



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
**LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY**

1st Session

Day 7

20th Assembly

HANSARD

Wednesday, February 21, 2024

Pages 145 - 168

The Honourable Shane Thompson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Members of the Legislative Assembly

Speaker
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(Nahendeh)

Hon. Caitlin Cleveland
(Kam Lake)
*Minister of Education, Culture and
Employment*
*Minister of Industry, Tourism and
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(Tu Nedhe-Willideh)

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Box 1320
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Tel: (867) 767-9010 Fax: (867) 920-4735 Toll-Free: 1-800-661-0784
<http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca>

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Wednesday, February 21, 2024****Members Present**

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

The House met at 1:32 p.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Shane Thompson): I'd like to thank Annie Inuktalik for the opening blessing.

Members, I want to go back to my original words to you when I first took this Chair. I promised to do everything in my power to be a Speaker that enables in-depth debate of ideas; a Speaker that enforces the rules; a Speaker that allows for freedom of speech that respects order and decorum. Members, healthy debate will often come close to the line and in some cases the line is crossed. If you are unsure, watch the reaction of Members. You will see on the faces of others that your remarks have crossed the line and caused disorder. You will also hear about it from me.

Here in this Chamber, we all have a role to play in healthy debate. I can tell you the previous sitting days, we set a positive tone and the public appreciated it. However, we must maintain it. If we don't, we will lose the public's trust in us and have a big hole we will need to get out of. Thank you.

Ministers' statements. Minister of ECE.

Ministers' Statements

**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 13-20(1):
CELEBRATING NWT OFFICIAL
LANGUAGES**

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: [Translation] Mr. Speaker, hello, my name is Caitlin Cleveland. My mother is Carol and my father is Randy. I am from and live in Yellowknife. [Translation ends]

As the Minister responsible for Official Languages, I am proud that all our official languages are celebrated every year, and I would like to begin by wishing my colleagues [Translation unavailable].

February is a time to celebrate our territory's diverse Indigenous languages and acknowledge the significance of language revitalization as these languages form the foundation of our territory's identity, pride, and community. This year's Indigenous Languages Month campaign is called Say it in Our Languages. Residents can keep an eye out for campaign materials on Government of the Northwest Territories' websites and social media channels, at community events, online learning resources, contests, and even on coffee sleeves at coffee shops.

Mr. Speaker, this campaign matters because the loss of Indigenous languages is an ongoing challenge in our territory and around the world. Throughout Canada's relatively short history, colonial policies aimed at assimilating Indigenous peoples have had a devastating impact on Indigenous languages. To reverse the loss of language and keep Indigenous languages alive and thriving, they must be spoken in our communities. Using Indigenous languages every day, whether at home, school or out in public, is critically important to their survival. We do not have to be fluent in the language to make a difference. Practicing Indigenous languages and incorporating them into daily life is a step we can all take to reverse further language loss, which is fundamental to healing our territory.

Mr. Speaker, last year we awarded a record-high 18 scholarships to students enrolled in post-secondary programs supporting Indigenous language revitalization. Additionally, our mentor-apprentice program, a nine-month immersive learning program where a fluent Indigenous speaker teaches a language learner. The program had 45 pairs in six different language groups last year. This is an increase of 12 pairs compared to the previous year. Last week I had the pleasure to virtually meet with many of our mentor-apprentice program pairs at their final gathering. I was inspired by their personal commitment to revitalize their languages and appreciated their advocacy for more action to support language learning.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to preserving, developing, and enhancing all official languages as supported by Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. As the only political region in Canada that recognizes 11 official languages, the NWT has so much to celebrate during Indigenous Languages Month.

In celebration, we have organized for tea and bannock in the Great Hall during this afternoon's break for all Members, interpreters, translators, and staff of the Legislative Assembly. I hope you can all make it, and I encourage my colleagues to join me in practicing to speak our Indigenous languages together.

I'd like to take this moment to thank our interpreters here in the House of the Legislative Assembly and also Members who continue to speak their language during Members' statements and also the Member for Monfwi who continues to help me learn more words in her language as well. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Ministers' statements. Minister for Environment and Climate Change.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 14-20(1):
OUR COMMITMENT TO CARIBOU
STEWARDSHIP

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, barren-ground caribou are extremely important to the people, cultures, and communities of the Northwest Territories. They have supported northern Indigenous peoples from time immemorial, and it is important that we all work together to ensure caribou populations remain strong for future generations. In recent years, many herds across the NWT have undergone significant declines, particularly the dramatic 99 percent decline in the size of the Bathurst herd. These changes are driven by multiple interacting factors, including harvest, predators, and the impacts of climate and environment. This is a serious concern as the Bathurst herd remains at extremely low levels with the latest estimate at approximately 6,850 caribou in 2022.

Mr. Speaker, last summer we got some positive news when we saw an increase in the size of the Bluenose-East caribou herd, which had undergone serious declines since 2010. After years of hard work with our co-management partners, the herd increased from 23,200 animals in 2021 to 39,500 animals in 2023.

Caribou management is a shared responsibility. The Government of the Northwest Territories has been working closely with Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, renewable resource boards, and the Government of Canada, neighboring jurisdictions, industry, non-government organizations, and other partners to take strong conservation measures to protect caribou. This collaborative work is being done as part of the NWT's well-established wildlife co-management system where everyone is at the table to help guide caribou management, conservation, and recovery.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Environment and Climate Change works with partners on key research, monitoring, and management initiatives that rely on the best available local, Indigenous, and scientific knowledge. Population surveys are scheduled for July of 2024 to assess the current status of the Bluenose-West, Cape Bathurst, and Tuktoyaktuk Peninsula herds. We are also supporting a wide range of caribou monitoring and guardian initiatives led by our co-management partners, implementing herd-specific management plans, and meeting with partners every year to review the status of individual herds based on all available information. This approach allows us to make hard decisions and take strong actions together in the best interests of the caribou.

Mr. Speaker, with the winter harvest season now underway, it is important that we continue our work with the Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, renewable resource boards, and other partners to ensure safe and respectful harvest. While most people harvest safely, legally, and respectfully, a small number of people do not.

Environment and Climate Change hosted a meeting of respected harvesters in December 2021 with representatives from communities that traditionally harvest from the Bathurst herd. Participants provided eight recommendations to leaders from Indigenous governments and the GNWT, including the need for all parties to work together, support monitoring and guardian programs, enhance enforcement efforts, and launch a public information campaign on respectful harvesting.

Mr. Speaker, it is our hope that this collaborative work will encourage the use of traditional harvesting practices and promote respect for the protections put in place to support collaboratively-developed caribou conservation and recovery. Important conservation measures such as the mobile core Bathurst caribou management zone are

put in place in collaboration with our co-management partners.

Mr. Speaker, caribou are a vital part of the cultures, traditions, and social fabric of our communities. The Government of the Northwest Territories is committed to working closely with all of our wildlife co-management partners to support the safe and respectful harvest of caribou while ensuring compliance with collaboratively-developed conservation measures, the Wildlife Act, and traditional practices and teaching. Take only what you need. Do not leave anything behind. Share what you have when you get back to your community. And listen and learn from your elders. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Members' statements. Minister for Housing NWT.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 15-20(1):
TENANT HANDBOOK AND PROGRAM
UPDATES

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Mr. Speaker, Housing NWT offers a range of programs and services to meet different housing needs across the NWT. As Housing NWT engaged with stakeholders as part of their strategic renewal, Housing NWT recognized that it needs new tools to offer a clear understanding of the role of Housing NWT and the local housing organizations as landlords and the rights and responsibilities of tenants in our units.

Coming out of these conversations and the related recommendations, I am very pleased to announce that some of the initiatives that Housing NWT is implementing to support clients across all areas of housing programs.

Mr. Speaker, Housing NWT has developed a tenant handbook to support tenants in public housing and to increase education and awareness on the rights and responsibilities of tenants and landlords. Existing tenants will receive a copy and new tenants will receive one as part of their check-in. The handbook explains the rights and responsibilities of public housing tenants, landlords, and agents involved in public housing in the NWT under the Residential Tenancies Act and related regulations. The handbook is written in plain language and covers a wide range of topics such as moving into a public housing unit, rent and security deposits, care of the unit, safety resources and understanding the processes if a tenant is not compliant with their tenancy agreement.

In addition to the handbook, Housing NWT has created a complementary online tenant

education tool for clients to use that will go live in April. This is an interactive learning module that can be used by existing clients but would also be useful for individuals for example that are on the housing waitlist and hope to be a tenant of public housing in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, another outcome of the Housing NWT renewal was to remove barriers to accessing programs. One good example of this is related to the Solutions to Educate People, or STEP courses. These courses were a requirement of applicants to Housing NWT's homeownership programs. Unfortunately, the requirement became a barrier to clients successfully accessing these programs. With Housing NWT removing the requirement for STEP courses, we hope to see an uptake of these programs to empower clients to own and operate their own homes.

