



NORTHWEST TERRITORIES LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

5th Session

Day 25

15th Assembly

HANSARD

Monday, February 12, 2007

Pages 777 - 810

The Honourable Paul Delorey, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**Monday, February 12, 2007****Members Present**

Honourable Brendan Bell, Mr. Braden, Honourable Paul Delorey, Mrs. Groenewegen, Honourable Joe Handley, Mr. Hawkins, Honourable David Krutko, Mr. Lafferty, Ms. Lee, Hon. Michael McLeod, Mr. McLeod, Hon. Kevin Menicoche, Mr. Ramsay, Mr. Villeneuve, Mr. Yakeleya

ITEM 1: PRAYER

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Paul Delorey): Good afternoon, colleagues. Orders of the day. Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation, Mr. Handley.

ITEM 2: MINISTERS' STATEMENTS**Minister's Statement 63-15(5): Launch Of New Consolidated Housing Programs**

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce today the launch of Housing Choices, the new program structure for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, Housing Choices is designed as a progressive and flexible program structure that will allow the corporation to be more responsive to the needs of our people and to contribute to this Assembly's goal of promoting self-reliance.

The consolidation of programs, from 14 to four, meets many of the priorities identified by stakeholders during the consultations undertaken on the Housing Corporation's mandate. It also reflects the input and suggestions we received from Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs and individual Members of this Legislative Assembly. I would like to thank all Members for their valuable contribution and support to this effort.

Mr. Speaker, under the new program structure, more people will be able to access programs than previously possible and residents who have previously accessed programs but remain in need can more easily access additional assistance.

Housing Choices offers many benefits to those in need. These benefits include new education and counselling modules designed to promote and enhance responsibility and increase capacity for success. It is important to note the new programs provide a clear path for both prospective and existing homeowners to follow to seek assistance.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to outline the four new programs:

- The Solutions to Educate People Program, STEP, provides participants with education and counselling consisting of four courses to prepare them for the requirements of homeownership;
- The Homeownership Entry Level Program, HELP, provides assistance to prospective first-time homebuyers by providing the opportunity to

experience homeownership commitments before purchasing a home;

- The Contributing Assistance for Repairs and Enhancement Program, CARE, enables existing homeowners to make necessary repairs to their home to ensure a safe and healthy residence and to increase the useful economic life of their home; and
- The Providing Assistance for Territorial Homeownership, PATH, allows clients the opportunity to become homebuyers by assisting with the construction or purchase of a modest home.

Mr. Speaker, while the number of programs offered by the Housing Corporation have been reduced, we have broadened access and expanded the eligibility criteria to increase the number of residents we can support. The delivery of these new programs also recognizes the needs of our seniors and persons with disabilities by having broadened access to programs that meet their needs.

Mr. Speaker, along with the affordable housing initiative, the launch of Housing Choices represents a renewed commitment by government to reduce core housing need and to ensure all residents of the Northwest Territories have access to adequate and affordable housing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, Mr. Krutko.

Minister's Statement 64-15(5): Northwest Territories Power Corporation Safety Record

HON. DAVID KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the excellent safety record that the employees of the Northwest Territories Power Corporation have achieved these past years. As of February 1, 2007, Power Corporation employees have worked over one million hours without a lost time accident.

---Applause

For those of us who may think in years as opposed to hours, this number represents over three years of work.

Mr. Speaker, this safety record would be exceptional in any company. However, when you consider the environment that the Power Corporation employees work in, it is even more noteworthy. The NWT Power Corporation is a fully integrated utility; that is they provide generation, transmission and distribution services to customers over our vast territory. Few utility companies these days still provide this broad scope of service, choosing instead to specialize in generation or

transmission or distribution and they operate in a much easier environment.

Access to the system also represents a safety challenge. Climbing electrical poles to work on connections or remove frost build-up is still very much part of the job of a Power Corporation lineperson. In comparison, many utilities across Canada service power poles and lines on their system with large bucket trucks that raise and lower the line personnel.

Mr. Speaker, this high standard of safe work practice has only been achieved by Power Corporation employees working together, making safety everyone's responsibility, and I am pleased to report that the safe work practices of Power Corporation employees has been recognized by their peers. The Canadian Electricity Association awarded NTPC a Bronze Medal President's Award of Excellence for employee safety to recognize that NTPC's lost time severity rate and all injury/illness frequency rate as being among the lowest of their reporting group.

I would like to personally congratulate the employees of the Power Corporation in achieving over one million hours without a lost time accident and I wish them continued success in the safe delivery of utility service to the residents and businesses in the NWT. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Ministers' statements. The honourable Premier, Mr. Handley.

Minister's Statement 65-15(5): Ministers Absent From The House

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise Members that the Honourable Charles Dent will be absent from the House today and tomorrow to attend the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada meeting in Toronto, Ontario.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I wish to advise Members that the Honourable Floyd Roland will be absent from the House today to attend the memorial service for Mr. Vince Steen in Tuktoyaktuk. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Ministers' statements. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

ITEM 3: MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Member's Statement On Passing Of Mother Laura Lennie

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, last week, my brothers, sisters and family members in the Sahtu and my family members in Tulita, especially for ourselves as a family, were devastated, Mr. Speaker. Our world was turned upside down. Mr. Speaker, from time to time, as Members of the Legislative Assembly, colleagues in this House here, we give statements. We say things about people in our region. We say good things about treatment of the youth, celebration of anniversaries; we say encouraging words to people who are in school. Those are delightful things that we have the opportunity to say on behalf of our people in our region.

