bring these nurses in. I understand we need them and, like I said, I am not going to be negative about it. In Inuvik, we've been fortunate where we have had a couple of long-term doctors that could be working elsewhere, but they have decided to live in Inuvik and they have been there for at least 15 years. More support for long-term doctors in the Northwest Territories would be nice to see.

The rehab teams, I like the program, the initiative that the Minister and his partner are bringing in on the rehab teams. I understand there is one going to be going up in Inuvik. Mr. Murray stated yesterday that I think the program is going to be phased in, so that would be one of my questions. You are phasing in the program, but does that mean one community is getting it, and the next year another community gets the services, and the year after the third team goes in? That would be one of my questions.

Another question and concern I have that I get from constituents of mine is on the ambulance services. I am curious to know if this department has a set standard that all ambulance service has to run on. I understand money flows to the health boards and that they, in turn, decide who they will contract to provide the ambulance services. I have some concerns with that. I get concerns from constituents and it's something I am working on right now on the ambulance services. In no way am I questioning the integrity of the people who operate the ambulance service, but we get concerns from constituents and we have to ask questions on them, whether some people think they are fair or not. We have a job to do and if it means asking questions to that effect, then that's something we have to do. That was a question. Is there a

set of standards? Is there someone in the department who oversees the operation, the ambulance service and makes sure they are all up to code, or is that something that is also done at the regional level? That's the question I have there.

The amalgamation of human resources, a couple of my colleagues have mentioned it before and I would like to speak to it again. I said before that a lot of money flows to the regional health boards and then they, in turn, divvy the money out. But the HR services, I am wondering, Mr. Minister, if that is something that came out of Yellowknife and all of them had to comply with it. You would think that someone working in the HR in the health field would be more qualified to try to recruit or do all the competitions that need to be done. I am just curious to know how much input the regional health boards had into the whole human resource amalgamation.

Those are a few comments I had and I believe there were a couple of questions in there. I would ask the Minister if he would respond to a few of my concerns. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Mahsi, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Minister.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Sorry. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will speak to a number of the issues very quickly and when I get to the issue of the rehab teams and the implementation, I will get the deputy to speak how that is going to roll out.

On the issue of medical travel, I want to recognize that this is a very important area. It's run out of health service administrative in Inuvik. The staff there deal with thousands of queries, issues and files. It is a very difficult job. There are times, because it is a very sensitive and often emotional issue, and a time when there are health issues under discussion and there is movement, so people get concerned and things don't happen the way they are supposed to. So we spend a lot of time out of my office because we get calls from MLAs, I call the deputy, the deputy gets calls, as well, and we try to sort these out as expeditiously as we can. I just want to recognize, though, that these folks do work long and hard. We are constantly trying to improve service and it is a very important service, but we are always interested in trying to sort out those circumstances where things haven't worked the way they are supposed to.

The issue of agencies, we have created a cycle of dependency that has implications and it is something we are trying to break and that is why I have indicated we are going to look very seriously at how we can adequately resource and make it workable to have float pools in the Beaufort-Delta, one out of Yellowknife, where we will have and fund adequately a service where we will get nurses that will work for us that we can put them out where they are needed on a rotational basis, as we look, as well, to do the ongoing training and get more grads out there on a longer-term basis, more permanent basis, in the small communities. Very clearly, by addressing a short-term need of getting nurses in there by flying them in every three weeks and flying them out for three weeks, we've created a double standard for those who are there in the long term. It's been a circumstance that has dogged us and bedevilled us ever since. We solved one problem, but created others and we are trying to get ourselves out of that. I recognize that that is a very clear issue.

The issue of ambulance services, Mr. Chairman, is one that there is no clear government position or departmental position on in terms of standards; how it's delivered, who is delivering it. Municipal and Community Affairs and Health and Social Services are in the process of bringing forward a paper to Cabinet that is going to speak to that issue, recognizing that we do need some standards, we do need criteria for training, who is going to deliver it, how is it going to be delivered. Right now it's a very mixed bag. In some communities, it's tied to municipalities with the fire departments. In Inuvik, it's a contract. In the Tlicho, it's a contract. In Fort Smith, it's delivered through the town and tied to their fire services as it is here in Yellowknife. It is clearly an area that needs some clarity and some framing with standards and recognition that it is a very important service. So we are going to do that.

The HR amalgamation was a government-wide initiative. There was a clear recognition and for those of us who have a history going back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Assembly when they basically blew up the personnel department, it's been an issue ever since. It's constantly come up and there was a recognition that we were replicating a service across government in all the departments. There were inefficiencies, there were all sorts of systems issues coming to light, there was HR staffing issues with unions. So the decision was made to consolidate HR services. There was discussion. There was, as to be expected, some concern and resistance in some quarters, but the final decision was that this was a good initiative. I still believe it was the right decision to make as we sort this out. We have nine years of independent HR development across government and bringing everybody back into the same tent is taking some time, but it's a labour that is going to be worth it.