Another program that has undergone changes to support clients is the Canada-NWT Housing Benefit. The Canada-NWT Housing Benefit, also known as the CNHB program, is a rent subsidy program that is cost shared 50/50 between Canada and Housing NWT. It is designed to help households that pay more than 30 percent of their income on their rent. Since April 2021, this benefit has provided qualified households with up to \$800 per month for rent.

Mr. Speaker, the program is a great example of how strong partnerships with the federal government can improve the lives of NWT residents. In 2022, this benefit supported 265 NWT households and is currently accepting new applicants with no waitlist. This benefit is a tangible, positive difference in the lives of residents in the private housing market. A total of \$1,017,800 was provided in support for the 2022-2023 fiscal year, supporting clients who had affordability issues and therefore are defined as a client in core housing need.

New changes coming to this program include an increase in funding for survivors of gender-based violence, seniors, and persons with disabilities. There has also been an elimination of the two-year cap on the program so residents can access this program for as long as they need it.

I am pleased with the improvements that Housing NWT has made to tailor its programs to the needs of people across the NWT, including commitment arising from the strategic renewal. As Minister responsible for Housing NWT, I am looking forward to continuing this work to increase the well-being of individuals and communities by providing fair access to quality housing support for people most in need. Quyananni, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Housing NWT. Ministers' statements. Mr. Premier.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 16-20(1):
MINISTER ABSENT FROM THE HOUSE

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise Members that the Honourable Caroline Wawzonek will be absent from the House for the remainder of the week to attend the meetings for federal, provincial, territorial Ministers responsible for transportation and safety in Montreal. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Ministers' statements. Members' statements. Member from Great Slave.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 75-20(1):
MEDICAL TRAVEL

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I like being in your line of eyesight now.

Mr. Speaker, over the next three and a half years, you will hear me say to Ministers of the GNWT that people need to come first in the delivery of government programs and services. When a policy or process doesn't work continually, government can't keep defending it as being right without cause. There should be a genuine effort to learn from and listen to those who are affected. We must remove barriers that don't support the goal of service and move towards a client service model that enables continued improvement.

Mr. Speaker, when I still worked in the public service, I mentioned to some coworkers that I would likely need medical travel in the future. Most of the people I spoke to sighed and told me to buckle up for a hard ride. As it turns out, Mr. Speaker, my appointments were scheduled for after I was elected. Once I became MLA, there was a point of contact for GNWT medical travel made available to me, which was appreciated for confidentiality reasons. But even then, it was still a confusing process to navigate. I'm a white woman in Yellowknife with a graduate degree and for me to find it confusing is troubling considering that many people in our territory do not have the same privileges I do. This past weekend in the grocery store, I overheard people speaking loudly in the produce section about how difficult medical travel was to navigate outside of the GNWT. As well, I've gotten feedback from a constituent whose company helps folks in the regions access medical travel supports for children. Their stories are down right

depressing, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure my colleagues can and will relay those frustrating accounts in the days and months to come about their regions.

Mr. Speaker, as 19 MLAs, one of the topics we could almost all universally agree on is that medical travel needs improvement. I'll have questions for the Minister of Health and Social Services at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Great Slave. Members' statements. Member from Range Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 76-20(1):
HEALTH CARE SUSTAINABILITY

MR. TESTART: Mr. Speaker, of all the institutions that are important to Canadians and that unite us, few are as cherished as universal public health care. No matter who we are, we all proudly pay into the same system and trust it will be there for us when we need it the most. It's a public service we've enjoyed longer than many of us can remember yet it remains incumbent upon every generation to ensure health care remains in public hands where it belongs. That is why my constituents are very concerned with the GNWT's increasing reliance on private agencies in the NWT health care system. This is undermining public health care and impacting the morale of our health care workers.

Over the last few years, the government has turned to private agency nurses as a stop gap solution to retain health care work in the Northwest Territories. Year after year, this nursing shortage has grown without any solutions. Now to keep health services available, the government is advertising for temporary private workers to fly in and out at a hefty price to taxpayers. These agency nurses are paid far more than local professionals, receiving higher wages, as well as lucrative bonuses and per diems. They come with little understanding of our communities and no connection to our residents. In turn stifling the ability to make meaningful connections for Northerners with their health care providers. The more we rely on private agencies, the more we are undermining our own local workforce. I fear our government is sending a message to our health care workers that they are worth less than those who come from the south.

It is understandable that in order to keep our health care services available that gaps in the system need to be filled but at some point a line needs to be drawn. Why are we spending so much money on private agencies when our nurses are underpaid and undervalued? What does it say about our health care system when

we make it more attractive to health care workers to leave permanent jobs for un-unionized private agencies? It cannot be true that this government is prioritizing private profits over the needs of public health care workers. This is just another example of how underfunding health care is the first step towards health care privatization. This is privatization by stealth, Mr. Speaker.

Building failure into the public system creates space for private agencies to move in, and that's exactly what has happened. We need to treat our health care workers with the respect and dignity they deserve and offer them wages and benefits that will keep them in the North and keep them working for Northerners. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 77-20(1):
HOLDOVER WILDFIRE ASSESSMENTS

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, holdover fires is inevitable in many parts of the Northwest Territories, a harsh reminder of last summer's wildfire disasters. NWT residents not only remember; they never forgot the devastation and most importantly losses. It is unimaginable the trauma that family displacements left with direct losses.

Mr. Speaker, these fires smolder through the winter only to return in the spring and are becoming a huge cause for concern amongst researchers and fire managers. Mr. Speaker, as of January the 1st, Alberta wildfires is reporting 51 active wildfires in the province - a notice of reality, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, last summer was a unprecedented year for wildfires throughout Canada. The Northwest Territories seen the loss of 4 million hectares. Mr. Speaker, by no means I share this statement to residents on reliving the past or the trauma, only taking a proactive measure on fire management readiness and preparedness with the first step on holdover fire assessments. Later I will have questions for the appropriate Minister. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 78-20(1):
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES MONTH

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the Minister's earlier statement about Indigenous Languages Month.

The GNWT has been clear about the need for language revival and preservation in this year's Indigenous Languages Month campaign, which I will quote from directly: The loss of Indigenous languages is an ongoing challenge in our territory and around the world. To reverse the loss of language and culture and keep Indigenous languages alive and thriving, they must be spoken in homes and communities.

While the statement about homes and communities is true, and we should be proud that NWT is currently the jurisdiction with the largest rate of Indigenous speakers, this rate is in steep decline, Mr. Speaker. According to the latest census data, we lost 25 percent of our Indigenous language speakers between 2016 and 2021 alone. If we truly want to reverse the loss of language and culture, Indigenous languages must be taught in school. And similar to French language schooling, this could be established as a right at the territorial level. Nunavut did it in 2009 with the passing of the Inuit Language Protection Act. Quebec has had legal provisions regarding the right to education in Indigenous languages since the late 1970s. As a result of this, four in ten First Nation children in Quebec can speak their language. This is double the rate of the NWT. In the NWT, there is one exception we can look to which has begun to turn the tide of language loss in the NWT.

The Tlicho language currently has more youth speakers than those 65 and older. This is a direct result of the leadership and dedication of the Tlicho people who have ensured Tlicho is not only taught as a second language but is actually a language of instruction. We could follow this example and complete the vision that this Assembly had when it gave official status to our Indigenous languages by enacting the right to education in Indigenous languages.

Thankfully much of the work towards this has already been done by the previous Assembly. It was a key recommendation of the Standing Committee on Government Operations when it reviewed the Official Languages Act less than a year ago. Recommendation of the four of the committee was that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment implement an exercisable right for Northerners to full K to 12 immersion in each local Indigenous official language. We have the opportunity now to pick up where the previous Assembly left off, and I look forward to continuing that discussion with my colleagues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Members' statements. Member from the Mackenzie Delta.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 79-20(1):
SOCIAL PASSING AND EDUCATION

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's very difficult to sit back as an elected official and watch as our young people are being neglected. This is exactly what is happening with our education system, especially in our smaller communities. The larger regional centres and Yellowknife seem to be benefitting more in this area.

Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I did my Member's statement on the income support program. In my statement, I referred to the recipients who are young adults who are being let down by the education system. The young eager students are being socially promoted to graduating with no academic skills to go on to post-secondary schools because they do not qualify. Then these students are at the doors of the income support office only to be stuck there.

Mr. Speaker, there are other alternative measures that the department can explore instead of placing our young people in a failing environment. Back in the 1980s, the department used a different approach to deal with students who were not academically ready to pursue post-secondary institutions.

Students were given the opportunity to participate in the trades component within the high school curriculum. And these are success stories that I have witnessed. We have former students who are now journeymen in their chosen trade and owners of their own companies.