Mr. Speaker, some of the hardest things we have to do as politicians, also, is to carry on with our workforce, carry on as our people have chosen us to do by electing us here at the House to represent our region.

Mr. Speaker, last week, my mother, Laura Lennie, decided to leave us early. Death has no appointment, I was told. I had a hard time with many people in my community, myself and my brothers and sisters. When love is gone, it is replaced with grief. I had a lot of wonderful calls and support from my colleagues here. I thank them. People talked to me. My mother was a leader, a strong woman that raised nine of us. I had no electricity or running water. She fought hard for us. I want to say to the people in the Sahtu and people here, thank you very much for supporting us and our families and our support to Vince Steen. People in Fort Simpson lost some families and other family members who are going to go through this experience. Your prayers really do help, and your words...

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Yakeleya, your time for Member's statement has expired. Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

Member's Statement On Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, I want to talk about a very important transportation issue. That issue, Mr. Speaker, is Highway No. 4, also known as the Ingraham Trail. The Ingraham Trail is home to hundreds of year-round residents. It is the access to the community of Detah, summer cottages, lakes, recreational areas, trails, campgrounds and parks. It is also the first 67 kilometres on which, each year, thousands of loads of fuel and other supplies travel to get to the mines located in the North Slave region. As a government, we have spent approximately \$25 million in the past 10 years in upgrades and rehabilitation to Highway No. 4. It is proposed that upwards of \$21.5 million more will be spent in the next few years on improvements. We have also increased our operations and maintenance budget by \$852,000 to address safety issues on our highways. It is interesting to note, Mr. Speaker, that, prior to January, there were three serious accidents on the Ingraham Trail.

Mr. Speaker, after the ice road opened, the amount of gravel was put down to the point where there was quite a noticeable difference between maintenance pre and post ice road season. As a government, I think we need to make sure that public safety is, and remains, a top priority on all of our highways all year long.

What I would like to see from this government is the pursuit, in partnership with aboriginal governments and industry, of the extension of Highway No. 4 north into the Slave Geological Province to open up access to our resources and eventually the Dogrib communities located to the west. This is the logical next step, seeing as we have almost 70 kilometres and millions of dollars invested in a road extending northeast from Yellowknife.

In his budget address the other day, the Finance Minister made mention of the fact that the federal government is responsible for new highway construction in our territory and that, since 1987, not a single kilometre of road construction has been completed in our territory. That is 20 years ago, Mr. Speaker. We need roads. We need

access to our communities and to our resources. We need to push for our transportation infrastructure. We need to get it on the agenda with the federal government. We cannot continue to flounder along as a territory with no lasting benefit from our resource riches. Roads should be a top priority in a lasting legacy as we develop these resources. Mr. Speaker, I will have questions for the Minister of Transportation at the appropriate time. Mahsi.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Monfwi, Mr. Lafferty.

Member's Statement On Artificial Ice Surfaces In Small Isolated Communities

MR. LAFFERTY: (Translation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about what took place two days ago. Right now, the youth YK minor hockey and living in Yellowknife, we don't have one available in Rae. Since we don't have an arena, even though the kids want to play, we don't have that in Rae. They went to Yellowknife and I just want to thank them since they don't have one available for Behchoko. Maybe there might be one in the future, but I might ask the Minister regarding that question. (Translation ends)

Just this past weekend, I have witnessed a mini hockey tournament that occurred over the weekend. It is a minor hockey league, along with invited guests coming out from Behchoko. Behchoko team came out. They were a team selected from many members from Behchoko. At that time, they didn't have a goalie, so they had to borrow a goalie from one of the house leagues here. I must say, it takes courage to come out to play against the Yellowknife team. The Yellowknife team compared to the Behchoko team or other small communities, they are good compared to the isolated communities. I would like to say thank you to the members that came out. I would like to see more of that coming out to Yellowknife or Hay River or Inuvik. We don't have those facilities in our communities. Artificial ice arena, we have been after for a number of years, but eventually we will probably see that. We talk about the bridge across the Mackenzie River. It is too costly. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, bridging the gap between Yellowknife and Behchoko will cost next to nothing compared to the Mackenzie River bridge. What I mean by that is relationship building. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may conclude your statement, Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would just like to conclude my statement by saying we, as a government sitting here, would like to see more of that, members coming out and playing against our house team here. At the same time, we, as a government, need to put the money where it is much needed, in the isolated communities with respect to artificial ice in the communities. Mahsi.

---Applause

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

Member's Statement On Passing Of Respected Northerners

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to just today mention a few people with respect to the passing of some loved and respected northerners. I empathize with Mr. Yakeleya today as he stands in this House to speak of the memory of his mother. It was 10 years ago this week that my Dad passed away while I was a sitting Member of this Legislature. I returned and stood in the House to speak to his memory. It is a difficult thing to do, but Laura Lennie, Norm's mother, was a definitely much beloved woman. I got to know her a little bit when I began to search for my grandmother's council, the matriarchs and the highly respected women in the various regions in the Northwest Territories. Her name was definitely at the top of the list. I got to know her a little more with her work that she did with the NWT seniors and helping seniors and encouraging them. She was a beautiful woman. She was a woman who had extraordinary talents when it came to making things and handicrafts and beadwork. As Norman said, she raised nine children. She, about herself, had a lovingness about her. You would not see her anywhere, at Wal-Mart, downtown, wherever you would run into her when she was in town, which was often because she was very politically involved in the North. I would always get a big hug and a kiss from her when I would see her. That lovingness that she showed is exemplified in her children as well. She did a wonderful job. Today, I just want to offer my condolences to our colleague here at the loss of his dear, dear mother at too early and too young of an age.

