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The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories
Friday, May 23, 2008**

Members Present

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

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

Prayer.

Speaker (Hon. Paul Delorey): Good morning, colleagues. Welcome back to the House. Before we go to orders of the day, it's a special day for a couple of our Members today. Mr. Beaulieu has a birthday.

Applause.

Mr. Speaker: And without disclosing his age, I would just like to give a message to his MLA that in 30 years' time, he'll be eligible for a special award.

Laughter.

Mr. Speaker: We also have another birthday in the House. Ms. Bisaro's birthday is today.

Applause.

Mr. Speaker: I thought I had the distinction of being the oldest Member, but not quite.

Laughter.

Mr. Speaker: Anyway, happy birthday to both of you.

Orders of the day. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, Bob McLeod.

Ministers' Statements

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 31-16(2)
REMEMBERING TOURISM PIONEER
JIM PETERSON

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a former builder, supporter and fierce advocate of our tourism industry in the Northwest Territories.

Jim Peterson passed away on April 15 of this year, just weeks before his beloved lodge on Point Lake opened for its 22nd season.

Jim first came to the Northwest Territories in 1979 with the Canadian Armed Forces and established northern roots that were, thankfully, never uprooted.

In 1986 he became an active participant in the NWT tourism industry with the establishment of Point Lake Lodge north of Yellowknife. A seasoned outdoorsman and outfitter, he was elected for two successive terms as president of the NWT Arctic Tourism Association and served as a vocal and committed president for the Barren Ground Caribou Outfitters Association.

Jim Peterson held a great love for the North and a deep passion for the industry that allowed him to share its unique environment and beauty with his worldwide circle of clients and friends. He was a man of rigorous principles, an exemplary Northerner who addressed his challenges head-on but never lost the humble spirit with which he supported his colleagues and friends through their own times of hardship.

Mr. Speaker, the headline in the Yellowknifer on April 18 read: "Jim Peterson fought the government, enjoyed his friends and loved his lodge." The words offer a succinct and fitting description of a man whose achievements and efforts on behalf of tourism in the Northwest Territories deserve our recognition, appreciation and celebration.

Friends and family will be gathering at the Adlair air hangar on Friday, May 23, at 5:30 p.m. for a celebration of life for this great Northerner. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING THE
BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, this is a budget session, and I want to talk about the budget information that was tabled in this House yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about our unique style of consensus government, and there is an anomaly in

that system. As soon as we choose the seven from among us, they are assigned areas of responsibility on behalf of MLAs and the residents of the Northwest Territories.

But at some point, they become the equivalent of a minority government and take on the characteristics of a governing political party, complete with party discipline, solidarity, confidentiality. They clearly differentiate themselves from those on this side of the House. Maybe this is an anomaly within consensus government that we need to rethink.

After the lack of consultation and representative participation in the development of this budget, maybe there's a more fitting model that will encourage Ministers to embrace and return to their commitments to work with all Members. Perhaps, like municipal councils, we should just strike committees and elect chairpersons to oversee those committees, and have Members serve as liaisons with various sectors of our territory. Perhaps responsibility for chairing these areas of responsibility should be rotated from time to time to build capacity, to plan for succession in future governments and to give everyone a chance to understand thoroughly the different dynamics and challenges of governing this vast territory.

There has been a very distinctive reluctance on the part of this government to demonstrate the values of the politics of inclusion. The Regular Members of this House have an amazing array of knowledge, background, experience and skills that are being disregarded when this Cabinet fails to consult in a meaningful way.

After our strategic planning session when we developed our Northerners Working Together — a bit of a contradiction.... When we developed that document, Cabinet committees were struck to deal with refocusing government. Many other initiatives committees were struck. Regular Members asked to have representation on those committees, and we were denied. Federal funding in the form of the Building Canada Fund, the equal trust and municipal debt development fund and community trust funding have had projects identified with no input from the Regular Members at the front end. We haven't been allowed to sit at the table. Decisions were made about reduction targets, job reductions. All this was done in consultation with deputy ministers and departments. Regular Members were lucky to hear about them after the fact and sometimes after the communication was already in the public — if not formally, at least informally.

Now the Finance Minister has brought forward a budget and can't understand why Regular Members are having a hard time to buy in. There may be more to be said.

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

Unanimous consent granted.

Mrs. Groenewegen: There may be more to be said about what's not in this budget than there is to say about what is in it. Some of the Budget Address could have been well spent explaining the rationale for the cuts and job reductions so that Northerners could understand the big picture. What we heard were vague metaphors, analogies and hard-to-understand riddles. If we can't understand the communication on this side of the House, how is the public supposed to make sense of it?

Speaking of the big picture, that is something this budget missed all together.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON RENT INCREASES IN THE CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to bring to light today a situation affecting my constituents and, I suspect, the constituents of other Yellowknife ridings. Yellowknife's rental housing market is extremely tight at the moment; the vacancy rate is less than 1 per cent. We're all well aware of the current costs that are attached to the provision of heat, power, maintenance and so on that landlords must endure — particularly fuel costs. So it's no surprise that tenants across the city of Yellowknife are receiving notices of pending rental rate increases.

Constituents have advised me that their rent increased in 2007 more than 16 per cent, with an increase in 2008 of another 11 per cent or 16 per cent, depending on their apartment size and the term of the lease.

I don't begrudge the landlords the opportunity to raise rents to meet their costs and to have a positive balance sheet at the end of the day. The current Residential Tenancies Act allows landlords to raise rents once in a 12-month period, and that's not unreasonable. What I am concerned about is the lack of any control for the amount of a rent increase. I find it unreasonable that tenants will have to endure rent increases two years running, each one as high as 16 per cent.

In a housing market with a normal vacancy rate, residents would have the option of looking for cheaper accommodations. Yellowknife renters don't have that option today. They are effectively held to ransom by the landlord.

The NWT needs to put in place a mechanism of appeal for tenants who feel they are facing an unacceptable rent increase. At the moment they can't appeal to the rental officer; he can only respond to things that are in the act. The act is silent on the amount of allowable rent increases. The act is also silent on the need for a landlord to

provide any justification to tenants in regard to a proposed rent increase.

I think tenants recognize the rising cost of doing business and are willing to accept some increase in their rent. But a 16 per cent increase when the cost of living increase is no more than 3 per cent seems out of line.

I urge the Yellowknife rental property owners to consider meeting with their tenants to explain why such a huge increase is necessary. At the very least, they should provide their tenants with written justification, including facts and figures to back up their proposed increases.

Few of our residents have the capability and capacity to appeal a rent increase via the court process, but at this time that is the only possibility open to them. Maybe it's time for the NWT to seriously consider establishing an ombudsman service to hear appeals from residents on any issue — not just rent concerns — where legislation has no avenue of appeal. I believe it's a service whose time has come. I hope the government will give it serious consideration in the future.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I will have questions for the Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes, Mr. Robert McLeod.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON RISING ENERGY COSTS

Mr. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, when you're back in the community, a lot of people come to you. They talk to you about cost of living. It was mentioned in the Budget Address yesterday. Cost of living is a great concern in the Northwest Territories, especially, as my colleague from Mackenzie Delta pointed out yesterday, the cost of energy.

One of the biggest complaints I get from back in Inuvik is the cost of power and the power bills and how they're distributed. The power bills have been coming. I was talking to a constituent and he was saying it's getting to the point where you almost can't afford a mortgage anymore. By the time you're finished paying your mortgage and your power bill, there's almost no money left for food.

The billing is coming out of Hay River now, where it used to be done out of Inuvik. They are behind. I was talking to a constituent this morning who's had five power bills in two months because they're trying to catch up and they're trying to make up. What kind of an organization is this?

The folks back in the Mackenzie Delta and in Inuvik and the Beaufort-Delta are getting a little frustrated with having to constantly deal with the Power Corporation and the way they do business. There's some serious talk; they're looking at options for

pulling off the grid. Your biggest customer base is in Inuvik and the Beaufort-Delta.

If they were to pull off the grid, that would seriously affect the Northwest Territories Power Corporation. If they can supply the power themselves, then we don't mind having to pay into our own community. But the folks in the Beaufort-Delta are getting these outrageous power bills. They're getting too many power bills.

I can just see the next power bill. They're going to have a rider on it, because they had to send out all these pink slips to remind you how they're going to fix your bill. We'll get a rider for those, like we get a rider for everything else. It's just very frustrating for people who constantly have to struggle to make ends meet.

Everything is going up. We talk about the cost of living being a priority of this government, and yet we do very little about it. The subsidy the government provides helps, obviously. Without that subsidy, times would be a little more difficult. It's just a frustrating time for all people in the Beaufort-Delta to have to keep paying these outrageous power bills.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON STATUS OF AKLAVIK COMMUNITY ACCESS ROAD

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was very disappointed with the Budget Address yesterday. There was no mention in regard to the access road for Aklavik. I'd like to congratulate my colleague from Tuktoyaktuk; they received recognition in the Budget Address.

After reviewing the budget last night, I was again not able to find anywhere in that budget reference to a motion that I passed in this House regarding an access road to gravel sources in Tuktoyaktuk to site 177 and an access road from Aklavik to Willow River to that gravel source.

This issue has been around since 1991 by way of motions from the Beaufort region, from the communities, and also from me as a Member of this House for 13 years. Yet somehow it has been totally erased or eliminated from the planning process of this government. This project has received government funding by way of the community access road project for several years, in which they've built two kilometres of road, because the cost of moving gravel from the Willow River site to the community.... This government has known about this project for some time.

The residents of Aklavik are very disappointed that this is not being recognized by this government. Mr. Speaker, this government has been divvying up

money among themselves by way of the Building Canada Fund and the strategic initiative funds. Again, a large number of these projects have nowhere been previously budgeted or previously planned for in the planning process of this government.

I can remember standing up in this House many times and being told by Ministers across the floor that in order to get any projects, by way of roads connecting communities to highways or expanding our highway system, it had to be part of the NWT Highway Strategy. These new projects aren't even close to being in the NWT strategy.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very disappointed in regard to what I heard yesterday and how we've been treated on this side of the House. As a Member who's been here for 13 years, this is the worst I've seen of dialogue between Members of the 16th Assembly compared to what we did in the 13th Assembly. That was a major budget exercise then.

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

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Krutko: As a Member for the 13th Assembly, we went through a similar exercise, but at least the 23 members of the 13th Assembly were involved. We knew which departments were going to be cut. We knew exactly what our situation was so we could go back to our constituents and explain it to them.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I will continue to fight with regard to the constituents of the Mackenzie Delta and the access road for Aklavik. I have to state that I'm very disappointed that there was nothing mentioned in the budget.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE
HOUSING FOR TEACHERS

Mr. Beaulieu: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to talk about the serious issue that is affecting many of our communities: a lack of adequate housing for teachers.

This is not a new issue. As a matter of fact, it's been making headlines for some time now — headlines like: Teachers' Housing – Headache for Education Body; Frustrated Teachers Quitting Beaufort Jobs; High Rents, Housing Crunch Drives Teachers from NWT Communities; Five Beaufort-Delta Communities Losing School Principals.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very serious issue for many communities. Things are no different in my riding. The district education authority in Lutselk'e and Fort Resolution, the South Slave District Education Council and even the NWT Teachers' Association

have raised the issue of housing for teachers in my communities numerous times over the past five years. There's been little or no improvement.

Mr. Speaker, there are three main issues with teachers' housing: availability, affordability and adequacy. Contributing to the problem is the fact that Fort Resolution and Lutselk'e are smaller communities with no private rental market. The cost of housing is a significant factor when prospective teachers are deciding whether or not to take the positions. Affordability is a huge factor when it comes to communities getting good teachers or retaining them.

In these smaller communities, availability of adequate housing is severely limited. As a result, teachers often find themselves having to share living quarters with others. One teacher was even forced to stay in a local bed-and-breakfast. In most cases they have month-to-month leases. This can be a major distraction for teachers. It often results in high, fast turnover and places a heavy burden on school budgets. In one case, a teacher had to go without laundry services for a full winter because of a faulty water system and other issues, like maintenance.

At the end of the day, this is not only a teacher's problem. It affects the students and the whole community.