Mr. Speaker, we have to start investing in our greatest resource, and that resource is our youth. It's time for the education department to focus on getting our students ready for the real world and implementing these similar programs within our high school curriculum. These students need career paths where they can have a secure future for themselves and their families. We do not want them to be knocking at the doors of the income support office and not coming out. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Members' statements. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 80-20(1):
REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS
PEOPLE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, the North is full of dedicated Indigenous people who are eager

to contribute their great skills to our public services.

In the 19th Assembly, I was closely involved in looking for ways to increase Indigenous hiring to the GNWT workforce, participating in the reports on the Indigenous representation in the Northwest Territories public service. I want to thank my colleagues at the time who participated and the chair and the cochair, Rylund Johnson and Frieda Martselos, as well as the Member from Kam Lake and the other Member from Inuvik Twin Lakes. A lot of hard work went into this subject in the 19th Assembly because it was vital that we make our public service representative of our population. Unfortunately, successive governments have been working towards these goals for decades but the number of Indigenous people in our public service has remained the same. I know now that the Ministers are preparing a work plan to increase Indigenous hiring in their departments, so now this government has another great opportunity to shape our -- and start making meaningful action towards achieving a diverse public service that is truly representative of the Northwest Territories. This is why I want to mention some of the things I'm hearing from my communities.

I have heard about several instances and situations of my constituents on this matter that are very concerning. These constituents are proud Indigenous people who have a lot to offer the GNWT, were forced out of their positions and replaced by non-Indigenous staff. One constituent worked for 12 years before she was forced out of their position so their supervisor could accommodate a P3 transfer. This constituent is not only one example. I have seen this happen all too often in my departments. We can talk about representation of workforce all we want. We can write action plans, strike committees, and give speeches in the House about our priorities for every department but we need to follow those words with action. Action means we cannot keep turning a blind eye to managers and administrators ignoring Ministers' guidelines and hire their friends and family instead.

Hearing these stories from my constituents tells me that we are moving forward but moving backwards and that if we keep moving backwards then our public service will be stuck at 30 percent of Indigenous hires. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Premier at the appropriate time. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh. Members' statements. Member from Deh Cho.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 81-20(1):
WATER LEVELS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Last year the Deh Cho and the Mackenzie River reached historical water levels across the NWT. There are many news stories about this, and many people shared their own photos online of receding shorelines up and down the Valley. These low water levels caused a lot of problems for many people, from harvesters unable to cross the river to go hunting to tugboats running aground and getting stuck, to barge deliveries cancelled and unable to deliver goods to Norman Wells and Tulita. These are just some of the issues low water levels have caused us in the last year.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't just the Mackenzie River with low water levels. The Liard River, the Great Slave Lake also experienced historic low water levels over the past two years. In fact, Great Slave Lake is currently at its lowest water level ever recorded. Both Great Slave Lake and Mackenzie River water levels remain extremely low largely due to hot and dry conditions in northern Alberta and British Columbia and the southern NWT. This is also impacting hydro electric energy generation across the NWT and other provinces. What's worse, Mr. Speaker, is that it's not only the NWT who are experiencing this either. Most of western Canada has been in a drought for the last two years. Alberta is experiencing extremely low water levels in many parts of the province due to below average snowpack and precipitation in recent months resulting in less runoff to rivers, lakes, and reservoirs. This is contributing to widespread dry conditions and water shortages.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, recently Alberta is beginning conserving its water usage province-wide. Alberta has established a drought command team, and they are encouraging people to plan for water shortage during 2024, including conserving water now. This is an extremely troubling situation. Climate change is real and happening now, and this is further evidence to that. This is also partly what fueled the worst fire season ever.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from the Deh Cho, your time is up.

MRS. YAKELEYA: To conclude my statement.

---Unanimous consent granted

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is also partly what fueled the worst fire season ever had last summer. Our government needs to respond to this, Mr. Speaker. I will

have questions for the Minister of ECC. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Deh Cho. Members' statements. Member from Monfwi.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 82-20(1):
ELDERS AND HOUSING NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES MORTGAGES

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, [Translation] this item that I am going to talk about is about housing mortgage and the policies that are in place and how they work with people in the community. This mortgage has been in place for a long time since 1978, and it's affecting the people in the community and now we have a lot of elders that are over 60 that are dealing with this issue. That is what I'm going to talk about. [Translation ends]

Mr. Speaker, I have seniors in my riding who entered into mortgage agreements not understanding what exactly they were signing because there was no interpreter. In many cases, these clients fell behind on payments, and Housing NWT provided refinance agreements as the only option to maintain their homes. Mr. Speaker, people signed these documents and follow along with the options Housing NWT provides but, in many cases, they do not understand what they are committing to. There is little meaningful effort from Housing NWT to ensure clients, mostly elders, understand the process and what they are signing.

Mr. Speaker, constituents in my regions have a mortgage with Housing NWT but they don't even know how much they owe. To these people, it's a mortgage sentence for life. Many people don't know how they will ever pay for their home in their lifetime. Housing NWT does not appear to be providing annual mortgage statements to clients. For clients that have fallen into arrears, they may eventually be referred to collections. In the collection process, clients have to deal with the law firm. There is no language or liaison person assigned to support clients in arrears and specifically for elders in arrears.

Mr. Speaker, this is a disservice to our elders. Seniors who have been paying into mortgages for 10, 20 years should be given more support from Housing NWT so they can become homeowners. With a mortgage, Housing NWT clients are on track to homeownership. This is something Housing NWT should be supporting, not penalizing. Often there are language barriers but dealing with bureaucracy and government administration is also a barrier.

What is being done to support elders, especially those who are residential school survivors, to be able to age in place in their homes and in their communities?

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Monfwi. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife North.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 83-20(1):
FUNDING FOR NON-GOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to reflect today on the problematic way that our government funds and works with nonprofit organizations who are providing essential social services. Yesterday in Committee of the Whole, I raised the urgent situation of the Spruce Bough supportive living housing facility where the non-profit Yellowknife Women Society is housing and providing wraparound services for 26 people with complex medical needs and addictions issues.

Ever since this facility opened its doors in 2020 with capital funding support from the feds, it's been cobbling together short-term operational funding, mostly from the GNWT. Now, a lot of our basic social safety net is operated by non-profits. They put roofs over the heads of seniors or the underhoused population or women and children fleeing violence. They provide daycare to children so their parents can go to work or school and put roofs over the heads of their families. These are services that we can't allow to fail. And if they do, the government is under considerable pressure to step in and take over these services to stop people from dying or to stop the economy from grinding to a halt. And we've seen the GNWT have to step in and the extra cost of that.

In recent years, the GNWT has taken over the day shelters and sobering centres in both Inuvik and Yellowknife, and we see in our supplementary estimates that that facility in Yellowknife alone costs us an extra \$2 million a year on top of what it used to cost to have a non-profit running. The reason, of course, that NGOs provide these services more cheaply is that they rely heavily on volunteer and low paid labour. We rely on goodwill, but that is a fragile currency that can easily dissolve.

And yet we seem to treat these essential social services as if they were any other contract. Pretend that we are the one in control, that we can drive costs and set the terms, and that any NGO would be lucky to be chosen as the winning bidder. But in many cases, we need those few non-profits as much or more than they need our funding.

The GNWT has done reports on how to better support NGOs in general but there are differences between the government throwing chunks of funding here and there to host fun community events and throwing short-term --

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Yellowknife North, your time is up.

---Unanimous consent granted

MS. MORGAN: I was saying there's a difference between throwing chunks of funding haphazardly for community events and throwing short-term chunks of funding haphazardly to keep roofs over peoples' heads. And so I don't want to stand here and plead with the government to have a heart and please donate money to these heroic organizations because that's part of what got us into this mess thinking that we can just offer charity when we have extra money in our pockets. I'm asking this government to think practically about what services our residents expect and how we can make longer term plans to collaborate with NGO partners with stable (audio).

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife North. Members' statements. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 84-20(1):
FAMILY DOCTORS

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It comes as no surprise to you, and all the Members of this House, that how important it is to have a family doctor on your health care journey. So whether you live in the Mackenzie Delta or you live in the Sahtu, I can tell you it matters to them. I mean how many times have people from Aklavik driven all the way to Inuvik to find a new doctor that they have to explain their story to them over and over again? How many times does someone from Deline have to take that goat trail all the way to the Wells to explain their story why they need their prescription changed or adjusted, Mr. Speaker? Or you live in Yellowknife and you have to explain to the locum doctor that you've never met before how many times your diabetes medication has been changed and tried and yet they continue to offer the same thing?

Mr. Speaker, it's well known that family doctors are key. They know your story. They know you. Even the Canadian Medical Journal points out about the relationship is number one. That's the difference between a family doctor and a locum.

I've reached out to the department of health and I asked how many people are on the waiting list. A non-transparency list in other words, Mr.

Speaker. A list that doesn't exist but apparently they're keeping numbers.