Also today, in a few minutes, they will be starting the memorial service for our friend Vince Steen up in Tuktoyaktuk. I had the honour and privilege of serving in this Legislature with Vince Steen. He was a character. He was his own man. He was unusual and he was unique. He was not all that easy to get to know, but I remember after knowing Vince for quite some time, I noticed that he didn't easily share his personal feelings and emotions that well. I found out, after a long time, that Vince had gone off to residential school when he was five years old and did not return until he was 12 years old. Seven years away from his family. That told a big story to me about Vince, but he was a man of great integrity. I always said if I was going to be lost out on the land someplace, I would want Vince there because he knew the land and he knew the ways of it so well. So we offer our condolences to his family and think of them today in Tuktoyaktuk as they remember his life. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

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

Member's Statement On Accuracy Of Caribou Population Estimates

MR. VILLENEUVE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today I would like to use my Member's statement to raise a very important issue that was brought forward at the

Caribou Summit that was held in Inuvik last month. One of these main issues raised at this historical gathering was the reliability of the data on caribou numbers along with the confidence and the methods used to determine herd numbers by our government officials and biologists. Mr. Speaker, I understand that we have a very difficult task ahead to get more definitive numbers on caribou and the numbers of caribou out there and that the resources required to undertake such an initiative are quite large given the limited budget in wildlife management programs in our government. But I feel that, given the importance of this renewable resource to all of the northerners and all levels of our northern society, we have to put more resources and money into this research initiative in the short term to get more reliable data. This has to be done before any restrictions are placed on northern businesses or residents alike. By not doing this, Mr. Speaker, the northern economy has a lot more to lose in the long term by infringing quotas on businesses and residents without the full confidence on how the numbers were derived at and the methods used to gather these numbers. So I would like this government to reassess its priority and also provide more than the \$1 million towards this initiative, which I feel is just simply appalling in comparison to what the caribou have done for northerners and the value of caribou to our northern identity and livelihood. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

Member's Statement On Decisions Regarding The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to talk about caribou and, at the end of January, I undertook, as the MLA representing the Yellowknife constituency of Great Slave, to travel to Inuvik and to learn more about this incredibly valuable resource. The success of this was unprecedented, Mr. Speaker. I know that the event attracted about 150 leaders and stakeholders and experts; far more than was originally envisioned. Mr. Speaker, in the two and a half days of this event, which was very capably and warmly hosted by the people of Inuvik, I got a sense of resolve and a sense of urgency, a sense of commitment collectively to act and a sense of collective responsibility, Mr. Speaker, for the requirement on us to join together. It was said many times in that venue, Mr. Speaker, that we don't have a caribou management problem. We have a people management problem. Therefore, the decisions that we make and the actions we take as individual harvesters and here at this level as a decision and a policy-making body are going to be very significant.

Mr. Speaker, the responsibility of our government to, indeed, act responsibly and effectively on behalf of all stakeholders is very much part of the expectation that came out of this event.

Mr. Speaker, as the significance of this came to me in the media in December and in subsequent weeks, I have made some comments on it. At one point, Mr. Speaker, I said that I thought that our numbers were flimsy and that our information was flimsy and could not be relied on.

Mr. Speaker, in the course of our business here, we learn and I learn that my assessment of flimsy numbers was wrong. I want to apologize to the scientists, experts, and the staff and the people who are engaged in examining our caribou. However, Mr. Speaker, there is something about how we apply this information that is missing. I want to seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may conclude your statement, Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, colleagues. Where our information has integrity and is on the leading edge of science on a best technique, we can rely on it, but, Mr. Speaker, our complete understanding of the environment and the actions of the species of caribou is not complete. Where we have some thorough knowledge in some areas, Mr. Speaker, we do not have collective, thorough and well-connected knowledge. But yet we have to make decisions and it is how we apply this knowledge to our decision-making process is where, Mr. Speaker, we are going to be judged and where we are being judged and, in fact, where some stakeholders are not being well treated and well respected by this government in the consequences that it has caused. I will be asking the Minister responsible, at the appropriate time, more questions about this, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

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

Member's Statement On Beaufort-Delta Education Council Long-Term Service Award Recipients

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we always stress the importance of educating our children. On January 29th, I was honoured to take part in the Beaufort-Delta Education Council's long-term service awards that were held in Inuvik. I was also proud of the fact that we had Ministers Roland, Dent and Krutko join us. It was a good opportunity to honour those that made long-term commitments to the professions and to the North. Mr. Speaker, honoured for 10 years of service -- and these are some constituents of Inuvik -- were: Rosa Kayotuk, Mary Connelly, Donna Maring; 15 years of service, Wayne Allen, Sandra Ipana, Sarah Jerome; 25 years of service was Catherine Ross; and 30 years of service, Mr. Speaker, was Sylvia Musselwhite. A common theme that I hear from a lot of people who decided to make the North their home was that they decided they would come up for one or maybe two years, and they end up staying here for 30, 40 years, the rest of their life. They fall in love with the country or they fall in love with somebody that keeps them here.

Mr. Speaker, I was also proud of the fact that we are seeing more and more aboriginal teachers being honoured for long-term service award.

---Applause

That is a by product of the Teacher Education Program they started a few years ago and now they have expanded that into the Bachelor of Education. I have

three sisters-in-law that have their Bachelor of Education. I have a fourth one that is working on it right now. So I think it is very important that we continue to honour people who have made long-term commitments to the North and start honouring our aboriginal teachers because they will be in the field for a while.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to need to keep educating our children because they are going to have to be the ones that are taught how to divide up the resource revenue sharing money that we are going to get from Ottawa. Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee.