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

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Beaulieu: This is a territory-wide problem that demands immediate attention. Later on today I will follow up this statement with questions for the appropriate Minister. Mahsi cho.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
RECOGNITION OF THE PASSING
OF 101-YEAR-OLD ELDER

Mr. Menicoche: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to honour the passing of an elder: Madeline Villeneuve from Fort Simpson. Madeline — best known as Madeleine, as she had been called all her life — was the oldest member of our community. She was 101 years old by church records. However, other elders and community members maintain she was far older than that. She was definitely the oldest one in our community and our region. She had lived a long and formidable life: from bows and arrows through to the moon landing, as it was said in her eulogy. This is significant, Mr. Speaker, because I read recently that the oldest person in the world is only 105 or 107, and she was up there.

She contributed greatly to our community. She had a large family. She had 43 grandchildren, 90 great-grandchildren and 28 great-great-grandchildren. I am proud to say that my children and grandchild are counted among them through their mother, Connie Villeneuve.

I just wanted to honour her today here in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, and as well to say: Madeleine, you have done a great job with all of your children, and I wish you peaceful rest as you have taken leave from us. Mahsi cho.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON REDUCTIONS TO THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Abernethy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During our last session I went on the record concerning morale in the public service. After receiving the Main Estimates yesterday, it's clear that 231 positions have been targeted for reduction. Fortunately only 147 of these will result in potential job loss, as 84 are currently vacant. Although 147 affected employees is definitely better than 231, it's still far from appropriate, and it's bad for the public service.

Staff of the GNWT are our most valuable resource. They're the people who provide the essential services to our residents in the Northwest Territories. Without a happy and motivated public service, we fail in the delivery of the essential services we are expected to deliver as a government.

These job cuts do nothing but radically reduce already poor morale. Further, this job-cutting exercise is seen as only the first round of cuts. Whether or not a second round of cuts is coming, it does cause uncertainty within the public service, which currently affects morale and the quality of the services provided by our dedicated yet nervous and apprehensive staff.

As I indicated previously, I believe focusing on job cuts is exactly the wrong way to pursue the course of direction with respect to the government's spending patterns.

The public and the Members on this side of the House have offered Cabinet many suggestions on ways to improve our financial situation without cutting staff: things like reviewing and improving our energy use and consumption within the government itself, restructuring boards and agencies and increasing cooperation between departments in order to reduce duplicate spending.

During the last session I and my colleagues on this side of the House strongly encouraged the Premier and Cabinet to make every reasonable effort to reduce our overall spending through streamlining,

as well as creative and innovative thinking and planning. After looking at the Main Estimates last night, it appears to me that our encouragement to find reductions other than through cuts has largely been ignored. Don't get me wrong. Upon review, it's clear that one or two of the departments were more creative and did find alternative savings without jobs cuts; however, the vast majority appear to have gone directly into job cuts themselves.

I am a realist. I know that this restructuring exercise will result in a few — and I stress, a few — job cuts. However, as I indicated previously, these job cuts should be the last resort. They shouldn't be the government's first solution to our financial difficulty. I'm disappointed that Cabinet has pursued this course of action, as I believe they're setting us up to relive the mistakes of 1996 government cuts.

To avoid repeating these same mistakes, I encourage Cabinet to listen to the Regular Members, your colleagues, and reconsider many of the job cuts you are proposing. We must support our most valuable resource: our dedicated and committed staff. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON COST OF LIVING ISSUES IN THE NWT

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, the three most important things in the basic cost of living for all our residents are food, energy and housing. This Assembly has made it a priority to address the soaring cost of living. Because our small communities have little economic development, they must be subsidized at increasing costs, with significant implications to our residents and to the GNWT budget. In the budget presented, I see little comprehensive and effective government action to actually address these costs. I want here to suggest a basis on which to move forward on this key issue.

When basic needs are derived from resources that are imported from increasingly remote locations, costs cannot be controlled and rising costs result. Money and economic resources are pipelined out of the community as fast as they come in and are concentrated in fewer and fewer large corporations without any relationship to the community. Environmental impacts rise and eventually are felt globally. Everyone pays those costs, but few have input into the decisions that could address those impacts. Development of skills related to providing those resources is not enhanced. Finally, increasing subsidies are required to provide the basic needs necessary and to address the social and other consequences that naturally arise from this situation. This is what we currently face.

In contrast, many benefits can accrue when basic needs are met, largely from local resources. Costs can be controlled, financial gains are maximized

and distributed locally, and economic interactions circulate money in the community. Environmental impacts are quickly addressed because they're felt immediately and locally, and community capacity rises. Indirect benefits include a strengthened social fabric, respect for the land and people who provide for the needs of the community, and an overall increase in community capacity. Economic development becomes specifically designed to local conditions and resources that vary widely, and it doesn't actually yield diversity.

Mr. Speaker, while we have the challenges of climate change impacts and soaring fuel costs, we also have solutions that will address both of these and the cost of living. We have an incredible potential to raise vegetables, herbs and even grains, as was demonstrated in the '40s through the '60s. Our varied crops are phenomenal. Our potential for harvesting meat is high, with marine mammals, bison, moose, waterfowl and the long-term caribou. Our forests offer....

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

Unanimous consent granted.

Mr. Bromley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our forests offer an amazing potential for diversifying our diet, from birch syrup to nutrient-laden mushrooms and other foods. Renewable energy is available in every community, varying from area to area. Building skills and materials are available, but need investigation and development.

The Minister of Finance noted yesterday that we are totally vulnerable to rising costs and global economic conditions, yet he failed to address how to become less vulnerable. Instead, this government's sole response seems to be to join the madness and pursue mega-development with predictable social, environmental and local economic consequences.

Mr. Speaker, I urge this government to recognize the incredible potential and innovation of our culturally diverse people and to provide real incentives, opportunities and requirements for environmentally, economically and socially sustainable development. We need to meet real needs with real solutions. Mahsi.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the Premier's Budget Address yesterday and found it quite interesting that there was absolutely no mention of the \$165 million Deh Cho Bridge project. It didn't get any billing whatsoever from this government. Mr. Speaker, is that not a strange omission?

According to the government, isn't this \$165 million bridge supposed to reduce the cost of living? And wouldn't you think that the government would be boasting about this massive piece of public infrastructure? Or was it left out intentionally? Perhaps the government does not want any more attention given to this project, or perhaps it's embarrassed to have gotten into such a poor deal in the first place.

Many of my constituents and residents around the Northwest Territories do not understand or comprehend why, if we are in financial duress and expenses are outstripping our revenues, would we ever, ever sign on to a project that's going to increase our annual operational expenses by close to \$3 million per year, indexed for the next 35 years.

Mr. Speaker, the bridge is going to be built. During questions to the Premier in October and in February, he did commit to having a post-mortem on finding out why the government signed the agreement three days before the last election and who was responsible for that action. I'm in receipt of a response to a set of written questions that I had asked the Premier in February — on February 8, to be specific — regarding the Deh Cho Bridge concession agreement. I want to thank the Premier for the responses, but they only add more questions to what the government was thinking when they signed off on this agreement.

In response, the Government of the Northwest Territories finally admits to the public and to this House that they did not have an updated cost-benefit analysis done prior to signing that agreement. How could this ever, ever be allowed to happen with public funds, Mr. Speaker?

We had the discussion yesterday regarding the need for sound decision-making. How on God's green earth is this sound decision-making when the government was relying on a five-year-old cost-benefit analysis to sign off on a \$165 million concession agreement? This is completely and utterly unacceptable and inexcusable, especially since the deal itself was signed in a veil of secrecy.

Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Premier at the appropriate time. Thank you.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON YELLOWKNIFE ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY LIVING

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I begin I would like to make special mention of Red Friday, where people wear red to honour the troops.

Mr. Speaker, today's Member's statement is to talk about a couple of community grassroots events that will be happening here in Yellowknife. The first one is the Gumboot Rally. It will be happening tomorrow, Saturday, May 24 at 10 a.m. at the Yellowknife Education Board parking lot. It will be the scene of fun, games and a lot of laughs at the Yellowknife Association for Community Living, where they are holding their 16th Annual Gumboot Rally.

The rally is the association's major fundraiser to maintain programming throughout the year. The YAFL is a non-profit organization that supports families, children, youth and adults with intellectual disabilities so that they are included and able to contribute to community life here in Yellowknife. The association provides services in eight different programming areas, including employability, family projects, living and learning with FASD projects, literacy outreach centres, respite, supportive living, skills training and inclusions.

Mr. Speaker, at the Gumboot Rally 15 to 20 teams will don hilarious costumes — and their gumboots, of course — to come out and compete in such games as basketboots, skinny ankles, boot toss and catch 'n boot. Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of notable prizes that will be donated by Canadian North: two trips, which can be a trip to Edmonton or Calgary. One is for the person who raises the most money, and the other is for the person who gets the most sponsors. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the event there will be a barbecue.

I'm just letting folks know that there are still packages available. Every year teams don funny costumes. In past years we've had the Loan Arrangers from the TD Bank, Aurora Jiggers from the college, the Flashers, Sisson Judges and the Hippies. So Mr. Speaker, that community event starts on Saturday. I'm making special note of our sponsors who make sure this event happens. They are Canadian North, YK1, Artisan Press, Northbest Distributors, BHP, and the Gumboots, as well as Coffee Break.

Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, I had two community events that are important in Yellowknife, and they're grassroots. Of course there's the Walk for the Cure of diabetes, which I'll be attending as well. That happens here at the Legislative Assembly on Sunday, May 25. Registration starts at 1 o'clock. I'll just say in closing it's put on every year by the Lions Club. I want to thank them for leading that initiative starting here at the Legislature on Sunday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins, The honourable Member for Nunakput, Mr. Jacobson.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CONSISTENT ACCESS TO MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Jacobson: Mr. Speaker, today I'd like to bring up a problem that we've been having in our community of Tuktoyaktuk since February of this year. Our x-ray machine has been broken down. The residents have to fly to Inuvik to get an x-ray done, and that's not acceptable in this day and age. We have to get a timeline on when that machine will be brought back to town. I'll have questions for the Minister at the appropriate time.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Jacobson. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Mr. Bromley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the family of the late Jim Peterson, who are in attendance today. I appreciated the remarks this morning. Welcome to the Peterson family.

Mr. Menicoche: I'd like to recognize Candy Brown from Fort Simpson.

Mr. Beaulieu: I'd like to recognize a long-term Housing employee, Mr. Jim White, of Yellowknife Housing Authority.

Hon. Bob McLeod: I am pleased to recognize the family of Jim Peterson: his wife, Margaret Peterson; his daughter Amanda, Jim's son Chad and also close friends Jack Levesque, Sandy Osborne and Don Santos. Thank you.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize an aboriginal filmmaker who made it in the world in the film business: my brother Raymond Yakeleya.

Mr. Speaker: If we've missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to the House. Hope you are enjoying the proceedings. Item 6, acknowledgements. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 162-16(2) YELLOWKNIFE RENTAL HOUSING MARKET (RULED OUT OF ORDER)

Ms. Bisaro: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to follow up on my Member's statement with some questions for the Minister of Justice.

Considering the very tight rental market in Yellowknife at the moment and considering the rent increases that many of my constituents are facing, can the Minister advise if the proposed

amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act will address the issue of limiting rent increases?

Mr. Speaker: I am going to rule that question out of order. That is on the order paper for today as legislation.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

QUESTION 163-16(2)
AVAILABILITY OF AFFORDABLE
HOUSING FOR TEACHERS

Mr. Beaulieu: Mr. Speaker, earlier in my Member's statement I spoke of the serious issue of lack of housing for teachers, and I'd like to ask the Minister of ECE some questions.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister advise me if the department has any strategy for providing teachers' housing in smaller non-market communities?

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

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, we realize that housing is a big issue in the Northwest Territories, especially for professional staff that we have in small communities and those most isolated communities. Our department has been working with the communities, with the leadership, with the Housing Corporation. I'd just like to highlight that we've met with district education authorities, the council and also with the superintendent this past couple of weeks in Norman Wells. We did highlight housing as one of the priorities of our discussion, and there have been a couple of options that were brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to say that our department is following up on those options. Follow-up meetings will be undertaken, and I will certainly address that with Members here. Mahsi.