I'm sorry to report it wasn't 100 people waiting to have a doctor, Mr. Speaker. It wasn't two. It wasn't 300 people. It wasn't four. Mr. Speaker, I could auctioneer this off for another ten minutes. Why don't we jump to the conclusion?

The department said 2,000 people are sitting on the non-transparency waiting list to see if they can get a family doctor, Mr. Speaker. That's a shameful process in this first world country in a territory as rich as ours. My goodness, Mr. Speaker, a family doctor should be a right, and that should be it.

So I asked them how can doctors refuse patients? Their answer was pretty much bare. I ask them about how do they get more doctors? They send me to Practice NWT as the result. And as a matter of fact, looking at that website it looks for attractive as they spell out the benefits of being a locum doctor better than they spell out to be a regular doctor in our communities, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, having a doctor is key whether you're in the early season of your life, whether you're new, or you're renewed like some of us and certainly maybe even those who are heading into the winter of their life. That special relationship is key. And as this government unilaterally ponders their policy and how to carve out \$50 million here and there, it has Northerners worried. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll have questions later today.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Members' statements.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 85-20(1):
PAUL STIPDONK MEMORIAL SOCCER
TOURNAMENT

HON. SHANE THOMPSON: Good afternoon, Members. Two weeks ago I had the pleasure of attending the Paul Stipdonk Memorial Soccer Tournament. It was the second time since the pandemic they cancelled the previous tournaments. As I stated previously in this House, this tournament is a bit unique in that they don't keep score, teams are mixed up, and we do not have winners or losers. The focus is on the youth having fun and playing the sport; something that the namesake was all about.

Besides playing the sport, the youth are given the opportunity to attend a skills competition event on Saturday. This year, we had athletes from Yellowknife, Fort Providence, and Fort Simpson. They were great sportsmen and ambassadors of their respective communities. It was amazing to see all those smiling faces

and the fun that they had over the weekend. I am proud to say the Fort Simpson athletes were great hosts and really enjoyed the games as they made new friends from the region and the territories. I am proud to say that parents and families of the athletes, whether they were from the community or from out of town, did an amazing job cheering and encouraging the youth. It was awesome to see the stands and the small hall full of supporters.

A special shout goes to the Mackenzie Recreation Association, Municipal and Community Affairs, the village of Fort Simpson recreation staff who kept the facility nice and clean, and most importantly Kali Norn and Jackie Whelly who dedicated many hours organizing and making sure the event ran smoothly.

To the speed skating moms, thank you for catering the whole weekend.

I would like to thank the Fort Simpson high performance athletes, especially Amaria Tanche Hanna and Gina Hardisty, for being the coaches of the teams, helpers, and being great role models to the youth. It was great to see this capacity being built. I take great pride when I see younger athletes paying back to the sport.

In closing, I would like to say a big thank you to the Stipdonk family for letting us to honour their husband, dad, grandfather, and my friend in a way that brings so many smiles to the youth. Thank you.

Members' statements. Member from Inuvik Boot Lake.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT 86-20(1):
EULOGY FOR VINCE SHARPE

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it's with a heavy heart today that I announce that the late Vince Patrick Sharpe, aged 76, passed away peacefully on February 15, 2024, at Stanton Territorial Hospital here in Yellowknife.

Vince was born on February 10th, 1948, in Nova Scotia to Walter J. Sharpe and Margaret M. Sharpe. Vince is one of six siblings, with two brothers and four sisters.

Vince left Nova Scotia at the young age of 19 and was soon captivated by the lure of the North and moved to Inuvik in 1968, initially working for Slim Semmler and John Camaralie. In 1968, he took a position then as Transport Canada firefighter at the Inuvik airport and volunteer firefighter of the Inuvik volunteer fire department.

He met his first wife Mabel Keevik in 1971. Vince has three beautiful children - Sheryl, Mike, and Harmony. And three wonderful grandsons, Brent, Colton, and Daniel.

He met and married his second wife Lena Allen, which then grew their family by two more children, Jimmy and Jenny Kalnik.

Vince went on to become a successful general contractor employing many local people for Inuvik and the surrounding areas.

On November 17th, 2007, Mr. Speaker, Vince was awarded the medal for bravery from the Governor General of Canada for rescuing two occupants from a burning structure in Inuvik.

Vince is predeceased by his father Walter Sharpe, Toronto, Ontario; his mother Margaret, Turo, Nova Scotia; and, brother David Sharpe, Gjoa Haven.

Mr. Speaker, Vince was one of the first people I met when I moved to Inuvik 30 years ago and we remained close friends since that time. Vince has always been an incredible advocate for our community that he so dearly loved. He served several years as a municipal councillor. He was a staunch supporter of the Inuvik fire department, any local protective services, and he supported and fundraised for community events such as the Muskrat Jamboree, the Firefighters Gala, the Children's First Centre, and many, many more, Mr. Speaker, that I could probably go on for an hour.

Vince's favourite place on the planet was at Ya Ya Lake where he spent many, many -- well, pretty much every weekend that he could out there in the summer hosting tourists, family, friends. As anybody who knows Vince, and I know some colleagues from the Beaufort Delta who are with me, and yourself, Vince lived life on his own terms always and was a true pillar for Inuvik and a legend for Inuvik, and he'll certainly be sorely missed.

Mr. Speaker, I offer my condolences to his family and friends and funeral services will take place on Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, beginning at 2 p.m. at the Midnight Sun Complex, the Roy Sugloo Arena in Inuvik. Burial at the cemetery will take place following the ceremony.

Mr. Speaker, I will be absent from the House Thursday, February 22nd, and Friday, February 23rd, to attend the service with family and friends for Mr. Sharpe. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Inuvik Boot Lake. Our condolences go out to the family and friends of an amazing individual that I had the pleasure of knowing since 1988.

So he will be sadly missed. So please pass on our condolences to the family and friends. Thank you.

Members' statements. Return to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. SPEAKER: I see there's some people in the gallery and we would like to thank you very much to be here in your Chamber. I hope you're enjoying the proceedings. It's always nice to see people in the gallery. Thank you for being here.

Acknowledgements. Oral questions. Member from Monfwi.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 63-20(1): HOUSING NORTHWEST TERRITORIES POLICIES ON MORTGAGE AND RENTAL ARREARS RECOVERY

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a question for the Minister of Housing. Can the Minister explain the process that the department follows when a mortgage client has fallen into arrears on their payment? Is the collection process different for people with a mortgage or people renting units? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Monfwi. Minister for Housing NWT.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Mr. Speaker, the process for collecting on a mortgage and rental arrears with Housing NWT is not different. It's the same institution, Housing NWT, same corporation. So the process is not different, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What supports are in place to assist elders as they deal with Housing NWT?

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: There's many supports in place, Mr. Speaker. We have tenant relations officers. We have district office. We have the local housing associations. And we also have government services officers in the communities. So we have many supports in place, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know this is long overdue, and I want to ask the Minister, will the Minister do the right thing and commit to doing a mortgage write off of its clients? It's been there since -- for over 20 years. Some of those are from early 1990s. So I just wanted to ask

the Minister if she will do the right thing and do a mortgage write off because those are the people -- the people that we're talking about are 65 and over now. Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my heart of hearts, I wish I could write everybody off, but I can't. We're a housing corporation and we use this revenue to provide more housing throughout the Northwest Territories. But we look at individual cases every year. Housing NWT does look at individual cases, and we follow the Financial Administration Act. And if there is cases that the Member would like us to look at, we can look at those. We can review things but, again, we have to follow the law and our regulations. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Housing NWT. Member from Monfwi. Final supplementary.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, if a client is referred to collection, a law firm represents Housing NWT. Housing NWT has a law firm to represent them, but the clients have no extra support to represent their interests. Can the Minister commit to a liaison person who can support Housing NWT clients in the collections process? Thank you.

HON. LUCY KUPTANA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A very serious process and ensuring that clients have the proper legal support, that's something I can look into and then follow up with the Member on to make sure that the information is correct and proper. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Housing NWT. Oral questions. Member from Range Lake.

QUESTION 64-20(1):
USE OF PRIVATE AGENCY NURSING IN
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Quebec has passed legislation to ban private health agencies in major centres by December of this year and throughout the province by the end of 2025. So my question is to the Minister of health, will she also ban the use of agencies in the Northwest Territories so we can restore integrity to our public health care system in the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Range Lake. Minister for Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a conversation that I actually had with Minister Holland last week, is the effect of, you know, agency nurses on our health care system and this is a discussion that I will continue -- I will be raising at the national level because as currently right now in the Northwest Territories, we have seven agency nurses working. And so if I was to say we are out of the 400 and some staff positions, for me to say I'm banning agency nurses and the rest of Canada doesn't do that, you know, I hear what the Member is saying, but the Northwest Territories can't do it alone so we're going to need -- I'm going to need help from the rest of the territories and provinces to do something like this. And I'm glad to hear, you know, some of the work that's going on in the rest of the country because this is an issue. This is an issue on our health care system. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well I heard a no, but I appreciate the Minister's position. So can she explain why we're so reliant on agency -- on public -- or private agencies in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: I could let Minister of housing answer, but I don't know if he'll get the answer he wants. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the North -- the NTHSSA uses agency nurses as a last resort. This is not something that we want to do but when it comes to closing beds, closing units, you know, we seen this happen two years ago when the obstetrics -- you know, that -- you know, and we raised it in this House. It was raised in this House that, you know, the costs of the two-month closure and the impact on all of those families that had to travel due to the closure, you know, if we're talking about closing a unit versus hiring some nurses to ensure that people are not sitting down in Edmonton incurring us costs and away from their family for -- you know, sometimes they leave two weeks before and then they are there two weeks after their due date before they deliver. So, you know, there's many other things.