Member's Statement On Taking Steps To Address Family Violence

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to report to you that the Women's Leadership Conference over the weekend was a resounding success, but the topic I would like to speak today about is one overwhelming theme that emerged from the conference which, in one way or another, really underlined and overshadowed the entire event. That has to do with how much the people of the North -- women, children and men -- are suffering from and affected by family violence in all of our communities, big and small.

Mr. Speaker, we know in the North that we have taken a number of measures to address these and prevent them from happening, but whatever we are doing appears simply not enough, Mr. Speaker. We had women endlessly talking, and often crying, about what they are dealing with. Even the entertainment during the Saturday night banquet resulted in an impromptu but powerful singing by Ann Kushuk from Inuvik that speaks about the pain of family abuse. Everyone needed her to sing this song because it is so healing.

Mr. Speaker, we were especially struck by two young women from one of our smallest communities who tearfully told us how they're doing all they can to help a mother of four get away from a very physically and mentally abusive situation she is in as we speak. They have so little resources to help her with. There is no police, there is no shelter, there is no nursing station, and they're helplessly watching. They're discouraged and they're heartbroken watching this woman giving up, so distraught that she has given up asking or taking any help from authorities and social agencies. Her mental and physical health has deteriorated to such a degree that she has no strength or resolve to do anything that would help her in the long run.

Mr. Speaker, I was asked by these women to tell the House that there is still deafening silence in many of our communities and deafening silence from those who are in a much better position to help these women and much more so than any government agencies or law enforcement authorities.

Mr. Speaker, we know there's a lot of people, women and men, who are working on this issue tirelessly in our communities, but we have to ask all our people -- women, men, elders, youth and the community leadership...Mr.

Speaker, may I seek unanimous consent to finish my statement?

MR. SPEAKER: The Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude her statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may conclude your statement, Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Mr. Speaker, we know that we need to have, we have to ask all our people -- women, men, elders, youth, and the community leadership -- to look around and listen to each other. We have to ask everyone. If you know that somebody's being abused by another person, even if that person comes from a good family, we have to speak to him and his family or his leaders. We have to tell them that it is not right to abuse someone or watch someone being abused and stay silent. We have to tell them that we have to do this, otherwise we will suffer, especially our children will suffer in the long run. We need to tell the one that is abusing that there is help if he wants it, that there is a much better way of living this life than this way. We have to ask everybody to do everything they can to help the women who are suffering from violence. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

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

Member's Statement On Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I wanted to talk about health coverage for certain medical conditions and the problems facing northerners without health insurance who cannot afford their course of required treatment.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the differences between what is covered for treatment for children born with cleft palate and one who's born with club foot, you'll get a sense of frustration being experienced by one of my constituents in them trying to get treatment for their child. Either situation is very unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, but if you were born with a cleft palate, you would expect the government to pay the cost of surgeries, any required speech therapy, and any subsequent dental costs or devices related to this diagnosis. If you were born with a club foot, however, Mr. Speaker, the government will pay the cost of surgery and hospital stay and they will start to cover the cost of your cast. However, that's where it ends, Mr. Speaker. They will not pay for the cost for the braces or shoes that are required down the road for that treatment surgery to work.

I have to ask, at what point of being involved is it really worth it, Mr. Speaker, because we should cover this treatment from start to finish. This situation points to the need for the Supplementary Health Benefit Program which, I understand, a review is currently under way, Mr. Speaker, to be addressed and to start to look at the seriousness of conditions being left out, Mr. Speaker. We need to be supportive of all medical treatments that are being left out.

I am probably not painting the picture of the department in the best light on this issue because there are gaps in our system, but I have to admit that the health officials are

trying to work with this family to recover, to fill in those gaps to cover the cost of the situation. For this I'm very grateful and I hope to hear soon of a satisfactory resolution on the family's process.

This Assembly has a vision of self-reliant individuals, families sharing the rewards and responsibilities of a healthy community and a prosperous and unified Northwest Territories. To accomplish this we need a government who needs to help their residents when required support is definitely needed.

Mr. Speaker, we tell our children out there that the world is theirs for the taking, but government policy is holding them back. Mr. Speaker, in closing, we need to put people first before paperwork, Mr. Speaker, especially when it comes to our children. Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Members' statements. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Handley.

Member's Statement On Reflections On Former MLA Mr. Vince Steen

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Mrs. Groenewegen pointed out, as we gather here, people are gathering in Tuk to celebrate Vince Steen's life. I want to take a moment just to reflect on some of the more memorable things that we used to laugh about as ways of getting through some of the pressures here.

When I first knew Vince I thought of him as kind of a gruff, grouchy kind of man. But I soon found out that there was a very compassionate, very kind, very much a man of the people, a very warm, caring individual.

Vince used to come to my office early in the morning and we would sit and sort of assess what happened the day before and what was going to happen the rest of the day. I got to know him very well. He's very much a man of the people. I used to tease him, because I remember in going to his constituency meetings and he would go and sit with his constituents and grill us. Sometimes even grill his own department.

---Laughter

That was his way of saying, okay, I'll represent my people. Even if I am a Minister, I'm not going to let it go by. I remember him once sitting over here and even grilling a Minister in Committee of the Whole.

---Laughter

---Applause

He always had a very practical solution to any complex issue, and he had an incredible ability to be able to get right to the core of an issue. We would discuss things around and around in a circle in Cabinet and Vince, in one statement, would get right to the core; and usually, 99 percent of the time, he's right.