Mr. Beaulieu: Can the Minister advise the House if there is any dialogue that's tied to developers as far as providing private market housing in non-market communities?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Like I said, the ongoing consultation will be between the superintendents, the DEAs and our department. It's all preliminary right now. Certainly the private contractors will play a role. We are working closely with the Housing Corporation as well. They have dialogues with local contractors in the communities. What it comes down to now is forming a partnership with the communities. We are in the process of forming a partnership with both ECE and the Housing Corporation and with the small communities that were faced with housing shortages.

Mr. Beaulieu: Can the Minister advise the House of anything specific that he can mention in the

House about what type of work has occurred between ECE and the Housing Corporation in this area?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: I appreciate the Member's questioning of this area. We have had a dialogue with the Housing Corporation and our department, and we are coming up with options. We are doing some pilot projects in one of the communities where there is a loan guarantee from the Housing Corporation on to the contractor in the community to build units. That's an area that we are focusing on, as well as an immediate plan. For long-term plans we are coming up with options to consider from the superintendents, the DEA chairs. Certainly those will be taken into consideration to deal with the housing shortages in the Northwest Territories for all 33 communities.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Final supplementary, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Beaulieu: Mahsi cho, Mr. Speaker. Could the Minister commit to a continued dialogue with the DEAs on housing teachers and report back to the House within six months so that we can get an update on any progress on housing for teachers?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: This is an important topic. It's one of the priorities of the Northwest Territories, so certainly, yes, I will commit to keeping the Members informed of the progress we're making.

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

QUESTION 164-16(2)
CONSISTENT ACCESS TO
MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Jacobson: Mr. Speaker, in my Member's statement I asked the Minister of Health about my x-ray machine in the community of Tuk, if she could look into the problem and get back to me early next week and let me know how much longer this will affect my community.

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Health, Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: I'd like to thank the Member for bringing that matter to my attention. I had a chance to meet with him and the mayor of Tuk this morning for breakfast, and that issue was brought up too. I am in the process of finding out details on that, and I'm hoping that I can have answers for him by the end of today.

Mr. Speaker: Supplementary question, Mr. Jacobson? Okay. Mr. Hawkins.

QUESTION 165-16(2)
FUEL PRICES IN THE NWT

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As everyone who owns a house or a car knows, fuel prices seem to continually go up and down, and

there's no stability. Many people are familiar with the issue of last product in, first product out, so that's sort of the pricing principle. As many people know, especially here in Yellowknife, when the ice bridge went out, no new product was trucked in to Yellowknife — I can tell you that — but the prices fluctuate. Based on that sort of pricing model, it seems completely unreasonable that fuel prices were going up and down.

I wrote the Minister of Finance about some pricing regulations and possibilities. There are other provinces across Canada, five to be exact, that regulate to some degree fuel prices, and that's motor fuels as well as home-heating fuels.

Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister of Finance is: will he look into this issue to see if we can create some type of stability here for the Northwest Territories, sort of something to take the volatility out of the ups and downs of the fuel pricing?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the area of fuel prices in the Northwest Territories is impacting across the territory, especially in our more remote communities.

The factor of the free market plays a significant role in the larger communities, where private businesses bring the product in and sell it to consumers. We've looked at other jurisdictions where they've had what would be considered moderate as a potential price control.

The fact is that when you look at the other pieces of legislation out there, it's not very clear, and it's not necessarily price control. There may be a delayed impact, but there's still an impact of that. When you do a price comparison across the country, there are still a number of other jurisdictions that are in the neighbourhood of beginning to pay the price that we've seen, at least in this community. We have to remember that in our smaller communities, we even pay a higher price as well.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to say that the Minister is completely wrong, but I just don't believe him.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that a PUB type of system will help protect and stabilize prices. Five out of our ten provinces in Canada can't be completely wrong by finding an approach to balance this out. It would still allow that industry to raise prices, yet it would put the onus on them to bring a mild amount of justification.

So, Mr. Speaker, with all of that said, would the Minister of Finance reconsider his position in the context of providing a stable, protected environment for our consumers in the Northwest Territories?

Hon. Floyd Roland: We are open to looking at ways where we can mitigate the impact of the cost of living in the Northwest Territories. What we do and the impact of what we do is something we have to look at.

The research we've done to date shows, in some of these cases, if you set up a structure that starts limiting the free market capability, we end up putting other pressure on ourselves. Jurisdictions have found that if you tighten up the market so much and regulate it as a government, you reduce that free market capability, and they go out and sell their product in other places where they do make their money and then put an additional squeeze on our own constituents. So we have to take that in consideration.

We would be willing to look at it under the refocusing or the cost-of-living scenarios that we have to look at as a government.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, that's the approach I'm looking for, so I will say that, hopefully, this will be my last question. Is that a commitment that they will include that into that process, or is that sort of, "We'll think about it"?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, we'll be willing to look at it. Within the cost-of-living strategic initiatives there are a whole number of areas, and we definitely have to look at how we impact the lives of people in the Northwest Territories.

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

QUESTION 166-16(2)
INCLUSION IN
BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Mrs. Groenewegen: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Premier has now pretty well heard consistently from most of the Members of this House that there's some unhappiness over here about the consultation and the communication since the 16th Assembly took office. Now, I don't want to say that this is a universal problem. I mean, certainly some Cabinet Ministers we've been working with have been doing a great job. They get back to us. They communicate.

But how we communicate and work together as Cabinet and committees and in that structured, formal framework that we work within... Collectively, there has been something lacking here. So I hope that the Premier is starting to get that message and won't deny it.

Example: Maximizing Opportunities, Managing This Land, Reducing the Cost of Living and Refocusing Government. Why can those committees, chaired by different Cabinet Ministers, not include, as has been requested, representation from Regular Members on this side of the House?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of Cabinet committees that are established that look at budgetary issues, legislation, policy. There is no joint committee process. There are a number of areas we've worked with; for example, Members on the climate change piece have put that together. There has been the Mackenzie Gas Project joint committee. So those things we can be looking at to salvage.

There are some areas where, as we're getting underway with the new way of doing our budgeting process, those strategic initiatives fit at this time. I've said to Members already that once we have that up and going, we'll be sitting down with Members on a more regular basis at some point to go through the items before they become even a draft main document. But that will take commitment from Members to agree to sit down and have those discussions and meetings about timing and how we go through those initiatives.

Mrs. Groenewegen: There has been a lot of emphasis put on changing the way we do business. The reason why I referenced those four committees is because they are strategic initiative committees that are supposed to take the strategic priorities of this government that we collectively agreed upon. These were formed after that to try and bring focus to the various Cabinet committees. We don't want to sit on every Cabinet committee, but some we have requested, and we have met with no favourable response, no agreement. It is an interesting dynamic.

When I was in my Member's statement referring to the fact that maybe Cabinet is a contradiction in consensus government, the Premier seemed to have a bit of a scoffing reaction to that. I suggested committees of oversight, like they have at municipal councils. Tell me why that would be such a foreign thought.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Committees of oversight do exist. The Standing Committees on Social Programs, Economic Development and Infrastructure and of Priorities and Planning are looking at what the government is doing and keeping us accountable. Let's also remember the fact that it wasn't that long ago in the history of the Government of the Northwest Territories when Ministers of this government went down to Ottawa and sat at those tables. In fact, we didn't sit at the tables; we sat in the hallway. Let's be realistic. If we're going to talk about being a grand municipal council instead of a territorial government, we'll get even less attention at the national table. So when we talk about credibility of this government and the views of this government, we have to keep that in mind and how we structure ourselves.

I believe there needs to be a process established over the life of this government to make some changes in the future of government operations, and maybe one of them is actually calling into question consensus government. I've said that I'm consensus to the core in how we do business, and I tried to operate in that. Although there have been a few Members who've said they've been walking in the blind with what our plans are, I would dispute that fact, and I can show and I'm prepared to get the times we've sat down with committees. We've put initiatives on the table, we've waited for response, and we've made some changes — the same process we've used in the past. I want to incorporate and get more dialogue between committees through these initiatives. I'm looking forward to that piece of it.

Mrs. Groenewegen: The Premier refers to getting a seat at those FPT tables. I would like to suggest that all that money that is spent to take Ministers, deputy ministers, officials down to all those FPT meetings, which they run up and down the country going to, is of limited benefit to this government. We've got huge problems and issues that we have to work out right here at home. Maybe Ministers would have more time to pay attention to what's going on in the Northwest Territories if they weren't running off to every city in the country, getting together with FPT Ministers. I would suggest that they are of limited value. You can read the communiqué that comes out at the end. You could probably just bring it home, and that would be good enough.

We are all equally elected Members of this Assembly. When we get here, we expect to have effective and meaningful input. I would like to refute the Premier's insinuation that any offer that's been made to this side of the House has not been fully received and accepted and participated in. The prime example for me is....

Mr. Speaker: Do you have a question, Mrs. Groenewegen?

Mrs. Groenewegen: Yes. I'd like to ask the Premier: going forward, what areas or avenues does he see available to him to set the example as the Premier of this government to provide more opportunity for a government of inclusion?

Hon. Floyd Roland: The fact is that we are trying to go down that path. I've offered to Members a different approach to take to the budgeting exercise. As I said yesterday, I was told to get the budget done; be ready for May–June. We've done that. I've said to Members that would put us back into the same old way of doing business as the Government of the Northwest Territories. We're in that, and that process has not changed. I would like to see a change going forward. As I proposed to Members, when we do these strategic initiative committees, the lead chairs and deputies would be

going to committee on a more regular basis to help get their information for proposals as we begin to draft it.

The typical process would be that letters go out to the departments in June. Departments start doing that exercise. Members see the draft of this plan in September. Then they make remarks, and we make some adjustments. We want to change that process.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Third supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If the Premier didn't have time to put together a budget that was going to be palatable, that was going to be reasonable, then we should have gone with the status quo. What we've ended up with is something not very acceptable. I know we asked for a compressed process. We expected better than this. We didn't get it.

Would the Premier agree to return to an interim status quo budget until such time as we can come together and not take these very, very drastic measures that are proposed in this budget?

Hon. Floyd Roland: No.

Mr. Speaker: Oral questions. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

QUESTION 167-16(2)
DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Premier, and it gets back to my Member's statement talking about the Deh Cho Bridge project. We're all well aware that the project is moving ahead and going forward. During the past four years I've probably asked close to a hundred questions on the Deh Cho Bridge project itself, trying to get a better understanding of what the government was doing and why it was doing it.

On February 8 I asked a number of written questions to the Premier in regard to what level of detailed information the government and Department of Transportation had at their disposal in order to sign the concession agreement on September 28. I just wanted to mention that a response to a written question that was tabled in the House yesterday is missing a response to question 2. The government admits to basically not having any updated cost-benefit analyses prior to signing the \$165 million deal. As I said earlier, that is just absurd.

I know the Premier is committed to doing a post-mortem on the accountability to try to find out exactly why this happened and how it happened, how public funds were put at risk. I'd like to ask the Premier where he is at in this post-mortem on this bridge.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm working with the Department of Executive, pulling all the dates, times and all of the process that unfolded, looking at our legislation, looking at the process and looking at how we can tighten it up. That work is ongoing. I'll have to get an update here within days, and I can get back to the Member as to when we hope to bring on our responses forward to committee. The work is ongoing.

We have to be clear on this. We're also trying to relook at history here. There were all kinds of meetings, as we tabled in this House back to Members, about meetings, times, events. If you want to relive that again, the dreams about bridges, the fact is that the Government of the Northwest Territories... If we held ourselves to the same measures that some Members are trying to hold government to on one project, we would have to close three-quarters of our communities and move them into Yellowknife or maybe move Yellowknife or the Northwest Territories into a small community in Alberta or B.C.

When we talk about the message we're trying to send to Canada and the fact that we need investment in the Northwest Territories in stuff like hydro development, in stuff like the Mackenzie Valley Highway — when we talk about the cost per capita, they could easily come back to us and say it's not cost-effective to invest in the Northwest Territories. But they do, because we are part of Canada, and they recognize that difference. We've got to start doing that same thing in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Ramsay: I don't dispute the fact that we should be doing some of that fine work that the Premier talks about, but we should have a foundation of information in order to base our decisions.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier pretty much a point-blank question: how could any government sign a \$165 million concession agreement three days prior to an election, with a five-year-old piece of cost-benefit analysis work being their only instrument that they have at their disposal? How could that happen? How is that good government, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, like I'm telling the people of Canada, the federal government and the Prime Minister, the Mackenzie Valley Highway is of national interest. It will help us economically, and it will help us develop the territory. That project is in a similar fashion; it's not only one piece that you make your decision on.