We also will use them in surgery, in the dialysis, in the operating room, post anesthetic, and most recently we ended up in an emergency situation where Inuvik Regional Hospital had to close down their birthing -- you know, members that were due had to fly out for that short period of time.

So these are specialty areas and so in order for us to keep those units going and less impact to the patients, that's where we use them. We don't want to use them but if we had the option

to hire a term or something, we would. Thank you.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the Minister doesn't want to use them. So how much is it costing us? How much is it costing us a day and how much -- and over time, has it changed since COVID? That's my question. Are we paying more now than before the pandemic? Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And keep it short, yes, we are paying more now before the pandemic because we didn't use them for 15 years before without the OBS unit closed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. TESTART: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the Minister for the brief answer. Mr. Speaker, how is the authority -- the health authority communicating to our local workforce that these aren't temporary measures, these are not replacing them, and we value their work, and we want to pay them what they -- for the hard work they do for our communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I can do it short, but I can do it -- so I could give the answer. So currently the NTHSSA is finalizing its formal employee engagement strategy. This is a draft strategy that's been distributed to all the staff members for their input, and they are actively seeking feedback. So executive-led council meetings provide a platform for discussion and feedback gathering, to communicate effectively with staff, the NTHSSA uses various channels, including daily staff emails, monthly coffee breaks, COO communication with staff monthly through their own newsletter, regular staff tailgate. You know, and I know that this area is hard because they work 12 hours a day, 24 -- or 12-hour shifts 24 hours a day and sometimes they're not able to always get the information. So if there's ways that -- and I mentioned it yesterday -- to better this communication, you know, please feel free to bring those discussions to me. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

QUESTION 65-20(1):
USE OF PRIVATE AGENCY NURSING IN
THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to have questions for the Minister of health as well, and as a matter of fact I have doctor questions but I was just realizing I have nursing agency questions, so I'm going to build on my colleague's questions here, Mr. Speaker.

What has the department done to reengineer the nursing agency problem because this is an attack on the health system as pointed out by my good colleague. And even the Premier of Manitoba has defined it as a crisis and attack on the health system. So in other words, to the question, Mr. Speaker, what is the department doing to reengineer the nursing agency problem and fixing it here in the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, like I said in my previous statement is that we haven't used agency nurses pre-COVID for at least 15 years, and so this is something that has come because of the health care crisis post -- like, post the pandemic. And so right now what we're doing is strategically within the NTHSSA and within the department is, you know, we're identifying where there's high needs and, you know, and I think the plan -- like, the work that's going on right now is to try and home grow -- like, some of the nurses that are employed by our department in these specialty areas. So that is one way that we can try and eliminate using the use of agency nurses. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I've recently talked to some nurses -- let me try it again. Agency nurses; there we go. So I'm not sure, there's six, there's ten, there's a hundred; I have no idea. How does the Minister know that there's this minimum, or maximum as she's trying to describe as six or seven, and where are they? I'm trying to -- because if she says the numbers are so low, it should be easy to explain where they are. Thank you.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the reason that I know this number because it was asked of me, and so I asked the department, where are these nurses and how many do we actually have right now working, and there was seven and they're in obstetrics. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. HAWKINS: Well yeah, I'll start with that. That's a good point. Seven too many, of course. And I spoke to one who was a former nurse in the Northwest Territories, and she told me it's way more lucrative to quit her job and move south to become an agency nurse. Mr. Speaker, as I said, what is the department doing to reengineer the nursing agency problem and to define this; what is the issue that seems to be blocking the problem that the department doesn't seem to understand? Why are nurses quitting to become agency nurses to

come back home to the Northwest Territories and work?

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure how many nurses have left the health care system to become agency nurses or to become term nurses because they want to go be closer to their family. There are different reasons for it, Mr. Speaker. Myself who worked as a -- alongside agency nurses at the beginning of my nursing career, there wasn't an option for me to pack up and go live some other territory because I was from here. So, you know, I think that's -- you know, when I hear the Member saying that it's more lucrative, well, you know, we have, you know, a different group of individuals that are coming out of nursing school and they're not settling down, wanting to live in this one certain area. Some of the nurses that I've -- like had spoken to throughout my career say they're fine with just travel because it gets them around the country and because it's the nature of the health care system right now. They're able to go and people are paying for them to fly around the country. They're seeing the world. They're taking off the time when they need to. Right now, the Northwest Territories is doing what they can do to work with the staff to try to promote. I think I've read off a list of things that we're doing that we can do. You know, our salaries are equivalent to the rest of Canada. There's -- and I'll -- I'll leave it there, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate your eye on the clock because, my goodness, we'd be through question period before we got to all the Members based on some of these answers.

She said we're doing whatever we can. You're paying the agencies too much. It's that simple. That simple. Mr. Speaker, money is the problem and the Minister says well, you know, I don't know but the reality is people leaving here because they know they get paid more coming back here. It's not about family.

So, Mr. Speaker, my question specifically to the Minister is is she willing to table publicly a wage comparison package of what our local nurses are paid versus what the agencies are paying their staff just to come back to the Northwest Territories and work? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would be able to table what our nurses are making but I can only table what we pay the agency because they don't disclose to

us what they pay their staff. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions. Member from Mackenzie Delta.

QUESTION 66-20(1):
EDUCATION POLICIES, CURRICULUM AND
SOCIAL PASSING

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the department of education. Is the department looking at eliminating the practice of socially promoting our students of the Northwest Territories? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Mackenzie Delta. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while the department doesn't practice social passing as a policy so to speak, it does endorse peer group placement for students in the Northwest Territories. This is researched-based education practice, and it's used in many jurisdictions across Canada and worldwide. What I want to add here, though, is that peer group placements do not prevent parents, students, teachers, and also even the education system as a whole, from holding appropriate expectations for students to continue growing in our territory. And I think it's really important that amendments that were made to the Education Act ensure that parents are notified when students are working below grade level and are placed on a modified education plan. So it's really important that parents know what's happening with students and have the ability to step in if they want to. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The industrial arts and home economic courses were very popular in high school. It gave the students something positive to look forward to. Can the department look at bringing these courses back into the school curriculum to start the process of building the self-esteem of our students? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in the Northwest Territories we currently have -- so schools have access to arts and trades programming through career and technology study courses. As we transition to a BC curriculum, these will then be known as applied design and skilled technology courses. So just a name change there. And these, within the BC curriculum, are known as experiential hands-on programming, learning through design and

creation, and really is able to pull on skills and concepts from traditional and Indigenous practices as well. But what it comes down to is the capacity of the schools and the interest of students as well to be able to offer this type of programming. But I want to say I'm very happy that we're having this conversation on the floor of the House today. Thank you.

MR. NERYSOO: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. Mr. Speaker, with the past success of these trade programs being in the school of the 1980s give the students the opportunity to get involved in a certain trade when they weren't academically ready to go to post-secondary institutions. So will the department commit to exploring these similar options to eliminate the social promoting of our students? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in regards to the peer group placement, I want to start there. And what is really crucial about that and what determines if, you know, a student -- well, what it calls on is that a student stays with their age group because studies have shown that has a huge benefit to students. And what's really important there is when students stay with their grade level, that when they go up to the next grade that they are given an education plan that outlines the student needs and how those will be met in the next grade level to ensure that we are still meeting students where they're at and providing them with the supports they need. So what I want to say there is that is a crucial, crucial part of this being effective. But when I said before that I'm really happy we're having this conversation on the floor of the House, I absolutely agree with the Member that we need to get more students and more Northerners interested in different vocational training and what opportunities might be out there for them and how they can take advantage of those. And so while it depends on what the capacity of a school is, there are also other programs in communities that exist and what I really want to highlight here for the Member and all Members is the SNAP program. And if we go back to 2016, the SNAP program had no students across the territory in it. Today, there are 37 students in the territory in the SNAP program. And I would love to be able to work with every Member here to -- over the course of this term see SNAP students in all of our communities. So I look forward to maintaining that relationship with our colleagues. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary.

Oral questions. Member from Frame Lake.