Mr. Chairman, with your indulgence, I would ask Mr. Murray to speak to the rollout of the rehab teams of how we plan to get this done. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Murray.

**MR. MURRAY:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Rehab services includes four groups. There is the speech language, audiology, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists and their support staff. Each of these teams will have approximately 11 employees in them, members of the team. The three new ones will be centred out of Inuvik to serve the Beaufort-Delta. In terms of how it's rolling out, Beaufort-Delta will be getting four positions in 2006-07; Yellowknife Stanton will be getting four positions; and for the southern team, two in Hay River and two in Fort Smith making a total of 12 positions. Over the next two years, that would be 2007-08 and 2008-09, we will be starting to add additional positions. Although that work is still going on to some extent between the different authorities, but I believe the emphasis at this stage is speech language, pathology and audiology in terms of positions that will be rolled out in 2006-07.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Murray. We have Ms. Lee next on the list. Ms. Lee.

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a number of issues I want to address and I know some of them have been addressed by some of the Members, especially Members from Yellowknife and I will try not to repeat them, but there are some things in detail that I want to hit on, as well.

The first one is on the human resource management issues with regard to doctors, nurses and specialists and everybody at Stanton. I didn't hear in the previous answers...I think there is a general recognition that recruiting and retention of health care professionals continues to be an ongoing issue and it's a challenge for everybody. It still is here. I know the Minister is working on lots of different initiatives, whether they be rehab teams or consolidating medical clinics, enhancing programs at Stanton or strengthening the regional facilities territory-wide. All those he cannot do without people. I am just wondering is there any plan in place -- and I think, Mr. Chairman, you asked this question earlier, but I didn't quite catch the answer -- to address this in a more aggressive way. I am watching the consolidation of the human resources section with a great deal of interest. I see a lot of potential there. I am waiting to see what kind of work it's going to achieve. I know it's going through a transition period and there is a lot of work on their plate, but coming up with really good recruiting and retention strategy for health care professionals is just one of those things, working on the succession plans and working on refining affirmative action plan, employment opportunities for people with disabilities. That's a whole other human resources issue that I am going to be addressing when the human resource Minister appears before us. I just want to know the relationship between the two. I don't want the Minister to have to repeat all that. Is that something that the Minister of Health is working with the Minister of human resources on? Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Minister.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The personnel and human resource issue has always been a real concern of mine in my 10 years as MLA, as well. The plan was, we consolidated back and brought the human resources together because it was identified that there was a need to do that. In Health, what we had done before the amalgamation, is we did our own comprehensive human resource plan and, at the same time, before the amalgamation, corporate services was also working on a GNWT-wide human resource plan, which they are still going to do but it's going to be a somewhat different document now that we've actually consolidated. So in 2004, we did a comprehensive human resource plan, which is on our web site. It was recently updated. We work very, very closely with the consolidated corporate human resources. We need each other. We can't survive without their service and support and we know that they are very sensitive to our issues. A lot of the staff have come from Health and Social Services. So, yes, Mr. Chairman, we are on this. We do have a plan. We aren't just doing it on a one-off basis. We recognize that a lot of issues are linked and recruitment and retention is not just an issue for doctors and nurses but for allied health professionals as a spectrum of service, as well as social workers and all the other folks who work in health and social services. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Ms. Lee.

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There is the whole issue of the human resource management for the government as a whole, and health care professionals, that we could spend lots of time talking about, but let me try...There are so many issues in this department other than that that I need to address with the Minister and we

have changed the format. This is now the opportunity for us to do this.

How am I going to do this? Let me just bring the Minister's attention back to the Stanton hospital for now. On the human resources plan and how he does it on the new section, I am looking forward to seeing him perhaps bringing a plan to the Social Programs committee within the near future, so we can discuss that further.

But with respect to Stanton hospital, I feel that there Stanton still needs a bit of revitalization and there are some low morale issues and there are the recruiting and retention issues. I am not getting as many phone calls as I used to before, I will tell you that, but there are still ongoing issues. I think the fact that they have not had a permanent CEO in a long time, I know that it's going through a recruiting process and I would like to know from the Minister where he is at on that issue.

Also, I would like to know if the Minister has given any thought to constituting a board at the Stanton hospital. I know the Minister and I, we have together, along with the Member from Hay River South, worked on the review of boards, but quite separate from that a time is coming, or a time is here, or a time has come where we should look at having a board reconstituted for Stanton. It could be made up of chairs of other regional boards, understanding that the Stanton is a territorial board. The Minister does have a vision on how everything should fit in, I do believe, and he's been in this job for probably longer than most people were before. He's had at least four years, if not more, and I can see that he can see Stanton as a specialized field that not only delivers specialized services for the territorial residents, but be a support for the regional satellite hospitals and authorities, and he is working also to strengthen them, as well. I can see where he is going with that, but I think there is still room for consolidation of clinics and primary health care going on and ISDM. There is just so much we could discuss here.