Where's the vision? We need to ask ourselves: where's the vision for the Northwest Territories? Do we want to stay with a "hat-in-hand" mentality,

going to Ottawa saying: Give us more; give us more? Or instead: Give us the tools, and we can build the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Ramsay: The Premier has a good point there: we need to come up with a vision; we need to engage the stakeholders here in the Northwest Territories. In this project the stakeholders weren't engaged. They were engaged in 2002 and 2003. The government has yet to prove to residents in the North Slave region that the cost of living will not go up as a result of this bridge being built. Where's that evidence, Mr. Speaker? I'd like to ask the Premier that question. Thank you.

Hon. Floyd Roland: I think that question has been answered a number of times — of course, not to the satisfaction of the Member. I think all you have to do right now is drive through some of the business parking lots and look at all the tractor-trailer units parked in their parking lots, because they had to stock up for the closing of the ice crossing. Let's ask the businesses that.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Final supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, that's the problem: they didn't go back out and they didn't ask the businesses. They asked them in 2002 and in 2003. They didn't go back out, prior to signing that concession agreement on September 28, and talk to the stakeholders in the North Slave region.

I would like to ask the Premier: what is the timeline for coming back with this look into exactly what happened, so the residents of the Northwest Territories can finally get a better picture of how exactly the government put \$165 million at risk? Thank you.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I told the Member in an earlier question already today, earlier in this line of questioning, that I would be going back to the Executive to get the timeline and come back to the Member. I'm prepared to do that.

But let's be realistic here. We're talking about an investment in the Northwest Territories. The Member sees it as risk. I think we're making investments in the Northwest Territories for the betterment of the Northwest Territories, for the long-term credibility and development of the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

QUESTION 168-16(2)
NWT HOUSING CORPORATION
APPEAL PROCESS

Mr. Menicoche: I would like to ask the Minister responsible for the NWT Housing Corporation some questions, most particularly on the appeal system.

Also, I would just like to thank him for coming to the Nahendeh riding. We did visit a few communities there, and we look forward to a return visit.

The continued concern that I get on a daily basis when I travel in my communities is basically appealing decisions by the housing corporation board. They are wanting to follow up on issues. I'm finding that an appeals system — and it's something that I've been pursuing for some time now — if it were in place, would address a lot of these concerns from constituents and concerned citizens.

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

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to commit publicly that as the Minister responsible for the Housing Corp., we'd like to continue to conclude our trip, which was interrupted. I'll commit to that.

The issue of the appeal process, as well, the Member has raised before, and it's a good one. It's one the Housing Corporation has put on their work list, and we are looking forward to being able to come back to committee, and to this Assembly, in the fall. We've indicated, as well, to the Member that we'd like to be able to look at processes that are already there that we could either pattern ourselves after, such as the Student Financial Assistance appeals or the Income Support appeals process. We recognize that the Member has raised a very good point, and it would give another avenue for due process for clients.

Mr. Menicoche: Quite often it's simple things that constituents are appealing to the Housing Corporation and the managers, but once that manager makes a decision, he's not going to change his mind. So they're coming to me, as their MLA, to say, "There's a glitch here in the system. I've been asking about this renovation," or "It needs repairs." Often it's simple things, and having an outlet for constituents to address those concerns is very important.

I'd just like to ask the Minister, Mr. Speaker, what type of appeal system does he foresee being implemented?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated, we're going to look closely at the appeal system that is now there for Income Support — there's another one for Student Financial Assistance — and we're going to do a jurisdictional check as well. The intent is not to try to recreate the wheel or reinvent the wheel, so we're going to take the best from the systems that are there. We'll be sharing that work with the Members and the committees.

Mr. Menicoche: Once again if the Minister can let me know, and let the House know: how soon will

they begin this work, and when can they implement such a system?

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, as we conclude this budget process and as we move forward, that item has already been identified. As the business is laid out and the work is laid out for the coming year, that's one of the items we intend to be able to bring back in the fall, with a clear outline of what's being recommended.

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

Mr. Menicoche: Will the process include any public consultations? Mahsi.

Hon. Michael Miltenberger: Mr. Speaker, the intent will be to come up with what's being recommended, walk it through, give the committee and the Members a chance to look at it, and in due course, subsequent to that, of course, we'll be looking to respond to the committee's feedback. As we move forward, that type of communication and consultation process will be built in.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Abernethy.

QUESTION 169-16(2)
FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR
ABORIGINAL HEALTH CARE

Mr. Abernethy: My question today is to the Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, and it is related to my Member's statement yesterday concerning federal responsibility for Indian and Inuit health care costs.

The federal government has limited growth on their portion of the Indian and Inuit health care at around 2 per cent. Real growth in health care is around 7 per cent or more. As a result, the GNWT is falling further behind. The feds owe our health system more money to support our health care system — around \$95 million to date.

So my questions are: what is Health and Social Services doing to collect these outstanding dollars? What is the status of any negotiations that are going on between the department and the federal government? How long can we wait, or expect, or.... How long is it going to take before we develop some sort of funding model to flow a larger portion of funds to us so that we're not relying on the 2 per cent?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Ms. Lee.

Hon. Sandy Lee: Mr. Speaker, I can advise the Member that this definitely is an issue that is on top of our agenda, not only for myself, as the Minister, but for the Cabinet as a whole. The Premier has brought this issue up in all of his meetings with the Prime Minister and the Minister of DIAND. I am working on meeting with the Minister of Health, the

Hon. Clement, as soon as we can arrange a meeting to speak about this in person. I also need to clarify that the issue here is about a gap between the funding that we get from the federal government for our aboriginal peoples, but it's really not an outstanding bill where it's about just collecting it. It's a disagreement, and it's a dispute. It's a gap, because the federal government placed a cap. They put a cap on it, and we need to renegotiate that.

So I think it's really important for the Members to know that we need to renegotiate it. It's not a matter of sending an invoice and collecting the money and actions that we need to do that. There's a lot more complexity to this, and we have been spending lots of energy on it.

Mr. Abernethy: I do understand that it is a gap. I understand that right now their increased costs are based on around 2 per cent, and we know that the real costs of health care are increasing about 7 per cent or more a year. I understand that.

The gap is real. You need to find a way to renegotiate that cap that they have placed on you. So I'm once again going to ask: what kind of timeline are you working on to develop or increase that cap, or negotiate an increase to the cap, so that we can stop losing money that they clearly owe us?

Hon. Sandy Lee: From our point of view, our timeline is as soon as possible, but obviously, there are lots of parties involved. Not only is it the federal government, but all the other governments that fall under this agreement. It is an agreement that we need to open up and renegotiate. We have asked for that negotiation to happen. We have not heard back yet.

So timeline.... We will work on that as much as possible, because it is a crucial issue. We are looking at all options available to the government, to see what additional pressure and stress we could put on this so we could come to a resolution. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

QUESTION 170-16(2)
SOURCE OF
GOVERNMENT FISCAL STRATEGY

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance and the Premier. Again, because of communications or lack of same, our public has been left trying to sort of work by Braille, if you will, to figure out on what basis this government has made projections that put us into deficit a couple years or three years into our term here. This has obviously cost the public and non-government organizations, volunteer groups, a lot of resources as they try and solve this mystery.

Will the Premier commit to immediately providing the public, who are our partners and our clients, with full information that clarifies the basis on which these projections were made, and provide the sources of the information? I know the government has chosen to flip back and forth to suit their needs between the Main Estimates and the Main Estimates as revised, so I'd like that to be clear and provided immediately to the public, so that they can give us the feedback we need and are responsible to bring to this House.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, we have provided, in tabling the documents.... It's the first time we've tabled this set of documents so that they're available for public review. The Budget Address, as well, has a lot of information on the stats and where we've come from. It's not a myth out there. We've had to build on.... Based on our assumptions and knowing that our formula financing going forward is fixed — there's little adjustment to that, and our growth of expenditures is there — we're going to run into problems. So we have to take action now, before we end up in a situation where all our flexibility is gone.

During good times we should be planning and making sure we don't end up in bad times. So we've had to take the steps to limit our growth or manage our growth, which means there are some changes, and reinvest some of those dollars into priority areas. We've got lots of information here that's available to the public. If there's specific questions, as we go through each department, more detail will be made available through Members' questions to Ministers and their deputies and senior staff here. That is available to the public as well.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge I've had some remarks from the Premier. I also acknowledge that there's tons of information out there — big thick documents. Certainly the Budget Address I find very murky. It basically talked about the top 6 or 8 per cent of the budget. I'm asking the Premier: will he provide the public with exactly the information on which the projections were based — the graph and the sources of it, the tables that show the decline in revenue and the sources of the decline in revenue and so on, the exact basis? In science, conclusions are not acknowledged until they're duplicable. To this date there is no duplicability, if you will — oh my gosh, the Hansard...

Laughter.

Mr. Bromley: ...to this projection. So I ask the same question again.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, as we have in past, as governments have practised, part of the Budget Address is a document on the future, the

fiscal forecasting, the fiscal strategy that's been put in place. In fact, the fiscal strategy is outlined in the document that was tabled, part of the address that's available to the public. In the back section under B-3, it shows in the graphs that if we don't make any changes, that's where we would end up. Those are based on the information we have available right now through our formula financing, with our agreement with the federal government, our own-source revenues, and estimates are made.

We also have to mention that science says we come from monkeys.

Mr. Bromley: I have to say, going back to some of the remarks I've heard from the Minister and the Premier.... I don't, of course, debate the need to live within our means and so on. That's not what this is about. This is about clarity and communication.

The public has gone to hire economists from afar to try and make sense of this murkiness, and it's still not clear. Somehow there seems to be a gap between the Premier's understanding of the situation and the public's. Will the Premier address this gap and make it plain?

Hon. Floyd Roland: If the Member is talking about the Parkland report, that's one thing — hired by the unions in the Northwest Territories to look at our numbers, come up with their assumptions and present those, in a sense, to question where we've come from as a government. I disputed those numbers. As the Member stated, we can both — the government and people out there — look at numbers, put them on a scale and say things are actually quite good.

Talk about the surplus. The surplus is a planned surplus so we can fund our capital programs. I've been saying that for years and I continue to say it. We need that surplus to help us with our capital programs. That surplus comes from O&M expenditures we spend on an annual basis.

So if there are avenues to put more clarity out there, that's one thing. I believe, for example, it started — and I think it's a good process — with Members having a pre-budget consultation process. We are taking that advice in our work, as well, and I think that's another avenue we can use in doing that. We've got lots of information here now that's available. We've got all the detail in here now that they can have a look at. Once they have specific questions on those areas, we'll try to address them.

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

QUESTION 171-16(2)
STATUS OF AKLAVIK
COMMUNITY ACCESS ROAD

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, with regard to my Member's statement regarding the access road to Aklavik, I moved a motion in this House, and it was passed unanimously. Yet nowhere to be seen is there even any reference to the road to Aklavik.

I see that the access road to Tuk has been approved. I'm looking at a budget of \$12 million. Yet, Mr. Speaker, a necessity to communities is gravel. When this government spends \$2 million to move gravel from Inuvik to Aklavik by barge, there's insanity to that. I think it's important that this government realizes that we are dealing with threats by way of global warming, floods and whatnot in a community in which the gravel source is ten kilometres from the community.

This government has spent money in the past for access road funding, which was an application-based program for \$50,000 a year. This government knows about the specific requests. So I'm asking the Minister a question. This government is going to be getting some \$275 million from the federal government by way of the Building Canada Fund, strategic infrastructure investment fund, but nowhere are the small communities even hinted at by way of these projects.

There's a list that has been sent to Ottawa. I'd like to ask the Minister or the Premier: how can communities get added to this list, knowing that the government has already submitted a list to the federal government for these particular projects? Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Minister of Transportation, Mr. Yakeleya.

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since 1995–1996 and 2004–2005, this department has been working with the community of Aklavik on the ATV community access road project. In 2001 the community of Aklavik requested that the department relook at the ATV trail and convert it into an all-weather road to the source that Mr. Krutko made reference to, at Willow River.