QUESTION 67-20(1):
AURORA COLLEGE GOVERNANCE

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is related to a statement I gave a couple of weeks ago related to the importance of post-secondary education. Now that we've established our priority of having a strong economic foundation, I wanted to ask the Minister some questions about the college transition.

So first, can the Minister first describe to me the department's relationship with Aurora College now that the Aurora College board of governors has been reestablished? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Education, Culture and Employment.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, in the course of the last term we did a lot of work on legislation to do with Aurora College. So we had the Aurora College Act itself that was done. We did the Post-Secondary Education Act, and we also had the opportunity under the previous Ministers to reestablish the Aurora College board of governors. And in terms of my role within that, I provide as Minister responsible for post-secondary oversight of the NWT post-secondary system as a whole, and including holding post-secondary institutions accountable under the Aurora College Act itself and the Post-Secondary Education Act, and then there's also now, because Aurora College is arm's length and has its public board reinstated, the board of governors is responsible for oversight of the operation matters to do with Aurora College and then Aurora College is responsible for the programming that occurs within its institution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I note that a new president has been appointed to the college, and I congratulate Ms. James on her appointment. Can the Minister tell me what role she or the department had in the recruitment process?

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in short, none. And the slightly longer more informative answer in that is that under the Act, because Aurora College is arm's length, the board of governors oversees hiring of the president and the president reports directly to the board chair. Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for the answer. The third question is how does the Minister provide direction to the college, and how is the college

held accountable to the priorities set in the Legislative Assembly and the priorities of the funders of the college; how are they held accountable to the Minister and this Assembly? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am not responsible for operations within the college itself, but I am responsible for the oversight and also the funding provided to the college. And I do have a few accountability tools that I can use in that role. So the first, of course, is regular discussions with the chairperson and regular check-ins, and I can state that we've already started those together. There's also the strategic mandate agreement, and the agreement sets out the operating parameters of the college itself and is developed by the college with input from ECE and with approval by myself. And then there's the accountability framework as well, which will be coming and implemented in the 2024-2025 school year. This framework is for all post-secondary education institutions, not just Aurora College. And the reporting required -- sorry, it will outline the reporting required by ECE every year and will help identify the financial stability of institutions and programs, whether or not they're operating effectively or not. So those are some of the tools, and some of those will be, of course, publicly reported to my colleagues in this House.

MR. SPEAKER: Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Frame Lake.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, will the Minister agree to the board chair and president of Aurora College appearing in front of a standing committee should the committee make such a request? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. As the Aurora College is arm's length and it is its own institution, the chair would be able to be contacted by the committee and be invited to appear in front of committee. I think it would be a great idea for committee to form that relationship with the college and be able to understand the board of governors' vision and where they'd like to take the college. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 68-20(1):
DELIVERY OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES
BY NON-GOVERNMENT
ORGANIZATIONS

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Premier, who is also the Minister for Executive and Indigenous Affairs. Does the government keep any inventory of contracts for essential social services and housing that are delivered by non-profits in our communities?

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

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No, there is no centralized collection of those. There is a number of departments and agencies with contracts and contributions with non-profits, but I can say that the -- as part of our homelessness strategy, A Way Home, the integrated services delivery team is tasked with compiling those into a central repository. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So that's great news. I'm also wondering does the government have a sense of how much turnover there is amongst the non-profits who are actually taking on these contracts for essential social services and housing? So another way (audio) same question might be are there lots of different NGOs available and willing to take on these contracts, or is it the same ones over and over again doing this year after year consistently? If that makes sense. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So the government has relationships with the NGOs and so is aware of the turnover within NGOs and even just personally, you know, I'm aware of my constituency of the issues NGOs have in retaining staff. And so, yes, we are aware of those staffing turnovers.

To the Member's question about organizations and whether or not those same organizations are delivering services, I'm not sure what awareness the department has but I think they must -- they probably have a pretty good sense as well. They're the ones who are signing the contribution agreements. And I know from my own experience that there are only so many NGOs, especially outside of Yellowknife. There's actually very few NGOs. And so we do rely on those same NGOs year after year to continue to deliver services. Thank you.

MS. MORGAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So, then, in dealing with these non-profits who have been providing the same basic social services in our communities year after year, often for

decades, to what extent does the GNWT negotiate these contracts and the terms of reference for the funding contributions collaboratively with those non-profits? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of those contracts are based on federal funding and so we have very limited abilities in those situations. When it's GNWT funding, there's a greater ability to collaborate. But I'll just take a guess that we could probably do more collaboration. I think we can always do more collaboration, and that's going to lead to more -- to better results and more satisfied organizations and people. So it is -- you know, I've been preaching about this for quite some time now, so I look forward to enhancing our collaboration with the NGOs. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Premier. Final supplementary. Yellowknife North.

MS. MORGAN: So this is all great news. So my final question is, will the government commit to developing a policy on how such contracts will be developed collaboratively with stable multi-year funding attached for NGOs? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And once again, I think this is great timing for these questions because as we embark on implementation of the homelessness strategy, those are the types of actions that we will be undertaking - how can we ensure that NGOs have stable funding? You know, I don't think that the Member needs to convince me of anything. I agreed with much of what she said in her statement. NGOs can provide -- they do provide core services often at a much lower price than the GNWT can, and so we need to strengthen that partnership as we go forward and try to live within our means as a government. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Premier. Oral questions. Member from the Sahtu.

QUESTION 69-20(1):
WILDFIRE SEASON PREPARATION
AND HOLDOVER FIRES

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Further to my statement on holdover fires aka zombie fires, my first question to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, in preparation for the upcoming 2024 summer fire season what is the Department of ECC doing to assess holdover fires in our territory? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from the Sahtu. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, Member, for the question. I would say climate change and the extended drought that we've had over the last couple of years has certainly shown us the need to be proactive in how we're approaching these types of fires over the winters, and I think one of the things that we're doing is we're monitoring. We've got staff currently monitoring fires throughout the winter. And as the fall came and last fire season ended late in October, staff identified that these are potential challenges for the early spring. So the department has worked to plan to bring our staff and resources on earlier in the spring to ensure that we're prepared and ready to address any of the existing fires that were held over over the winter. There's a plan to do aerial as well as drone scanning early in the spring as well as having staff on the ground also doing assessments on fires. Currently, as they're monitoring over the winter, there has been some action on a fire at Paradise Gardens outside of Hay River because there was significant smoke that was billowing from there that was bothering some of the residents. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thanks to the Minister for that response.

Moving on to my next question, I'm glad to see that there is a monitoring assessment and an inventory of these holdover fires in the different locations across the territory. In particular, I've heard remarks made to me on several sites along the winter road south of Tulita, so if the Minister could put that on the radar for assessment.

My next question is is there communications underway with each community on the assessment and inventory catalog to the holdover fires close to the communities? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, annually the department regional wildfire management staff teams undertake community engagement every winter as part of an annual process. They meet with all the community governments, Indigenous governments, Indigenous leaders, and community members, provide them with information regarding wildfire response. And then also the community members are given an opportunity to bring forward their concerns from the past fire season, more concerns or thoughts they have on the upcoming fire season, and there's a public forum which gives them an

opportunity to address those issues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. McNEELY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Minister on the subject here is I'm very glad that there's a working relationship, more importantly communication with the department and the communities so the community leaders could feel very comfortable and safe as we approach the summer months here.

My next question is, is the department working to upgrade the emergency response plans in each community? Mahsi.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the emergency response plans are the responsibility of the community governments, and they're the ones that are responsible to prepare, adopt, and maintain the emergency plans and programs, including reviewing their emergency response plans annually. Environment and climate change is indirectly involved with these plans as they move forward or as they come into implementation in that we provide, you know, support and information to those activities. Over the winter, I know MACA will be delivering community emergency planning workshops to assist community governments in developing, updating their community emergency plans. MACA's also been delivering tabletop exercise workshops for community governments who want to validate their emergency plan and increase preparedness through practice. MACA has also had a wide variety of tools and supports for community governments for their emergency management role to add and build to capacity, including community emergency plan templates, an EMO portal for community governments to assess tools and templates to assist with community emergency management programs, a community emergency management video series to educate community emergency management officials on basic emergency management in the NWT emergency management system, and programming to be involved in the incident command system. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Oral questions. Member from the Tu Nedhe-Willideh.