I remember one time the Member from North Slave, or now Monfwi, giving Vince a hard time as Minister of Transportation about the condition of the highway between here and Behchoko and telling him you can't even drive up to the speed limit. "What are you going to

do about it, Minister?" Well, two days later Vince lowered the speed limit.

---Laughter

So, yes, he always got a bit of a trick to him, as well. More than anything else, except Betty and his family, Vince loved Transportation. I remember him being very devastated the day Transportation was taken from his portfolio. He really wanted to make sure that I was going to look after it in a way that he felt about it. I visited him in Tuk several times after he was no longer in politics and you'd see his eyes light up when he talked about opening up the airport after a blizzard or doing things with equipment. He loved being an equipment operator and was a great one.

He loved to play bridge. Whenever he could find a partner, he would come to my house and play bridge with my wife and I and sometimes he'd have a glass of wine. He's very honest and very candid man. He never minced words. I gave him a glass of my homemade wine one day. He looked at me after he took a sip and said, "What animal peed in this?"

---Laughter

That was Vince. He's a formidable bridge opponent and...

MR. SPEAKER: Mr. Handley, your time for Member's statement has expired.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to conclude my statement.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. The Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement. Are there any nays? There are no nays. You may conclude your statement, Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As in this House, Vince knew all the strategies, all the rules in bridge; even had a few tricks of his own. Let me say, Vince, my friend, I know that where you are now, transportation is well looked after and you're in charge and I'm sure that you've even lined up a few bridge games. We miss you here but, more than anything else, we're thankful that we've known you as a friend and a colleague. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Very well expressed, I'm sure, to a number of Members from this House.

Speaker's Ruling

Members, before I proceed to the next item on the Order Paper, I would like to provide a ruling concerning the tabling of unsigned documents in this House.

The House will recall that on Friday, February 9, 2007, the honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre tabled an unsigned, unidentified copy of an e-mail correspondence.

The question of unsigned tabled documents is not addressed in the rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories. However, I refer Members to the 12th Assembly of this Legislature and to a ruling made by Speaker Samuel Gargan on March 27, 1995.

Mr. Gargan undertook a meticulous examination of unsigned tabled documents reviewing rules, precedents and authorities. I quote from his ruling found on page 612 of Hansard, March 27, 1995, which states:

After reviewing parliamentary precedent and rulings from other jurisdictions, I have become clearly aware of the requirements and limitations as to the content for petitions and tabled documents, including the concern as the verification and authenticity of letters and any facts contained therein. It is my ruling that it is not an acceptable practice to table unsigned letters in this House. Therefore, all letters tabled, whether it be by the government or by Ordinary Members, will have to be forthwith directed from a specific individual or organization, dated and signed.

Speaker Gargan also quoted from Beauchesne's, 6th Edition, citation 493, subsection (4), cautioning Members to "exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside of the House and unable to reply."

Speaker Gargan once again ruled on the tabling of unsigned documents on January 28, 1998, during the sitting of the 13th Assembly, and found his former ruling to be "clear and concise with respect to the issue."

I agree with Speaker Gargan on both of these counts and it is, therefore, my ruling that the document tabled in this House on Friday, February 9th, 2007, does not meet the requirements as set out for a tabled document. The document is considered not to be in the acceptable format and should not have been tabled in this House. I direct the Clerk to remove the item from the tabled document list and to amend Hansard to reflect this change. Thank you, Members.

Orders of the day. Returns to oral questions. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Yellowknife South, Mr. Bell.

ITEM 5: RECOGNITION OF VISITORS IN THE GALLERY

HON. BRENDAN BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a number of people that I'd like to recognize today. First of all, I'd like to recognize Jim, Margaret and Amanda Peterson, as well as Gary Jaeb who are in the gallery today. Both the Peterson's and Jaeb's own family-run northern businesses, outfitting businesses, that are so vital to our northern economy.

---Applause

I'd also like to recognize Bob Reid and Carl Chala who were here to make a presentation on behalf of Aboriginal Pipeline Group to our committee at lunch today. Thank you.

---Applause

As well as Yellowknife South Pages Michael Canam and also Lyndon Stanzell from William McDonald School. Lyndon is, if you remember, if the Members recognize the last name it's because his father, Alan, works in Floyd's office. Thank you to those Pages. Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Monfwi, Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to recognize Gary Jaeb, formally out of Behchoko, a well-established northern outfitter within the Monhi Gogha D'e Niit'ee area. Welcome.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Weledeh, Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to have special recognition for Amanda Peterson, resident of Weledeh and Madeline Lake. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Hay River South, Ms. Groenewegen.

MS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to recognize in the visitors' gallery counsellor Kevin Wallington, a very popular counsellor who topped the polls in Hay River. Very popular guy in Hay River, and seemingly very popular in Yellowknife lately; he's over here a lot. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Groenewegen. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Kam Lake, Mr. Ramsay.

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to recognize a constituent, Mr. Gary Jaeb from True North Safaris, a Kam Lake resident. As well, the president of the Barren-Ground Caribou Outfitters Association, Mr. Jim Peterson; his wife, Margaret, and Amanda Peterson, as well. Mahsi.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Villeneuve.

MR. VILLENEUVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to recognize one of my constituents, a mentor, a band counsellor, a good critique of government, my father, Mr. Jim Villeneuve.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to recognize the APG representatives, Bob Reid and Carl. Welcome.