This department has been listening to the community of Aklavik and the communities down the Mackenzie Valley. We have spent \$309,000 on this access road now that's been determined.

We are committed to building partnerships with industry at the level of government, such as mentioned yesterday by the Finance Minister, and some of the partnerships are going under the Building Canada Fund.

We are very much interested in going back into Aklavik, relooking at the request, and sitting down with the community. The Member and I had some discussions on when we could get into Aklavik and

have a community discussion in terms of what can we do to look at their needs. We also need to talk with the community in terms of their gravel sources, as to who does this. We've stated that they're now responsible for such projects as gravel sources. It will be coming up in our discussions with my officials. We are prepared to go in to the Member's riding.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, the Minister was nowhere even close to answering my question. My question was: what does the community have to do to get on the list of projects that are going to be funded through the federal government, through the Building Canada Fund, the strategic initiative investment fund?

Nowhere on this list do I see any communities that are not in Ministers' ridings, for one thing.

Interjections.

Mr. Krutko: I'd like to ask the Minister: what do you have to do to get on the list that we've been sending to the federal government? We don't have input from this side of the House?

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mr. Speaker, we have to go through a process. The other projects have gone through a process.

The community of Aklavik is again asking for an issue that.... This project in Aklavik is something that we have to look at very seriously. We have to do some engineering; we have to do some studies. We do it every year, as we go through our lists.

The project we identified is somewhere in the Building Canada Fund, in terms of our research and development initiatives, but we have to do some work there.

So we are continuing to work with the community of Aklavik, going forward on a yearly basis. We'll have to have some more discussions with the community and the Member. And from there, we will take it as to what are the priorities of the Government of the Northwest Territories, in terms of investments in our infrastructures.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I will try to make it as simple as I can. There was a list submitted to the federal government on projects from this government. We as Ordinary Members have not had an opportunity to put items on that list, but yet, through the strategic committees that are set up on the other side, they had that discussion internally. There was a list sent to Ottawa in regard to projects they wanted to see, on that side of the House, but nowhere on that list is reference to a project that I would like to see on it.

I'd like to ask the Minister: when will the Members on this side of the House have an opportunity to put on that list projects that have been in the books going back to 1991? All we are doing is talking

about this project. When are we going to really see the reality of something happening here?

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Mr. Speaker, let's be very clear. We had the list, which we put together. We met with the committees. We've talked about the review on a yearly basis. We'll come back again to have some further discussions.

I have mentioned to the Member that under research and development and the Building Canada Fund — the portion that we will take from the funding there — we will look at the Aklavik gravel source and other projects. We have to look at investment right down the Mackenzie Valley for people in the Beaufort-Delta or the Gwich'in area.

The department has invested heavily into the Member's riding. The Aklavik gravel source is up there, and he's been talking to me. It's going to be something that I'll have further discussions on with him and the community members when we provide another list that is scheduled to be submitted to the federal government.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Final short supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Again, Mr. Speaker, I've been hearing too little too long. I know that if you don't get a project on the budget process, you'll never see the light of day.

So I'd like to ask the Minister: knowing that it is not on this particular budget this time around, can we see it in the next year's budget, to ensure that we actually see some activity done on the project, which has been around this table since 1991?

Hon. Norman Yakeleya: Again I say to the Members, through our research and development fund and the Building Canada Fund, we will look at the gravel source request from Aklavik in terms of an all-weather road.

We'll do a cost-benefit analysis. We'll look across the Northwest Territories and see if it makes any sense to put money where we think it's needed in terms of our infrastructure, or new infrastructure. Some of the communities don't even have roads into the community. Some of them have other requests. We've got to look at them and prioritize them and see that they fit within our goals of connecting communities.

When we continue reviewing the list that we have, we'll see if it fits the criteria in terms of future funding. For now, we'll continue working with the Member on this issue.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Frame Lake, Ms. Bisaro.

QUESTION 172-16(2)
RENT INCREASES IN
CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE

Ms. Bisaro: I may be older but you're obviously wiser, so I will try this again.

Laughter.

Ms. Bisaro: Considering the very tight rental market in Yellowknife at the moment and considering the rent increases that constituents are facing, I would like to ask the Minister whether or not there is anything in current legislation that limits the amount of a rent increase by a landlord.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Minister responsible for Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.... Or Justice, I guess.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. The rent has been an issue in the community. The community has addressed that with us, and we have met with the committees as well. There have been some requests that came in, so certainly, that is one of the areas that we are looking at.

With the current legislation we are working with, there are areas that we're looking at where rents increase once per year, but they've got to be given three months' notice. Those are in discussion, and we're working with our department on this specific area.

We are doing what we can to deal with those rent increases in the communities, specifically on those communities that have high rent. Mahsi.

Ms. Bisaro: I thank the Minister for his answer. I know that there is nothing in the current legislation that can limit a rent increase, except that there can only be one in any 12-month period.

I'd like to know whether or not the Minister can advise if the department, in previous years, has ever considered rent caps.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, a rent cap has been talked about in the past government, but at the same time, it is costly to initiate that process. So it has been talked about, but the department hasn't pursued it because of high costs for our jurisdiction, the Northwest Territories. Mahsi.

Ms. Bisaro: That was, unfortunately, the answer I expected. I know that rent caps are a very controversial issue. The landlords don't like them; tenants do like them. But it also creates a diversion in the marketplace, and I can understand why they're not currently in place.

However, to my suggestion of an ombudsman, I think there needs to be some sort of appeal for tenants. I'd like to know if the Justice Department has considered creating an ombudsman's office to

hear appeals from residents where no other avenue of appeal exists. Thank you.

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: We do take suggestions into consideration from Members. That's one area that's been brought to our attention in the past. And certainly, we will work with it, the suggestion that's brought forward.

There needs to be ongoing consultation with the community, the renters, the tenants, and rental officers, and with our department and with the Members as well. This is one of the issues that's been addressed to us, and we're discussing it within our department. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Ms. Bisaro.

Ms. Bisaro: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't think I heard the Minister say that he'll consider the idea of an ombudsman's office, so I'll repeat the question. Will the Minister agree to look into establishing an ombudsman's office for the next fiscal year?

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: We'll look into those options. Mahsi.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

QUESTION 173-16(2)
POTENTIALLY AFFECTED
PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES

Mr. Hawkins: The number of layoffs concerns myself, as well as a number of people in this House. Furthermore, it certainly has hit the radar of the union out there, with approximately 135 potential layoffs coming out there. I want to seek some clarity as we go forward in this process as to what's happening, so I'll have some questions directed to the Premier.

The Premier has announced 135 layoffs. As I understand it, some people have left, due to separation, in the context that they've taken other jobs. There's been some further paring down as other people have taken other opportunities. I want to know today: what's the actual number we're dealing with, as in potential layoffs? Could the Premier provide clarity on actual numbers that could be at risk at this time? Thank you.

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

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I'll have to redirect this to the Minister of Human Resources. He would have the most up-to-date information on this file. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government of the Northwest Territories presently has 4,753 full-time indeterminate employees and

1,051 casual employees. At this moment, we have 118 potentially affected employees. Thank you.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, of the 118 potential employees being laid off, what is the Human Resources Minister doing to make sure that number gets pared down even further before this final decision? My fear is we'll pass the budget, and then they'll be shown the door.

Just for clarity, are we working out any deal with these folks? Have we pared it down? Have any packages been prepared? What is the situation, so that we get that number as low as possible? Thank you.

Hon. Bob McLeod: The Department of Human Resources and the home department of these 118 potentially affected employees, which is less than 2 per cent of the whole Government of the Northwest Territories' workforce.... We work very closely with the potentially affected employees under our Staff Retention policy. And I emphasize "staff retention," because it is our objective to keep as many of these potentially affected employees on the workforce.

Departmental HR staff and departmental management meet with those potentially affected employees that request a meeting. We work with them to make sure they understand the process and the options that are available to them. Thank you.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, in all due respect, I don't see it as 2 per cent. I see it as 118 families, and that's the way I see it.

My issue really is, out of this 118 that we're talking about, how many are up for potential reassignment in other positions? That's what I want to know. Ultimately, I want to know — and I would hope other Members on this side of the House want to know — how many people are we really talking about that will be ultimately impacted, once this process is jiggled out and finalized?

Hon. Bob McLeod: It's difficult to determine, because we have to take into consideration the individual needs or preferences of potentially affected employees.

We have set in place.... Through the Staff Retention policy, we make all the competitions that are coming forward available and known to the potentially affected employees.

We have received at least 50 résumés. The remainder, I assume, are waiting to see what transpires through the budget process. Our expectation is that potentially affected employees will probably have a better option. We are certainly encouraging our managers of the different departments to actively review the list on the Staff Retention policy so that we can, hopefully, find placements.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know there will continue to be a number of empty positions out there. My issue is: are we trying to make sure that those 118 people will be provided not just the first opportunity but the real opportunity, in the context of "We've got empty positions — can we get them into those?" to make sure they can have some stable transition?

The issue, furthermore, goes beyond that. We have a number of these people potentially affected, the 118 people, who could go off to retirement. I want to make sure today; I want to hear about those types of numbers and situations. Are we working with them to make sure they can retire, meet their superannuation requirements, so that the impact ultimately boils down even smaller? I want to make sure we're getting to that. That's the impact I'm talking about.

Hon. Bob McLeod: We've had the opportunity to meet with the 118 potentially affected employees. Through the Staff Retention policy there are a number of options. One is education assistance, separation assistance or severance priority.

With regard to early retirement or potential retirement, that is, I guess, a decision that would have to be requested by the potentially affected employee. We're prepared to look into that, and we're waiting for direction from the Members as well.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The time for question period has expired. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to go back to item 7, please.

Mr. Speaker: The Member is seeking unanimous consent to return to item 7, oral questions. Are there any nays?

An Honourable Member: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: We have a nay. Item 8, written questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Beaulieu.

Written Questions

QUESTION 12-16(2) TU NEDHE RESIDENTS SUFFERING FROM RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES

Mr. Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This written question is for the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can the Minister of Health and Social Services provide me with statistics on the number of people in Tu Nedhe, specifically Fort Resolution and Lutselk'e, who are suffering from asthma and other lung diseases that can be affected by dust?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to the opening address. Item 11, replies to the Budget Address, day 2 of 7. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Mrs. Groenewegen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to seek unanimous consent to go back to item 7, oral questions.

Mr. Speaker: The Member is seeking unanimous consent to return to item 7, oral questions.

Unanimous consent granted.

The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

Oral Questions (Reversion)

QUESTION 174-16(2) INCLUSION IN BUDGET DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Mr. Krutko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is directed to the Premier. In light of consensus government motions that have passed unanimously in this House, and also items and issues that Members raised in committees and in the process that we have to have inclusion of all Members of this House when a budget's being developed....

In light of what we see here, I'd like to ask the Premier exactly how he sees motions being passed in this Legislative Assembly about matters which are brought before a Minister to deal with an item which is critical to their constituents — to be able to work with all Members of this House, to be able to develop something that's universal for all communities in the Northwest Territories and not just a few.

I'd like to ask the Minister exactly how seriously his Cabinet takes motions passed in this Legislative Assembly on matters that are basically unanimously supported by Members in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Premier, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Motions that are passed in this House unanimously, or obviously any motions in this House, are paid attention to as we do our review. Those that are specifically directed at departments, when they start their business plan process, are taken into consideration. We also have to look at the long list of backlogged capital items or O&M requests that we've not been able to fund, and that gets part of the discussion embedded as we prepare for that. I think in this situation there's been a commitment to move with one of those projects the Member spoke specifically about: a motion moved for the Aklavik and Tuk access roads.

As well, the Minister of Transportation has committed through the Building Canada Fund portion on development and review — research, I believe — to take some of those funds and do the work that's needed for the department to see if this project can move along the track of going through this process.

I must also say the Building Canada Fund.... The list the Member talks about has been shared with committee, shared with the federal government, but is still under review by the federal government. It's not our final list. We have to keep that in mind.

Mr. Krutko: As we know, this government has just restructured itself to have ministerial committees look at the different initiatives that the government wants to move on. Yet there seems to be a missing link there by way of inclusion of Members on this side of the House. I'd like to ask the Premier.... I know it's been suggested or recommended to find a system and that we try to get unanimous endorsement of those initiatives by all Members of the House before we submit anything to the federal government. Is the Premier open to revisiting that and finding the system that works for all 19 Members of the Legislative Assembly?