QUESTION 70-20(1):

INCREASING INDIGENOUS HIRING WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Indigenous representation report from the 19th Assembly was expected to increase Aboriginal hiring in the public services. I raise

two issues here today on P1 positions. Mr. Speaker, in the 20th Assembly I heard from the Premier, Minister, that they were -- they want to work collaboratively and to build trust with Indigenous governments. My question to the Premier -- and I want to apologize for not getting these questions to you a little bit earlier. And I just want to say that can the Premier provide an update to the House about what action the 20th Assembly's taken to increase Indigenous hiring and to help restore the broken trust with Indigenous governments? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member from Tu Nedhe-Willideh. There's two questions there. Mr. Premier.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I'll do my best of course. The Minister of Finance isn't here today, and so I know that questions directed to other -- it would normally go to other Ministers than come to the Premier when the appropriate Minister is not here. Just a bit of education to the public on why I'm answering these. So I'll do my best. It's a big question because there actually is a lot happening. This was a huge focus in the last government as the Member recalls, and so a lot of work has begun. So I can't go through everything that is happening but if you look at the Indigenous Recruitment and Retention Framework and Action Plan, that is the plan that is going to lead us through the next few years. There's a number of actions in there but overall the priorities are creating a culturally inclusive workplace, building capacity and career development, and fostering Indigenous leadership through talent management. So, basically, we want to create an environment where Indigenous people want to work for one thing. We need to figure out what are the barriers to Indigenous people for working in the GNWT, and that goes to things like reviewing the job actions. So every department now has a plan to -- job description -- sorry. Every department has a plan to review a certain number of job descriptions each year until they completely review those to ensure there are no barriers in those. There's exit interviews. So when employees leave, if there were issues, if there were -- they felt like there was issues of discrimination or systemic racism, those can be brought to the forefront and addressed. We have the Indigenous Career Gateway Program, which -- and I believe this -- it feels like it's getting more and more use. We have an Indigenous eligibility list for pre-qualified candidates. And I could go on and on and on but I'll wrap it up there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you, Premier, for helping answer that question. My next question would be is that will

the GNWT commit to revisiting the decisions that have impacted my constituents who were wrongfully dismissed from their jobs and replaced with non-Indigenous staff? Thank you.

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So if the Member wants to provide the Minister of Finance with some specifics about the instances he's talking about, I'm sure the Minister of Finance will be happy to look into those. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from the Deh Cho.

QUESTION 71-20(1):
LOW WATER LEVELS IN THE MACKENZIE
RIVER

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker. My questions are to the Minister of ECC. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Environment and Climate Change explain how his department is responding to the historic low water levels in the Mackenzie River that we seen over the last year? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you. Minister of Environment and Climate Change.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you to the Member for the question. The department's role related to low water levels is essentially providing situational awareness of the current conditions in the Northwest Territories. Our hydrologists regularly review real time data that is provided through a number of mechanisms. This information will tell us the current water level and the flow rates, and this information is provided through monthly bulletins about the current water conditions. This information then can be used by departments or EMO during the freshet, by infrastructure particularly during the barging season, and this helps to understand the short and long-term conditions related to low water levels. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, can the Minister explain if ECC is anticipating low water levels in this year for the Mackenzie River? Thank you.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, while ECC is unable to predict how much rain or snow there will be other the next several months, it's safe to say that we would require an extremely high rainfall amount across the large geographic area to increase our water levels at this point. The winter snowfall amounts across the NWT have been extremely variable, and these very low snowfall amounts in Fort Simpson and -- sorry, ECC will continue to assess water conditions

and distribute monthly NWT water monitoring bulletins to the public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you, and thank you to the Minister for that. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister tell us what communications ECC has had with the Alberta government regarding the drought command team that they just recently initiated? Thank you.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week, I met with the Alberta Minister of Environment and Parks, Rebecca Schulz. We discussed issues of shared concern, including low water levels. We discussed the concern that had been raised by the NWT Indigenous governments, partners, and residents about our low water levels. We also discussed the water shortage advisory that is currently in place for the Hay River basin in Alberta along with many other water sheds in the province. Water use by temporary and long-term license holders has been affected. Through our transboundary water agreement with Alberta, there's a commitment to continue to transparently communicate about water use during these times of low water levels. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Environment and Climate Change. Final supplementary. Member from the Deh Cho.

MRS. YAKELEYA: Thank you. And thank you to the Minister. Mr. Speaker, the Government of Alberta has begun telling the residents to conserve water and that they've launched water sharing negotiations with all of their water licensing holders. Can the Minister tell us if the NWT is in a similar boat and our residents will need to begin conserving water usage like Alberta? Thank you.

HON. JAY MacDONALD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Any decisions on water conservation will be informed by our snowpack assessments that we do annually and water levels of source rivers. Information would be shared with communities and with multiple parties involved in this discussion and further action. ECC will continue to assess water conditions and distribute monthly monitoring bulletins to the public. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

QUESTION 72-20(1):
MEDICAL TRAVEL POLICIES AND
PRACTICES

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the process of medical travel can be

confusing. Depending on what treatment you need, intake can be different and it's also not really clear to some folks who are not employed by the GNWT as to what stream of medical travel they fall into. From personal experience, the forms for medical travel are also confusing and duplicate information.

Can the Minister explain if there is any work underway to improve standard operating procedures or communications with the public for the different streams of medical travel? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Great Slave. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, medical travel, you know, in the Northwest Territories, we're moving 44,000 people at any -- you know, to be able to access care so it is very, very complex. And so when we think about the -- when I -- you know, as a Minister now that has to oversee this, there is medical travel that are for non-insured health benefits clients, so those who are Inuit or Status, you know, who hold a status card. Then there's extended health benefits and medical travel for those. Then there's Metis benefits for those who qualify and then the travel benefits for them. And there's the GNWT, which the GNWT administers for the six -- you know, whatever -- the amount of employees that we have and their benefits, and that is removed from the department of health now. And then there's those who don't fall in any of these categories. So with that there's things that need -- that are currently being done. So I just needed to make sure that people are aware that there's five different areas that this happens. So work is currently being done to review several areas.

One of the things that we've heard on and on again is the exceptions policy to streamline decisions for benefits for individuals that have undue financial hardship or extraordinary health needs and a unique situation. So that's something that's being reviewed, working collaboratively with the federal counterpart to clarify and improve the administration of the non-insured health benefits, which is very complex. They're reviewing the boarding home services and, you know, this is time -- like, these contracts are coming up within the next fiscal year. Gathering information from Indigenous governments because they're hearing from their residents, so. And working closely with our counter parts, you know, with like all of the airlines and the people that move people throughout the territory. And, again, like I said, yes, and shifting all of the benefits for medical travel out of health and social services to GNWT for those that -- so we only have to

deal with the non-GNWTs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm curious if the department has been looking into any of the most high need areas for medical travel, and what I mean by this is the areas of medical requirements that have a lot of subscription or uptake. So what I'm curious about is does the Minister think that we could bring specialists to the North to remove long haul burden on folks to go out of territory which is also a high cost for the GNWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize to the interpreters. I know I've been talking quite fast and I've been kind of given the notice.

So, Mr. Speaker, this already occurs in many instances. You know, we have urology, pediatrics, cardiology, neurology that come here. We continue to explore opportunities to further develop sustainable in-territory programs as well as remote services to supplement or replace out-of-territory services. The priority is to deliver sustainable and high quality services. And you know, the medical travel and the people that are travelling not necessarily are related to specialists, there's lots of other -- like, for surgery, for different things, so. And we are monitoring this. And the department, we are currently reviewing everything right now within the medical travel policy because we do know it is very convoluted and complex. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MS. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And it's really wonderful to hear from the Minister that they're looking in-depth to a lot of the issues that I'm highlighting today.

Mr. Speaker, I'm also wondering, though, about improvements to processes that complement medical travel. So right now if someone accesses a practitioner on medical travel in the south who recommends lab work as an example, they then must get the lab requisition redone in the territory so they can have those services completed in the NWT. The question is, can the Minister speak to what work could be done to streamline this process to change southern requisitions into NWT requisitions that can be fulfilled without the need to then go and book an appointment with the overtaxed medical practitioner system that we have? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, I think that the problem -- like, this is an issue and this is an ongoing issue because even though we are the Northwest Territories and we do referral

service to Alberta health, their practitioners are not able to -- and the Member has stated -- are not allowed to -- like, you can't take their requisition because they're not licensed in our territory to go in and do the blood work here. And I know that there's back and forth. It's the same thing. Like, we can't take ours and take it down there and get blood work. So you know, there's a lot of work going on behind the scenes to try and work on those types of things. You know, and I think the -- when I look at all of those issues, these are complex. And it has a lot to do with patient health information and the legislation around that too. So when you get your blood work done and you get services done in Alberta, they tend -- they'll send the patient all of the information and then the patient themselves needs to bring that to their practitioner. So I hear the Member where they're saying, and the things that we're doing behind the scenes is trying to figure out ways to mitigate that because we know it is a tax on our -- getting in. And there's different legislation, things that we've all talked about in the past government and this government that's going to try and help that. So thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Health and Social Services. Final supplementary. Great Slave.

(audio)

QUESTION 73-20(1):
SENIOR HOME HEATING SUBSIDY
PROGRAM

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Further to the statement that I made a couple weeks ago. It's for the ECE. Can the department increase the senior home heating subsidy rates? That's a question for the Minister.