---Applause

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

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, would like to recognize the Peterson family; a former constituent, Amanda, and her mother and father, Jim and Margaret Peterson, who are in the constituency. Jim, of course, is the president of the NWT Barren-Ground Outfitters Association, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. The honourable Member for Mackenzie Delta, Mr. Krutko.

HON. DAVID KRUTKO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to recognize our own CBC reporter Mr. Lee Selleck, who's overseeing the proceedings for the House and keeping an eye on what's going on in the House. Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Recognition of visitors in the gallery. If we've missed anyone in the gallery today, welcome to the House. It's always nice to have an audience observing our proceedings.

Oral questions. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

ITEM 6: ORAL QUESTIONS

Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question today is for the Minister of Transportation, the Honourable Kevin Menicoche. I want to ask the Minister, in terms of transportation issues in the Sahtu region, about the bridges. I want to talk specifically about the bridgework that's up in my region, the Great Bear River Bridge and some of the other bridges that are planned for this year. Can the Minister inform the people of the Sahtu in terms the status of the Great Bear and the other bridges planned to be used in the next couple of months or years? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. The honourable Member responsible for Transportation, Mr. Menicoche.

Return To Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In response to the Member's question, Mr. Speaker, in 2004, the GNWT received \$25.3 million from the Canada strategic infrastructure funding. At that time, the Great Bear Bridge was designed as a 460-metre-long, two-lane bridge along with a 100-metre-wide navigational box to go with it. It was estimated at that time to be around \$15 million, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry; no, it was estimated at \$25 million. The \$25 million was planned for the bridge. Consequently, as we went along and got some cost estimates in last year, the estimates came in at \$40 million. As a result, the project was beyond the scope of our ability to deliver the Great Bear Bridge, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya.

Supplementary To Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker. The Great Bear River Bridge is a vital point in terms of the oil and gas activity in the Sahtu and also the mining that shows a lot of interest in our region. I want to ask the Minister in terms of... Because of the estimate and the actual cost of putting this bridge in is about \$15 million over, is the Minister then considering going back to the federal government, or looking at some of the other bridges that can be put in, in the meantime, in terms of strengthening our highway system, in terms of bringing business into the region? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return To Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Great Bear River Bridge project, yes, because it was taken off our books and de-scoped, we actually had to go back to the federal government because it was a pre-approved program by the federal government at that time. However, we were able to get agreement to reallocate that money to five other bridges/projects: the Big Smith Creek, Little Smith Creek, Bob's Canyon, Blackwater River and Strawberry Creek bridges, Mr. Speaker. Those will be done. It actually expedites the number of bridges that we need for a future all-weather road up the Mackenzie Valley, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya.

Supplementary To Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Transportation had music to my ears: a future all-weather road up the Mackenzie Valley. I want to ask the Minister, in terms of this all-weather road up the Mackenzie Valley, what is the Minister doing, besides the bridgework, in terms of helping the communities in the Sahtu with safety, a better road system? I understand he's talked to other regions about the roads, so we are also in competition for the road. So what is the Minister doing to ensure the people in the Sahtu, with the number of oil and gas activities, the mining, to ensure that they will have a good road system also and not forget our orphan roads in the Sahtu? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return to Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the winter road up in the Sahtu region, just because of the increased exploration over the past few years, we have got agreements with industry over there to help provide for the maintenance and upkeep of the roads. In particular, last year was a good year because we were able to secure extra water trucks with the money that we got. Consequently, the road was very well maintained because the road was actually an ice road last year. This year, because the activity is down, there is not

that much contribution, as a result we were not able to ice the whole road. I'm sure that the Member and his constituents have noticed the difference. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Final supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya.

Supplementary To Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, we did notice a difference. I did; and I thought, last year, I drove on that winter road and I had a cup of coffee and didn't spill one bit. This year, I had to duct tape my coffee pot to the vehicle and coffee was all over the place. I told the Minister I didn't spill a cup of coffee because it was frozen.

I want to ask the Minister, in terms of helping us out in the Sahtu region, will the Minister work with the region in terms of helping put safety measures on this winter road by cutting down some of the steep hills that some of the bridgework won't be able to go? Also, some of the corners, that they could be cut. I ask the Minister, would he commit himself to meet with the regional leadership businesspeople who are working on the winter roads to straighten out these winter roads, and cut down some of the hills? That would help us quite greatly. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return To Question 288-15(5): Sahtu Region Bridge Construction

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I am unaware of that level of detail as to which creeks and which bends are going to be realigned, but I can commit to getting back to the Member on that. Of course, keeping our highways straight and safe is the primary concern of our department, and we will continue to monitor that. Mahsi cho.

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

Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Transportation, and gets back to my Member's statement from earlier and the level of investment that the Government of the Northwest Territories has put into Highway No. 4 over the past 10 years and into the foreseeable future. In my estimation, or calculation, that would come to about \$45 million that the government has and is going to put into the Ingraham Trail. I'd like to ask the Minister of Transportation, what is the government's position on the extension of the Ingraham Trail north into the Slave Geological Province? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Minister responsible for Transportation, Mr. Menicoche.