Hon. Floyd Roland: I think the scientists are still looking for the missing link. The fact is, as we progress in our work, there is a process established. We are at one level in the sense of the first filter. Then we go to committee and put that on the table, and we react to the recommendations. There have been times when we've changed what we've presented based on committee recommendations and information. We'll continue to do that.

This process, this Building Canada Fund, worked out of a number of other initiatives, and we're still trying to get the final piece of that in place. Again we're being told by the federal government that we can't bank on that piece until we get the funding agreement signed. It's the first year of seven years. So this other project, as committed to by the Minister of Transportation through the research and development portion of that Building Canada Fund, will be looking at that access road, and it can work its way through our business plan process.

Mr. Krutko: We as the 16th Assembly have set a list of priorities that we'd like to achieve. There seems to be some misinterpretation of how we see it as Ordinary Members. When you talk about building capacity or trying to reduce the cost of living, I think people have different opinions on it. I think it's appropriate that all Members have a choice to voice their opinions. When we look at these projects, where we have access to some \$270 million of federal funds, where we can really make a difference to the Northwest Territories, it's awfully hard for Members to try to illustrate what we mean by reducing the cost of living in communities.

Every one of us lives in different types of communities. We all have unique ideas that I think have to be looked at.

I'd like to ask the Minister that before we take that next step of looking at the business planning process going forward or whatnot, we have a system in place, have a caucus or have a meeting, so that we really explain what we meant as Members of the 16th Assembly in setting our priorities and going forward. Will the Premier consider that in light of the problem we seem to have today?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, as I have committed to, as we begin our normal business planning process, that input, that back and forth is going to happen. It needs to happen as we proceed. We'll present that, hear back, and go back and forth on that as we get back into our normal cycle. Not a first-year budget after an election. We're ready to sit down on that basis.

As well, I've sat down with the Ministers to say that we need to get the committees on these initiatives. When the Building Canada Fund package was brought forward, recommendations were made. We looked at some of those changes, and we reacted to some of those as well.

We're ready to sit down and go through that and make some changes, but as we all know around this table, even sitting together as 19 Members, rarely do we get 19 Members agreeing with everything. That's something we also have to take into consideration.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Final supplementary, Mr. Krutko.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, in regard to our priorities and where we all come from, being here for 13 years, I think we have to improve our consultation, our dialogue, realizing that we all represent people in the Northwest Territories, regardless of where we're from or what role we play. It's important, as government, that we find ways to improve that.

The reason that I raised the issue with regard to our priorities is, you know, when you talk about safer communities, for me the basic thing for communities is they want to have policing and nursing and things like that and ensure they have security. When we talk about chipsealing a highway to make communities safer, I find a problem with that. We have to ensure that those priorities are really what we mean when we set our priorities.

Again, is there a chance that we'll have to illustrate our priorities, but also make sure that maybe we have a better definition of how those priorities were set and what we really meant? Can the Premier consider looking at exactly how these reasons have come about and also at what we mean, or define what we mean?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, when we prepare our business plans and go to committees to get responses back — recommendations, input on how it's being put together — in the end, when we sit down, Ministers, specifically, will have to explain the priorities and the criteria set. We're continuing down that road in the sense of making sure they're prepared and have the information and justification as to what happened.

The example the Member has used on chipsealing Highway No. 5, that's not part of the Building Canada Fund; that's a different fund that's been in place for quite a number of years and was also in partnership with the federal government.

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

QUESTION 175-16(2)
DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, I listened quite closely to the Premier's Budget Address yesterday and questioned him a little bit earlier today on the Deh Cho Bridge project. I'm wondering, and I think the public is wondering, as well, why the single largest piece of public infrastructure built here in the Northwest Territories didn't get one iota of a mention in his Budget Address. Perhaps the Premier can offer an explanation to me and to the public on why that omission was made.

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

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, with all the questioning and answering on the process for quite a number of years, I thought the members of the public had had enough. The project is in place, construction is happening, trucks are moving, loaders are working, and people are being paid to go to work.

There is also the amount of the discussion we had, as was made by Member Bromley, that the Budget Address.... I guess I could have been here for a lot longer going into much more detail about all the specifics. The fact is, when you take O&M and our capital expenditures, it's almost \$1.3 billion of expenditures. We didn't talk about near enough of it, and that's where we'll be able to discuss that. That's where it didn't get mentioned.

Mr. Ramsay: Mr. Speaker, in the Budget Address there was no shortage of small announcements — \$100,000 here, \$200,000 there. So you would think on a project the size of the Deh Cho Bridge project that \$165 million, committing the government for the next 35 years to expenses, and a bridge that supposedly — and I have yet to be proven wrong — is going to increase the cost of living.... The government says it's going to decrease the cost of living here in the North Slave region, but I beg to

differ. I find it very strange that the government would leave a project the size of the Deh Cho Bridge out of this year's Budget Address. There's no question there, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps the Premier would like to comment on that.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I'll work with the Member on the next Budget Address. Oh, wait. I won't be doing another. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Roland. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

QUESTION 176-16(2)
BUDGET ADDRESS 2008

Mr. Bromley: Just briefly on the clarity and so on of the budget, I'd like to just get some clarity. The Minister says that the GNWT intends to realign \$135 million in expenditures. For clarification, does that mean cut, or is he realigning it some other way? Maybe disappearing it or something.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I think if we just did an example from Mains to Mains, or even Revised Mains to Mains, we'd see that from Mains to Mains of '07-08, as a practice of budgetary process, we're growing by 5.5 per cent, if you take out the one-time bump-ups for trucks that have been put in place and so on. So when we're talking about realignment, there's going to be a portion that we need to cap, or manage our growth of government. So there will be some reduction — Members are talking about reductions in different levels of programs — and an impact on some of our employees. But we want to reinvest money in the Northwest Territories, as well, and that's where we've come up with the \$75 million figure of reinvesting that in the Northwest Territories in key priority areas that departments will have to be accountable for and show that they've made an investment, not just throwing more dollars into existing programs that are sometimes questionable.

Mr. Bromley: I acknowledge that I'm really dense on this stuff, but let me just read the sentence again: The GNWT intends to realign \$135 million in expenditures with \$75 million to be reallocated to those spending priorities. What is the difference between "realign" and "reallocate?"

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, as we put this plan in place, we looked at a \$135 million overall reduction. Seventy-five million dollars of that would need to be reinvested in our priorities. As we put this plan together, it clearly shows we've not met our targets, and in the fact the budget still grows. So it's pretty hard to put it into the reduction scenarios that the unions have been talking about, and that's our initial language as well. We're having to manage our growth and find some dollars from in

the system to reinvest. Of course, those who are affected in the delivery of those programs, as well as receiving those programs, see that as a direct reduction. It's a matter of our language, I guess. We could have talked about the target of a \$135 million reduction and out of that, \$75 million looking for reinvestment.

Mr. Bromley: That would certainly be clear language and understandable, which would be a refreshing change here. Just one more clarification. On B-5 there's a graph in the Budget Address, and it lists components of change, strategic initiatives and other initiatives that I think total \$72 million according to the paragraph under "Expenditures" on the same page. What's the difference here between strategic initiatives and other initiatives, and are those outlined somewhere that's accessible?

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I know the Ministers will be available for all the detailed questions Members may have in each department of those initiatives that are affected. In this part, as the government has prepared the budget — as I stated earlier, I believe it was yesterday — in the budget process when we talked about the normal business planning cycle, letters go out to departments in June and August and capital gets added. That is all put together and presented to Members in September for review and reporting back, and then Cabinet takes that back and makes some changes. We present a budget in February or March. That's a typical year process. So some of this work — the other initiatives — was in fact beginning to be looked at and talked about by previous Assemblies, and we've looked at that work and they aligned with our priorities. But the strategic initiatives are the ones that flow out of the work that we did starting this government.

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

QUESTION 177-16(2)
BUDGET ADDRESS 2008

Mrs. Groenewegen: I wasn't planning to ask any more questions, but after the Finance Minister offered to let Mr. Ramsay help him write his next Budget Address, for one minute I thought he was serious. I thought I had seen a little evidence of something called working together. I believed him, and then he said, of course, "Oh yeah, I won't be the Finance Minister next time."

I don't know who the Premier and Finance Minister hired to write his speech this year, but we seem to be having some trouble with the language in it. We're having a little difficulty understanding it. As Mr. Bromley said, maybe we're just dense on this side of the House. But in the interest of clarity, we have the budget paper, economic review, fiscal review. Would it be possible to add to that? In the interests of people understanding why we are

making these reductions, if we could include a fiscal forecast in this, that would lay that out for the next several years.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, I believe that would be good advice. We talk about it as Members. We shared that, our fiscal strategy, the years of projections, what goes into our projections and using our relationships. For example, our first year of budgeting comes from numbers we know we had from the federal government. We build on that with estimates. So yes, I can't see why we can't put that in place.

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

QUESTION 178-16(2)
POTENTIALLY AFFECTED
PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Human Resources. In light of the budget cuts and positions and whatnot, you have individuals who are making less than \$30,000 cut through this process. For people living in communities, with \$30,000 you're struggling as it is. Then to take whatever little seasonal job they have away and save \$30,000, it will probably cost you \$30,000 just to deal with the processing of this person.

I'd like to ask the Minister: have you looked at seasonal positions and looked at alternatives for those seasonal positions, where you're only looking at saving \$30,000, and can you reinstate it knowing that it's not going to have a major difference in regard to the reduction for the savings this government is going to have? If anything, it will probably cost you more. So have you looked at those individuals who are in the area of \$30,000 and exactly what that is going to prove by way of these budget cuts?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. The honourable Minister of Human Resources, Mr. McLeod.

Hon. Bob McLeod: I know that seasonal workers are very important to the communities. Just to be very clear, maybe the Member could clarify what types of positions he is talking about. Is he talking about firefighters? Is he talking about highway workers?

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I'm talking about the marine equipment maintainer assistant's position in Fort McPherson for the Abraham Francis Ferry on the Peel River. This individual has been with the organization almost 30 years. He's making \$30,000 a year as his main source of income. He has a large family. Yet as a government, we're trying to

say we don't need you anymore; you've been with us for 30 years, but maybe it's time to go. Yet we think we're going to save \$30,000. I think if anything we should be giving this individual a medal for hanging in there as long as he has and maybe trying to let him know we're going to give him a pension or something before we kick him out the door. So I'd like to ask the Minister — that's the position I'm talking about — is there any way that position can be reinstated?

Hon. Bob McLeod: As I talked about earlier, we do have the Staff Retention Program. The Department of Human Resources will work very closely with the department responsible for marine operations to work with the affected employee with the objective of retaining him and finding him a similar position somewhere in the Northwest Territories.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to know: as the so-called seasonal positions are being cut, are those individuals eligible for a pension from this government for services which are seasonal?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Employees that are seasonal-indeterminate obtain benefits on the same basis as any other indeterminate employee.

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

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, the importance of marine operations, especially in my riding where we depend on two ferry services, and also the number of individuals we see having to be hired from southern Canada because we cannot find those individuals.... Has the Minister looked at the possibility of training and whatnot for these individuals? We're short of engineers; we're short of captains; we're short of people. Yet in order to fill those positions, we have to hire in some cases from overseas.

I'd like to ask the Minister: have you looked at the possibility — I know there's money in the budget for training for those particular positions — of whether that individual could be offered an opportunity to train for one of those positions?

Hon. Bob McLeod: Originally I grew up in Fort Providence, and I know that a number of people have been trained to work on marine operations. So I'm sure similar arrangements for training opportunities could be made available in the Member's constituency. I know the department has identified \$100,000 that they're making available for marine training. Perhaps we can work together so that this individual could take advantage of that.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Bromley.

QUESTION 179-16(2)
POLICY TO ADDRESS
LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to follow up on my Member's statement this morning about using local resources to meet some of our basic needs. I'd like to talk about food. As everybody knows, food costs are rising rapidly around the world, and the Northwest Territories is no different. The quality of food is declining and the availability of food is going down as the impacts of climate change and other factors are felt. Our soils are less productive and so on. I think the public really expects a new approach in dealing with these sorts of things, and I think there are lots of opportunities for win-win approaches and responsible solutions.