Let me just ask the Minister if he would consider doing that. For the Stanton hospital to have gone through the administrators, looking for CEOs without the board, they are going through a master plan. There are a lot of changes going on with respect to emergency units and just the delivery of health care services, not only in Yellowknife, but the whole Territories. I would like to know where those ideas might fit into that picture. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Minister.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, just going through my list here, we will make sure the committee is given a copy of the corporate human resource plan that we have on the books, recognizing that this is something of a living document that we will be looking at adjusting as we move and working to make sure that it fits very closely within the broader corporate human resource planning that's being done through corporate human resources.

The issue of low morale is always one of concern, recognizing Stanton is over 500 employees. It's the flagship of the medical system we have in the Northwest Territories. It's tied to the issue of the CEO. We are currently staffing that position. We anticipate that there will be interviews done next month, but we also have a lot of very qualified, dedicated staff and we are trying to be as

proactive in terms of having as positive a work environment as possible.

We do currently have an arrangement with the board chairs called the Joint Leadership Council. It sits with me as Minister and the deputy minister, that provides oversight and direction in terms of broad, system-wide issues and planning. As well, one of the functions that they do that we have added to the list is provide that oversight that the Member has suggested that she thinks may be required for Stanton. That does constitute all of the board chairs now and me and the deputy. At this point, the deputy sits on it, but he also has two hats as he is also the public administrator. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Ms. Lee.

**MS. LEE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do understand that the Minister has this senior management board made up of board chairs from across the country and he has relied on their service during the tenure of his term as Minister, but I would like the Minister to take a look at the possibility of formalizing this further and constituting some kind of advisory board for Stanton. I really think it's essential. It's time has come. I think it's been awhile since the last time we had a board there. It is a hospital that should be performing at its maximum to provide the specialized service, as well as the territorial umbrella service that the Minister envisions that it will do. It has to go through the master plan, it will have a new CEO, so perhaps it's time with the new CEO that the board chairs of all the boards should constitute together as an advisory...transitional or interim until such time as it's decided that there should be a need for a board to be more formally recognized. We should at least try that. I really think that a hospital like that should not be going through recruiting a CEO, doing a long-term plan, doing a long-term facility plan and address all of the health issues that are going on all around us in terms of delivering service. Nationally, too, there are lots of things on the agenda. I just think it's time for the Minister to look at that. I would like to know if he would undertake to look at that and come back to the committee and tell us the pros and cons and maybes of why he would or would not, or thinks it's not a good idea, and maybe we should do some consultation on that, too. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Minister.

**HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the intent is to, probably not in the life of this Assembly because we don't have the legislative time, but we do have to amend the act that governs all the authorities and boards. It would be my intention that we would be looking at putting the current JLC structure into the legislation. It doesn't now exist there. I have always recognized the need to have some kind of oversight by chairs or some kind of board. Very clearly, I am of the opinion that that JLC is provided that oversight that we need.

We also have a very close working connection with the individual authorities, as well as with the Social Programs committee. So we are looking at revising that act because it does need revisions. It's out of date and there are some changes underway in terms that we would like to contemplate with other things like tenure for board chairs

and those types of things. I appreciate the Member's concern. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Braden.

**MR. BRADEN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I move we report progress.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Braden. The motion is to report progress. The motion is in order. It's not debatable. Does committee agree?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Agreed.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Thank you. I will rise and report progress. I would like to thank you, Mr. Minister, Mr. Murray and Mr. St. Germaine, for being with us this afternoon. Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Can I have the report of Committee of the Whole? Mr. Ramsay.

#### ITEM 20: REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

**MR. RAMSAY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 18, Appropriation Act, 2006-2007, and, Mr. Speaker, I move that the report of Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Is there a seconder for the motion? The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

Third reading of bills. Orders of the day.

#### ITEM 22: ORDERS OF THE DAY

**CLERK ASSISTANT (Mr. Ouellette):** Orders of the day for Friday, February 10, 2006, at 10:00 a.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Oral Questions
7. Written Questions
8. Returns to Written Questions
9. Replies to Opening Address
10. Replies to Budget Address (Day 7 of 7)
11. Petitions
12. Reports of Standing and Special Committees

13. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
14. Tabling of Documents
15. Notices of Motion
16. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
17. Motions
18. First Reading of Bills
  - Bill 19, Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 3, 2005-2006
19. Second Reading of Bills
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
  - Bill 18, Appropriation Act, 2006-2007
  - Committee Report 5-15(4), Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight Report on the 2006-2007 Pre-Budget Review Process
  - Committee Report 6-15(4), Standing Committee on Governance and Economic Development Report on the 2006-2007 Pre-Budget Review Process
  - Committee Report 7-15(4), Standing Committee on Social Programs Report on the 2006-2007 Pre-Budget Review Process
21. Report of Committee of the Whole
22. Third Reading of Bills
23. Orders of the Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr. Ouellette. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Friday, February 10, 2006, at 10:00 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 17:53 p.m.