Return To Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The government's position on Highway No. 4 is

just to upkeep and maintain it, as we do have some residents that live out there. I'm not too sure what the Member is getting at, maybe the strategy out towards the Slave Geological Province. It is a long-term strategy of ours to get to the Slave Geological Province. It is one of the highways that we're looking at as basin opening and it is in a couple of our documents that we presented to the federal government for any new roads that they will eventually have to build for us, Mr. Speaker. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Supplementary To Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you have to ask yourself or oneself, with all the resource development that's taking place in this territory, why is it that since 1987 not one single solitary kilometre of new roadway has been constructed in our territory. I'd like to ask the Minister of Transportation how come, over 20 years, there hasn't been one single kilometre of roadway constructed in this territory, even given the fact that the federal government has taken, just in the five years alone, \$924 million in resource revenue out of this territory? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return to Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member raises a good question and that's why we pointed it out in our budget speech. That's a very good question we should be asking the federal government and the federal Transportation Minister. In fact, I think the last new road, we had to complete it; that was the highway up north towards Wrigley. We were responsible for finishing it off. We continue to press the matter with the federal government every chance that we get. I know the Premier has, I have, and all Members of our government have been doing it on a consistent basis, Mr. Speaker. The infrastructure that the federal government develops in the North will benefit not only us now, but in the future as well. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Supplementary To Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard colleagues of mine in this House just recently talk about connecting an all-weather road into the Dogrib communities, the all-weather road down the Mackenzie Highway, or down the Mackenzie Valley, also the Tuk-Inuvik highway. Highways are a big issue here in the North, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask the Minister, they've come up with the Corridors for Canada I, the Corridors for Canada II, yet we haven't got any substantial new roadwork done or constructed in the Northwest Territories. I'd like to ask the Minister, are there plans of a comprehensive Highway Strategy in the Northwest Territories that can work with aboriginal governments, industry and the federal government to accomplish the goals? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return To Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If I hear the Member correctly he was asking if our government had a comprehensive Highway Strategy. Consistently over the years, we do have a strategy for new roads but that's, again, we continue to press the matter with the federal Transportation ministry as well as our federal government. They are highlighted in many of our documents, Connecting Canada Coast to Coast to Coast, Corridors for Canada I, as the Member mentioned, as well as Corridors for Canada II. Those are long-term strategies. It certainly is all the future roads that we want: the Mackenzie Highway, the Slave Geological Province, the realignment of the Tlicho roads. They are all very important, Mr. Speaker. Especially with the impact of climate change, we do have to realign all our roads, as many of our winter roads are crossing streams and lakes, et cetera. Mahsi cho.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Final supplementary, Mr. Ramsay.

Supplementary To Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the level of investment that the Government of the Northwest Territories made in Highway No. 4, the Ingraham Trail, I would suggest that that highway be given a top priority in terms of any road going north into the Slave Geological Province. I would like to ask the Minister to answer the question whether, in fact, the Ingraham Trail will be given top priority in any future road development north into the Slave Geological Province. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return To Question 289-15(5): Extension Of Highway No. 4 Into The Slave Geological Province

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Member raises a good question. That road is a priority of this government along with many of our roads and infrastructure...

---Applause

...that we must maintain and upkeep, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to upkeep and maintain that road. Mahsi cho.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Monfwi, Mr. Lafferty.

Question 290-15(5): Lack Of RCMP Detachment In Gameti

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker...(Translation) I'm going to talk about, I want to talk about one important issue. There's no RCMP living in Gameti. Sometimes we have tragedy among us. I brought it up numerous times in this House. I'm going to ask questions to the Minister later on. (Translation ends)

I'd like to highlight the RCMP presence in the community of Gameti. I've raised this issue on numerous occasions in this House and also in front of the Social Programs committee and I'm beginning to wonder if we will ever address this concern. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Justice, Mr. Bell, what is the department doing currently to see a possible RCMP detachment in the community of Gameti in the near future? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. The honourable Minister responsible for Justice, Mr. Bell.

Return To Question 290-15(5): Lack Of RCMP Detachment In Gameti

HON. BRENDAN BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the Member and I've been in the community with the Member and talked to the residents of Gameti. The RCMP were in there to talk to them as well. Of course, we're running the pilot project for the second year now during the winter road season to have an RCMP presence on the ground, and I think that's very much been appreciated by the community. But the community, especially the elders, have told us that is not enough, and that in fact they need a full-time RCMP presence in that community. I can tell you that the RCMP agree with them; this government agrees with them and we're working as hard as we can to see a permanent detachment in that community. There are, as Members know, a number of communities without detachments, but we're working systematically to try to reduce the number of communities without detachments and Gameti absolutely, Mr. Speaker, is a priority. Thank you.

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

Supplementary To Question 290-15(5): Lack Of RCMP Detachment In Gameti

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, yes, the pilot project on the winter road last year was very successful and we much appreciate it from the RCMP detachment and the department. We're looking forward to another one during the upcoming weeks of the winter road opening in Gameti. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister, is there any way to speed up the process within the GNWT system and, most importantly, with the federal government to expedite this process?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Mr. Bell.

Further Return To Question 290-15(5): Lack Of RCMP Detachment In Gameti

HON. BRENDAN BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As Members know, it is the federal government that is responsible for the capital money, the capital allocation to build detachments. I have spoken to the federal Justice Minister about this. He's very much supportive, as are the RCMP. So it really is about us finding the operational dollars, getting the commitment from the RCMP to do this. I believe and know from talking to the chief superintendent, he recognizes the urgency. I can assure the Member we're working as quickly as we possibly can to see a detachment built there. I'd like to see it happen. I'd like to see the commitment to a full-time presence before we leave office next October. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary To Question 290-15(5): Lack Of RCMP Detachment In Gameti

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to highlight that the Tlicho Government is ready and willing to work with the Minister of Justice to find a fast solution to this issue. So I'd like to ask the Minister, what is the department's action plan? I'd like to see a plan in place for '07-08 to help make this vision a reality. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Mr. Bell.