What new and comprehensive programs are identified in this budget to promote local production of food? That's to whoever is appropriate.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. Premier Roland.

Hon. Floyd Roland: Mr. Speaker, the area of agriculture, I believe, falls under the Hon. Bob McLeod, so I'd redirect that.

Hon. Bob McLeod: As the Member indicates, having been born and raised in the Northwest Territories, I do know that producing your own food is certainly one way of reducing the costs. At one time every family that lived in the community had their own garden plot, and this is something the department has attempted to encourage. We do have a program where we assist communities to develop their own gardens and to start growing their own food, and we assist them to do so.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, that's certainly a project that I'm aware of. It's pretty modest; it's not taken up very well. I've been working with the community of Fort Providence myself indirectly through non-government organizations on these issues. Every community is full of people that require food, so we need a comprehensive, well-thought-out, well-laid-out program across the Northwest Territories that encourages this. There are challenges in different areas, but there are huge opportunities just the same.

Once again I'm asking what new comprehensive programs are being put in place with this budget to address the need for local food production that will also address many of our problems in the North.

Hon. Bob McLeod: We are in the process of negotiating an agrifood agreement with the federal government. Once that is concluded, then we will be able to communicate what we've been successful in negotiating to the communities. Production of food is certainly something we want to encourage and to see continuing to grow.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, again I'm talking local here. It would be great to see the federal government involved, but I'm talking the Northwest Territories communities; I'm talking about our own people. We need to be doing this ourselves. We need to provide the leadership. We have small communities; these are not huge bunches of people out there. We have demonstrated productivity of our land back in the '60s and '50s and '40s.

Will the Minister and Cabinet commit to putting together comprehensive plans to meet our basic needs like the food situation? Let's start with this Minister and food.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Speaker, what the Member raises is certainly an objective that we've been working to achieve, and we are talking about our own people in our own communities. As the budget indicated yesterday, there are a number of strategic initiative committees. I think the Managing This Land Strategic Initiative will be looking at the whole area of agriculture, and we would look at identifying dollars that are available for investment with agriculture. If the committee comes out that it's a priority — and I certainly think it is — then we'll be doing more in this area.

Mr. Bromley: Mr. Speaker, I hear a tendency to think as if this is a complex situation and so on, and big agriculture.... I'm sure there is a role for agriculture here, and we obviously need to support it a lot more. But there are a lot of local situations that could be addressed without that.

You know, we're pouring huge subsidies into our communities because of these situations.

Will the Minister also commit to looking into requiring some service from the people that we're subsidizing and that are able to take advantage? In other words, we cannot continue to support rising costs. Why not start requiring some service that actually enhances skills and capabilities and allows people to develop the potential for pursuing their own economic development? Again, a new approach is needed.

Hon. Bob McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure if the Member is talking about workfare or something where people who are on income support should be put to work. But there have been a number of different programs over the years, and I guess we'd have to check to see whether they're still in existence. I recall IRAP, for example, where you would get money to do projects, but you could only hire people that were on income assistance to do the work. But certainly I think that any program where we can help people acquire new skills, I'd be supportive. I'd certainly be willing to look at it.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of standing and special committees. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

Reports of Standing and Special Committees

COMMITTEE REPORT 2-16(2) REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE REPORT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL ON THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES HOUSING CORPORATION PUBLIC HOUSING AND HOMEOWNERSHIP PROGRAMS

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Great Slave, that the Report on the Review of the Report of the Auditor General of Canada on the NWT Housing Corporation Public Housing and Homeownership Programs be deemed read and printed in Hansard in its entirety.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. The motion is on the floor. The motion's in order.

Motion carried; Committee Report 2-16(2) received and deemed read.

The Standing Committee on Government Operations held its public review on the Report of the Auditor General on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation's Public Housing and Homeownership Programs on March 4 and 5, 2008. The committee would like to thank the Auditor General, Ms. Sheila Fraser, and her staff for their excellent work in preparing the report and in assisting the committee with its review. We would also like to thank the President of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, Mr. Jeff Polakoff, and his staff for appearing before committee.

General Comments

The Standing Committee on Government Operations is a new committee of the 16th Legislative Assembly. Its mandate includes the examination of the annual financial statements and public accounts of the Government of the Northwest Territories and the reports of the Auditor General. The committee firmly believes that public accountability is the foundation of good governance.

The performance audit on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation was requested by Motion 17-15(4) of the 15th Legislative Assembly and adopted on March 2, 2006. The committee shares the concerns expressed in the motion on whether the NWT Housing Corporation is making the most effective use of its resources to address the need for adequate, accessible and affordable housing and whether the quality and relevance of the business plans, Main Estimates and other documents put before the Legislative Assembly and its committees are adequate and appropriate.

The performance audit of the Housing Corporation covered the period between 2005 and 2007. The

Auditor General's report was tabled during the second session of the 16th Legislative Assembly on February 15, 2008. The auditors reviewed how the NWT Housing Corporation manages its public housing and homeownership programs, and how it conducts its planning and reporting.

The public review with the Auditor General and the President of the Housing Corporation provided opportunities for further exploration of the issues and shortcomings identified by the auditors. It is the intent of committee to ensure that the recommendations of the report are addressed and that measurable improvements to the housing programs are initiated. Ultimately the Housing Corporation needs to deliver on its mandate of reducing the number of NWT households in core need of housing assistance and report on its progress toward this goal.

The report makes 11 recommendations addressing three major areas of concern:

- the management of the public housing program;
- the management of the homeownership program; and
- the planning and reporting conducted by the NWT Housing Corporation.

The management of the Housing Corporation agreed to all of the audit recommendations. This is a positive first step towards improving the corporation's program and operational management. However, the committee found some of the management responses to the recommendations too broad and vague. The committee was also disappointed with the lack of additional detail provided by the president of the corporation during the public review.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Minister table a detailed action plan no later than October 2008 outlining how the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation will address the recommendations of the audit report.

Furthermore, the Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that this plan outline the following details:

- specific measures for actions addressing each recommendation;
- an explanation of what each of the specific actions addresses;
- progress measure for each action;
- timelines for each action or measure; and

- organizational responsibility and accountability assigned to each specific action.

The committee recognizes that some of the Housing Corporation's challenges stem from the past and have accumulated over time. The committee also acknowledges that the Housing Corporation has put considerable effort into its draft Framework for Action 2008–2011. However, the document does not sufficiently address the recommendations of the Auditor General. While the President of the Housing Corporation committed to a strategic plan, priority setting and more details within the Framework for Action, Members remain concerned about the corporation's intent and willingness to implement details for specific measures recommended by the Auditor General.

During the public review with the Auditor General and the president of the corporation, Members emphasized that the draft framework is very ambitious but requires further details that prioritize the actions and initiatives identified. In the current environment of fiscal restraint it is evident that not all actions can be undertaken simultaneously, so prioritizing the initiatives is of utmost importance. Committee agrees with the president of the corporation that the Framework for Action should serve as a roadmap for the Housing Corporation as well as an accountability document to the public and stakeholders. Therefore, the information needs to be clear with real goals that are tangible, achievable and measurable.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the NWT Housing Corporation prioritize its Framework for Action to specifically address the audit report recommendations while focusing on its primary mandate: reducing the number of NWT households in core need of housing assistance.

The committee acknowledges that it will take a certain amount of time before measures show progress and the final goals are achieved, particularly in some of the more challenging areas like rent and mortgage collection. The committee understands that the Housing Corporation has already increased communication with, and operational support for, the Local Housing Organizations (LHOs) and district offices. The committee was also pleased to see that the corporation has policies and procedures in place to guide the allocation and operation of its programs.

However, the committee is concerned that the greatest shortcomings identified in the audit were related to insufficient monitoring, analysis and follow-up to ensure established policies and procedures are actually being followed. There is also some history within the corporation of not acting on findings identified through internal

auditing, past reports of the Auditor General and concerns expressed by stakeholders.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Minister provide periodic updates on the progress of the implementation of the actions through status reports to the appropriate standing committee.

Public housing program management

The public housing program is mostly delivered through the 23 community-based LHOs. However, the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation retains the ultimate responsibility for the management of these programs, ensuring that they are delivered fairly and efficiently.

The auditors acknowledged that the corporation, district offices and LHOs have policies and procedures in place. Some LHOs are applying these guidelines consistently, while others do not always follow existing policy and procedures.

The Auditor General identified adequate monitoring of LHOs as a main issue. As the corporation has given most of the operational responsibility for public housing to the LHOs, it is up to the Housing Corporation to ensure that policies and procedures are followed. More rigorous monitoring, analysis and independent spot-checks are needed to ensure the information that the corporation receives is accurate and that LHOs conduct business as they should. For example, non-compliance with the point rating system may lead to public housing being delayed, denied or allocated without justification and documentation.

Members agree with the Auditor General's concern that there is no appeal process in place allowing clients who believe they were treated unfairly to raise their issues. During the deliberations with the President of the Housing Corporation, the committee was pleased to learn that an appeal process is under development and is presently being discussed with stakeholders, and that the corporation anticipates introducing this appeal mechanism in 2009.

The audit findings also reveal incidents of non-compliance with the annual inspection requirements and inaccuracies in annual condition ratings. These shortcomings may affect the quality of the public housing stock as well as future maintenance and budget requirements. Adequate maintenance of public housing units is crucial for the protection of the GNWT investment in public housing. Regular inspections and maintenance also ensure that public housing continues to be available to households in core need.

The efficiency of the operation is essential for the sustainability of public housing in the communities. The committee does not believe it is acceptable for

LHOs to accumulate deficits as a result of low rental collection rates and to finance deficits through the deferral of maintenance and repairs.

In order to reverse this negative trend, it is crucial the Housing Corporation monitor and provide practical hands-on support to the LHOs. The committee agrees with the audit recommendation that this support should be based on the needs of each community and should continue until sufficient capacity has been built. The committee was pleased to hear that the president recognized this need for support as an essential management responsibility of the corporation, and not as a shortcoming of the LHOs.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that in order to deliver the public housing programs in a fair and equitable manner and to sustain the programs over time in a cost-effective way, the corporation monitor the district offices and LHOs in order to ensure that policies are implemented, rent is collected and operational and financial controls are in place.

The committee further recommends that specific measure for monitoring and support be tailored to the LHOs' needs, based on risk assessments of their compliance with existing policies, procedures, rent collection and financial management, with the level of practical support, supervision, frequency and detail of these monitoring activities being tailored accordingly; and furthermore, that the Housing Corporation report on these activities, targets and progress in their action plan and periodic status reports.

Homeownership programs management

Homeownership programs are delivered through the five district offices. The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation retains the management responsibility and therefore has the obligation to ensure that programs are delivered fairly and equitably, within the economic means of the organization while contributing to the objective of reducing the number of households in core need. Similar to the public housing programs, the corporation has policies and procedures that guide the allocation of homeownership assistance.

The audit findings show that the district offices are not sufficiently monitored for compliance with policies and procedures when allocating homeownership assistance. The committee was disheartened to learn that uncollectible mortgage rates climbed to 88 per cent in 2007, meaning that of the total \$16.5 million in outstanding mortgages, \$14.6 million would not be paid. Of further concern was the fact that an unknown number of uncollectible mortgages are for houses without land tenure. The corporation needs to identify and address these issues in its strategic plan and

measure its progress against targets in its periodic updates and annual reports.

As part of its overall management responsibility for the delivery of the housing programs, the Housing Corporation needs to provide operational support to district offices and LHOs where required.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that in order to deliver the homeownership programs in a fair and equitable fashion and within economic means, the Housing Corporation monitor the district offices to ensure policies are implemented and mortgages are collected.

The committee also recommends that a program evaluation of homeownership programs be carried out to verify how much existing programs contribute towards the goal of self-reliance and the reduction of households with core housing needs; and further, that such program evaluation be on-going, timely and measureable against specific targets.

Planning and reporting

The auditors found that the NWT Housing Corporation had not completed its strategic plan for meeting the housing needs of Northwest Territories residents. The committee discussed the importance of a strategic plan with the President of the Housing Corporation, stressing that all elements of NWT housing programs need to be included in this document. The goals of the corporation need to be clearly defined with measurable outcomes and linked to the corporation's mandate and programs.