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

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, right now the rates are not intended to cover 100 percent of the seniors' heating costs. They aim to help with 80 percent of the heating costs. In early last year, there was a review done on the seniors' home heating subsidy, and it was done to review the amount that was being provided to seniors and to see what we could do from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment in order to either increase that amount or create certainty for seniors. And so what was done at that point was providing costs over the month to seniors in order to ensure that they weren't running out in the coldest months of the year and so providing more certainty. And at that point, when we looked at what we were

able to do, we put a little bit more money into the funding. Those funds then were able to be absorbed within the department. And if there's any desire to see additional funding going into the seniors' home heating subsidy on behalf of Members or on behalf of the public, it would need to be additional funds to the program that would need to be approved through the Legislative Assembly because we've stretched our budget as far as possible from within the department. Thank you.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, are there barriers for the department to permanently increase the subsidies rate?

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, currently we budget about \$2.2 million for this subsidy every year. We added approximately half a million dollars using internal resources in 2022-2023 and then again in 2023-2024 in order to acknowledge that heating fuel costs have gone up. While we recognize that heating fuel fluctuates throughout the year and when it is higher than usual, we do try to put more funding into this subsidy. But like I said before, we cannot afford within the department to continue to fund from within. We would need to have increases done to the program as a whole, and those dollars would have to be approved by the Legislative Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister confirm how many Tlicho residents are denied because their income exceeds the income threshold? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that while 59 applicants were approved from Tlicho region, there were 13 people who were denied for the seniors' home heating subsidy and that is because their income was over the income threshold. And what I do want to add here, because I want to acknowledge that some residents participate in seasonal employment, if somebody is denied because their previous year's income is too high but their income -- or their employment has changed in the following year, they can actually seek a reassessment from the department so that their income threshold is reflective of where they are actually at in their employment journey. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Minister of Education, Culture and Employment. Final supplementary. Member from Monfwi.

MRS. WEYALLON ARMSTRONG: Mr. Speaker, are there barriers for the department to increase the income threshold? Thank you.

HON. CAITLIN CLEVELAND: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would say the biggest barrier is budget. If we want to be able to provide more than the aim or the goal of 80 percent of heating costs to low and moderate income seniors across the territory, we would need to increase the budget for that. If the goal was to provide 100 percent, say, of subsidy for the cost of heat to seniors that are considered low and moderate income and who are not on income assistance, we would need to make sure that our budgets do reflect that and that the policy of the program reflects that as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral questions. Member from Frame Lake.

QUESTION 74-20(1):
HEALTHCARE STAFFING

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is a follow-up question to the Minister of health from some of my questions yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has said that there will not be job losses associated with COVID -- COVID funding sunseting but it is not clear to me what changes may occur to where staff were placed in the system. Can the Minister describe in more detail what changes are proposed and how that will affect frontline operations at Stanton? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Frame Lake. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the funding -- and I guess I tried to explain this yesterday that the COVID funding that has come to -- will come to an end as of March 31st, there are going to be funding for was there for positions but like I said yesterday, there's no job losses because we've been increasing those numbers on those units with casuals and float and relief workers. And, you know, specific to the concerns that, you know, the Member is raising is the new funding that we had -- that I announced yesterday is to replace a lot of those positions that -- you know, to incur some of that cushion for those positions that COVID funding is ending, so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. MORSE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So can the Minister describe to the House what the department is going to be doing to ensure that frontline staff, particularly nurses, are

continuing to be supported in their roles in our hospitals in the NWT? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

HON. LESA SEMMLER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, in any one of our hospitals, not just in Stanton, but in any one of our hospitals, so Inuvik and Hay River, you know, the thing is they all have a manager, they all have someone that they have level of acuity. So any given day it's not the same every day. And so the beginning of every shift, you know -- and if we're going to get down into operations, the beginning of every shift there is a level of care that's needed for those patients. I mean, I can talk about this all day. I don't know if the Speaker will give it to me but what I can say is that, you know, these patients that -- the patients that we have and the conversation that we've been having is nursing assistants from the Member's statements yesterday. You know, there is a higher level of patients that need -- and we call ADLs, activities of daily living. So those are patients that high needs for their -- you know, they need help with -- assistance with eating and bathing and those types of things. Those patients are sitting in our medicine units and our acute care units and they -- you know, and so we need extra nursing assistance to do that, and that's what this money has been providing. And with the new funding, you know, there are positions there that are going to mitigate that. So if there's a concern that there's not going to be adequate staffing levels, like I said yesterday we will not compromise patient care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Health and Social Services. Oral questions, the time is up, Members. Oral questions.

Written questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery (Reversion)

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to return to item number 7 on the orders of the day. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member from Yellowknife Centre is requesting that we return to item number 7 on the agenda. Any nays? Written questions. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to return to the orders of the day, item number 5. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Member is requesting us -- Member from Yellowknife Centre is requesting us to return to item number 5 on the

orders of the day. Are there any nays? Seeing no nays. Member from Yellowknife Centre.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to return -- and thank you, colleagues, by the way -- to recognition of visitors in the gallery. A near and dear friend of mine, their son is a page today. And he wasn't in the gallery earlier when we did it, and I wanted to recognize him when he was here, Mr. Seth Gordon. Thank you very much for being a page in the Legislative Assembly.

MR. SPEAKER: I thank all the pages for doing the great work. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too want to recognize the former Dene National Chief Noleen Villebrun.

MR. SPEAKER: Recognition of visitors in the gallery. Written questions. Return to written questions. Replies to Commissioner's address. Petitions. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Reports of standing and special committees. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Motion. Notice of motion for the first reading of bills. Minister of Justice.

Notice of Motion for the First Reading of Bills

BILL 2: MISSING PERSON'S ACT

HON. R.J. SIMPSON: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that on Friday, February 23rd, 2024, I will present Bill 2, Missing Person's Act, to be read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister of Justice. Notices of motion for the first reading of bills. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters, Minister's Statement 4-20(1), Minister's Statement 5-20(1), Tabled Document 28-20(1), Tabled Document 29-20(1), with the Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. I now call the Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? Mr. Rodgers.

MR. RODGERS: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I move that the chair rise and report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Edjericon): Thank you. Thank you, committee. We will proceed with the first item. Okay, thank you.

There's a motion on the floor to report progress. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? Okay, motion carried. I will now rise and report progress. Thank you.

---Carried

---SHORT RECESS

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: May I have the report of the Committee of the Whole. Member from Tu Nedhe-Wiilideh.

MR. EDJERICON: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Minister's Statement 4-20(1), Minister's Statement 5-20(1), Tabled Document 28-20(1), Tabled Document 29-20(1). And, Mr. Speaker, I move the report of Committee of the Whole be concurred with. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member. Do I have a seconder for the report of the Committee of the Whole? Member from Range Lake. The motion is in order and non-debatable. All those in favour? All those opposed? All those abstaining? Motion has been carried. And the report of the Committee of the Whole has been concurred with.

---Carried

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Reports of committee of Committee of the Whole -- oh, I guess that was just said. Sorry. Reports of the Committee of the Whole.

Third reading of bills. Orders of the day, Mr. Clerk.

Orders of the Day

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Glen Rutland): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Orders of the day for Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

1. Prayer
 2. Ministers' Statements
 3. Members' Statements
 4. Returns to Oral Questions
- Oral Question 62-20(1):
Consultation with Members of the

- Legislative Assembly on Policies and Strategies
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
 6. Acknowledgements
 7. Oral Questions
 8. Written Questions
 9. Returns to Written Questions
 10. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
 11. Petitions
 12. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
 13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
 14. Tabling of Documents
 15. Notices of Motion
 16. Motions
 - Motion 9-20(1): Establishing a Public Inquiry into the 2023 Wildfires
 - Motion 16-20(1): Appointment of Deputy Chairpersons of Committee of the Whole
 - Motion 17-20(1): Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Tabled Document 27-20(1)
 - Motion 18-20(1): Honours Advisory Council
 - Motion 19-20(1): Appointment of Equal Pay Commissioner
 17. Notice of Motion for First Reading of Bills
 18. First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 1: An Act to Amend the Legislative Assembly and Executive Council Act
 19. Second Reading of Bills
 20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Minister's Statement 4-20(1): 2023 Wildfire Season Review and Planning for the 2024 Season

- Minister's Statement 5-20(1): Emergency Management Preparation

- Tabled Document 28-20(1): Supplementary Estimates (Infrastructure Expenditures), No. 3, 2023-2024

- Tabled Document 29-20(1): Supplementary Estimates (Operations Expenditures), No. 4, 2023-2024

21. Report of Committee of the Whole

22. Third Reading of Bills

23. Orders of the Day

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Members, just a reminder of the tea and bannock in the Great Hall at the rise of the House to celebrate our Indigenous language interpreters in Indigenous Language Month.

This House stands adjourned until Thursday, February 22nd, 2024, at 1:30 p.m. Thank you.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