The lack of risk assessment and risk management was also discussed during the public review with the President of the Housing Corporation. The audit findings acknowledge that while the corporation identified some risks in its business plan, there was no indication of how these risks would be addressed or mitigated. Members were also concerned that other risks like decreasing rent and mortgage collection rates were not addressed with adequate details that would allow monitoring of progress over time.

Another risk with potentially significant financial impact for the corporation is the declining Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) funding. The committee recognizes that the Minister is addressing the need for federal support at a political level with his federal, provincial and territorial counterparts. As the CMHC funding sunsets in 2038, the GNWT still needs to plan for taking on the fiscal responsibility for the public housing stock, should these political initiatives not materialize into new federal dollars.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Housing Corporation include a risk management component in its strategic plan that:

- identifies and analyzes the risks for the NWT Housing Corporation;
- plans for specific actions with details addressing the identified risk;
- includes measure to report on the success of the action plan; and
- evaluates how the risks are mitigated in a timely fashion.

The audit findings also detail that the corporation needs to improve its performance measurement and reporting. During the public review, Members repeatedly pointed out that performance indicators should include targets,

outputs and outcomes allowing for progress to be examined over longer periods of time. Targets and indicators used in different documents, like the business plan, the Framework for Action and the strategic plan, need to be linked, allowing for reporting consistency, comparison and true progress measurement periodically and over time.

Recognizing that the Housing Corporation relies on the NWT Community Survey and Census Canada for data on households in core need, the committee agrees with the recommendation of the Auditor General of Canada that the corporation should include information in its periodic reports on the reduction of households in core need. This could be done by including information on the construction of new housing units and the repair and renovation of existing units followed by a more comprehensive report on the reduction of households in core need based on the community needs assessment once it is completed.

Conclusion

The committee recognizes the challenges the Housing Corporation is facing in meeting the housing needs of NWT residents. Members also acknowledge the commitment of the Local Housing Organizations and district offices to deliver housing programs in the communities. After concluding the public review of the Report of the Auditor General on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation, Members are hopeful that the organization is willing and motivated to address these challenges. The committee trusts that the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Infrastructure will consider the outcomes of this performance audit, public review and committee report when reviewing business plans, legislation and other documents

concerning the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation in the future.

Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the government provide a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

Mr. Speaker: Reports of standing and special committees. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Great Slave, that Committee Report 2-16(2) be received by the Assembly and moved into Committee of the Whole for consideration.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. The motion is on the floor. The motion's in order.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Reports of Standing and Special Committees. The honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to waive Rule 93(4) and that Committee Report 2-16(2) be received by the Assembly and moved into Committee of the Whole today.

Mr. Speaker: The Member is seeking unanimous consent to waive Rule 93(4) and have Committee Report 2-16(2) moved into Committee of the Whole today.

Unanimous consent granted.

Committee Report 2-16(2) referred to Committee of the Whole for consideration today.

Mr. Speaker: The report will be moved into Committee of the Whole for today. Reports of standing and special committees, the honourable Member for Nahendeh, Mr. Menicoche.

COMMITTEE REPORT 3-16(2) REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE 2006-2007 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide a report from the Standing Committee on Government Operations on the 2006-2007 Annual Report from the Official Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories.

The Standing Committee on Government Operations met on April 9, 2008, to review the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner. The committee would like to thank Ms. Shannon Gullberg for appearing before us.

The committee is glad to see that the commission's web site is now operational and information about the complaints process is available in all official

languages. The committee looks forward to seeing the resolution of technical problems, the correction of translation errors and the timely posting of newly released commissioner reports in the near future.

During the 15th Assembly the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight encouraged the commissioner in this report to step up her efforts to publicize her office, particularly by undertaking community visits to meet with stakeholders and to raise public awareness about her role and mandate. The committee was therefore disappointed to hear that the commissioner's plans to visit Rae, Inuvik and Fort Smith in early 2007 to conduct community and school meetings and to visit health centres were not realized. The committee is also concerned that none of the commissioner's \$28,000 travel budget was spent and that the number of inquiries decreased to 11 during the 2006-2007 fiscal year.

Members discussed these concerns with the commissioner, suggesting that the low numbers of inquiries and complaints demonstrate that the public is not well aware of the office and role of the Languages Commissioner. Most inquiries came from Yellowknife and were primarily private sector requests for information. The committee also noted that only one complaint was filed and that the commissioner did not conduct any investigations on her own initiative during the 2006-2007 reporting time frame.

The committee urges the commissioner to become more active in planning community visits to promote her role and office and looks forward to seeing the results of her plans to make community visits and promotion of her office the priority in 2008-2009.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask the committee's deputy chair to continue delivering this report.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, the committee is disappointed that the two reports the commissioner had announced during the review of her last year's annual report had not been received. During the review of the 2006-2007 annual report, the commissioner announced that the report on language services in health care facilities will be tabled during the May-June session of 2008. The commissioner provided no timelines or details relating to her previous announced report on advertising requirements.

As the committee discussed with the commissioner, the responsibility for the promotion of the official languages rests with the Minister. The committee urges the commissioner to exercise her powers and make full use of her mandate, which, as outlined in section 20 of the Official Languages Act, includes ensuring recognition of the rights, status and privileges of each of the official languages in compliance with the spirit and intent of the act in the administration of the affairs of government

institutions in conducting investigations on her own initiative.

In the 2006–2007 annual report, the commissioner makes two recommendations.

Languages Commissioner recommendation 1: That the Legislative Assembly and GNWT adopt uniform policy in regard to the development of web sites, including the languages in which web site materials are available. The committee discussed this recommendation with interest but decided that the further considerations need to include existing government policies addressing visual identity, communication, web site protocols and official languages. Furthermore, cost implications and the availability of resources would need to be taken into account.

Committee recommendation: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT conduct a review on its web site policies and report back on whether the web site policy is in compliance with the official languages policies, guidelines and legislation.

Mr. Speaker, at this time I would like to pass the report over to Mr. Abernethy.

Mr. Abernethy: Language Commissioner recommendation 2: That the government immediately take steps to ensure the appropriate training and certification of interpreters and translators and ensure that there's a registry of interpreters and translators that is available to both the public and private sector.

With the closure of the aboriginal language section of the Language Bureau in the mid-1990s, the GNWT lost capacity in the areas of language standards, terminology development, training and accreditation. The precarious situation of our aboriginal languages combined with the declining numbers of mother-tongue speakers makes the need to actively address the revitalization of the aboriginal languages more urgent.

In recent years the former Language Commissioner and the Special Committee on the Review of the Official Languages Act spoke to the need for capacity building through the development of translation standards as well as training and certification standards for interpreters and translators.

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommended in its "Report on the Review of the 2004–2005 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner" that "the GNWT work with Aurora College to deliver a basic interpreter-translator training program for aboriginal languages as well as specialized training for medical terminology."

In its response to the report, the government indicated that while it generally supported the idea,

it "delegated" the responsibility for action to Aurora College and further made any action dependent on "sufficient demand and program funding." The government's response did not indicate any specific steps towards such an undertaking.

A year later the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight recommended in its "Report on the Review of the 2005–2006 Annual Report of the Language Commissioner" that "the GNWT implement a plan for the training and certification of interpreters and translators."

During the review of the 2006–2007 annual report, the Standing Committee on Government Operations discussed with the commissioner the fact that, despite repeated recommendations by the Languages Commissioner and by standing committees of the Legislative Assembly, the GNWT has not made any progress on training programs and certification of interpreter-translators in aboriginal languages.

During this discussion the committee also encouraged the commissioner to follow up on her recommendations in accordance with her mandate and powers under the act. The committee suggested that the commissioner include a status section on previous recommendations in future annual reports.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask my colleague from Nunakput to continue the report.

Mr. Jacobson: The committee also wishes to point out that the re-establishment of training and certification for aboriginal languages interpreter-translator programs would be an important step towards language terminology standardization, which is a vital aspect of language revitalization.

Committee recommendation: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT implement and plan training and certification of interpreters and translators and establish a registry of interpreters and translators for all official languages.

The Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight tabled its "Report on the Review of 2005–2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner" on March 12, 2007. The report concluded with Motion 58-15(5), requiring the government to table a comprehensive response to the report within 120 days. The government did not table that response.

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the GNWT respond to the Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight's "Report and Review of the 2005–2006 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner" by addressing all recommendations from the commissioner and the committee in its reply to the present report.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the committee chair to conclude the delivery of this report.

Mr. Menicoche: I'd like to thank Members of committee for reading the report.

In conclusion, the Standing Committee on Government Operations encourages the commissioner to make the promotion of her role and office her priority and to exercise her power to make full use of her mandate in accordance with the Official Languages Act to ensure the GNWT complies with the spirit and intent of the act.

Committee recommendation: The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends the GNWT table a comprehensive response to this report within 120 days.

That concludes the report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations on the review of the 2006–2007 Annual Report of the Official Languages Commissioner of the Northwest Territories.

Therefore, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, that Committee Report 3-16(2) be received by the Assembly and moved into Committee of the Whole for consideration.

Motion carried.

Mr. Menicoche: Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to waive Rule 93(4) and that Committee Report 3-16(2) be moved into Committee of the Whole today.

Unanimous consent granted.

Committee Report 3-16(2) referred to Committee of the Whole for consideration today.

Mr. Speaker: Item 14, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 15, tabling of documents. Mr. Lafferty.

Tabling of Documents

Hon. Jackson Lafferty: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following three documents entitled Northwest Territories Coroner's Service 2006 Annual Report, Annual Report on the Activities of the Rental Office, January 1 – December 31, 2007, and 2008 Report of the Northwest Territories Judicial Remuneration Commission.

Document 44-16(2), Northwest Territories Coroner's Service 2006 Annual Report, tabled.

Document 45-16(2), Annual Report on the Activities of the Rental Office, January 1 – December 31, 2007, tabled.

Document 46-16(2), 2008 Report of the NWT Judicial Remuneration Commission, tabled.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Item 16, notices of motion. Item 17, notices of motion for first

reading of bills. Item 18, motions. Item 19, first reading of bills. Item 20, second reading of bills. Item 21, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Bill 4, Bill 7, Committee Report 2-16(2) and Committee Report 3-16(2) with Mr. Krutko in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

BILL 4
MISCELLANEOUS STATUTES
AMENDMENT ACT, 2008

BILL 7
SECURITIES ACT

COMMITTEE REPORT 2-16(2)
REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
REPORT OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL
ON THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
HOUSING CORPORATION PUBLIC
HOUSING AND HOMEOWNERSHIP
PROGRAMS

COMMITTEE REPORT 3-16(2)
REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE
2006–2007 ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE LANGUAGES COMMISSIONER

Chairman (Mr. Krutko): I'd like to call the committee to order.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters. Bill 4, Bill 7, Committee Report 2-16(2), Committee Report 3-16(2). What is the wish of the committee? Mr. Hawkins.

Mr. Hawkins: Mr. Speaker, I move that we report progress.

Motion carried.

Report of Committee of the Whole

The House resumed.

Mr. Speaker: May I have the report of Committee of the Whole, please.

Mr. Krutko: Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 4, Bill 7, Committee Report 2-16(2) and Committee Report 3-16(2) and would like to report progress.

I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Do we have a seconder for the motion? The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Item 23, third reading of bills. Item 24, Orders of the Day, Madam Clerk.

Orders of the Day**Principal Clerk of Committees (Ms. Russell):**

Mr. Speaker, Orders of the Day for Monday, May 26, 2008, 1:30 p.m.

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

Motion 9-16(2): Referral of Main Estimates for 2008-09 to Committee of the Whole

- 19) First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 8: Appropriation Act, 2008-2009
 - Bill 9: Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 4, 2007-2008
- 20) Second Reading of Bills
- 21) Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Bill 4: Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2008
 - Bill 7: Securities Act
 - Committee Report 2-16(2): Report on the Review of the Auditor General on the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation Public Housing and Homeownership Programs
 - Committee Report 3-16(2): Report on the Review of the 2006-2007 Annual Report of the Languages Commissioner
- 22) Report of Committee of the Whole
- 23) Third Reading of Bills
- 24) Orders of the Day

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Madam Clerk. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 26, at 1:30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 12:30 p.m.