Further Return To Question 290-15(5): Lack Of RCMP Detachment In Gameti

HON. BRENDAN BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I should acknowledge that the Tlicho leadership, the chiefs have been very cooperative and very helpful in working with my department and the RCMP, especially to try to restrict the flow of alcohol and drugs into those communities. This does take an approach by the leadership and by all of the communities to be successful. We want to reciprocate. We recognize that effort. We want to make a likewise effort. So I can tell the Member that I will be sitting down with the RCMP, and with my colleagues on this side of the House, and with government, and with committee, to make the case for a detachment in Gameti, and I sincerely hope that we can have some positive news soon on that front, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Yellowknife Centre, Mr. Hawkins.

Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my Member's statement today, I spoke of a problem from a constituent point of view where they require coverage for a certain medical condition that their child has, but there seems to be gaps out there because they do not have insurance. It's coupled by the government policy that does not recognize being born with a club foot as a defined medical condition. So I look to the Premier today to see if he will look into and get back to me to find out what the criteria is required to have a medical condition put on the specified medical conditions list. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Return To Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, as requested, I'll have our people in health look into this and let the Member know how you add this to the list. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

Supplementary To Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time, can I ask the Premier to look into the status of the review

of our Supplementary Health Benefits Program and have the Department of Health get back to me on that matter, as well? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Handley.

Further Return To Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, yes, I will raise that with the Minister of Health as soon as I have an opportunity. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

Supplementary To Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this is great to have yes answers. It's quite unusual.

---Laughter

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier commit today to having those who are doing this review of our Supplementary Health Benefits Program evaluate and see if they can include, during this review and this update, club foot as a medical condition that we cover fully? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Handley.

Further Return To Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

---Laughter

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Final Supplementary, Mr. Hawkins.

Supplementary To Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My last question to the Premier is, quality of life is very important. During this debate in the House we talk about people afflicted with quality of life issues that stop them from having a regular standard of life, which I think is very important. Mr. Speaker, will the Premier do what he can, will he tell me today what he can do to look into making sure that we put people first before paperwork, because we have a constituent who has medical treatment outstanding. What can we do to ensure people are put first? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. Mr. Handley.

Further Return To Question 291-15(5): Health Coverage For Select Medical Conditions

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I will talk to the Minister of Health tomorrow morning. He will read our dialogue here in Hansard and I'm sure undertake to get back to the Member as quickly as he can. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Villeneuve.

Question 292-15(5): Accuracy Of Caribou Population Estimates

MR. VILLENEUVE: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. Just getting back to what I was talking about in my Member's statement about the importance of the caribou here in the NWT to our outfitters' economy, to our food resource that the many small communities rely on, I just want to ask the Minister, the million dollars that we are supplying in additional funding to some biophysical studies and some Barren-Ground Caribou Management Strategy to me is just not enough. I think given the importance and the multi-million dollars the caribou generate here in the NWT for people, the money that it saves a lot of people in the communities, the cost of living now that we're going to have to deal with, all are offsets from or spin-offs from these declining caribou numbers and the impacts that the government has imposed on outfitters and hunters alike on harvesting caribou. I just want to know, given the anticipated surplus of \$44 million that this government is going to anticipate in the 2006-2007 year, why can't we put more money into some mitigating factors, into some more research? I don't even know if we need more research into these caribou numbers, Mr. Speaker, but I think we should get more money into the boards and agencies at the local level to make sure that they have the resources to go out there and give the outfitters some real hard numbers that they can really live by and agree to some harvesting numbers as opposed to just letting the government impose restrictions without giving, you know, without due diligence, I guess, that they can give the outfitters and how many millions that they're going to lose. We stand to lose too much just giving the one million bucks that we have allocated for this initiative. I just want to ask the Minister, is there any commitment from his department to look for more funding? I'd say more in the \$5 million range per year over the next two to three years to look at how we can mitigate the declining caribou numbers, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. The honourable Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources, Mr. McLeod.

Return To Question 292-15(5): Accuracy Of Caribou Population Estimates

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't have made the point better if I wrote it myself. Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt, and I don't think any Member of this House will challenge the fact that we need more information, we need better information, and that the information is never going to be satisfactory to everybody. We've taken it upon ourselves through the Caribou Management Strategy to do a number of things and that involves consultation with many people, many organizations, and many governments. We've attempted to do that in the last 15 months, to go out there and meet with the different co-management groups, to meet with the different parties that use the land or the caribou. It's been very costly. Surveys are very expensive. Helicopter time is very expensive. We've been spending an average of about \$600,000 a year on caribou and counting caribou. We need to do more. We also need to be able to get a better handle on the harvest numbers. What are the aboriginal populations taking? What are the resident hunters taking? What are the outfitters taking? What is being left behind on the land? There are a number of things we still have to count and analyze, but how comprehensive is a comprehensive study? Do we start

counting other herds that are not even in our jurisdiction? We have to start working with Nunavut; we have to work with Saskatchewan, other governments to do a comprehensive survey. Right now we're using the precautionary principle of we know the herds are crashing and we have to make some decisions and those are tough ones, but we'll continue to move forward. We'll gather information. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Supplementary, Mr. Villeneuve.

Supplementary To Question 292-15(5): Accuracy Of Caribou Population Estimates

MR. VILLENEUVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do realize the complexity and the vast amount of resources required to carry out, you know, to get some more definitive numbers on the caribou populations. But I'm just not sure if the Minister is really pushing the fact that the caribou are so important here in the NWT. I don't think there is any excuse as to say well, we should have done this, we have to do that, we're going to do this...

MR. SPEAKER: Do you have a question, Mr. Villeneuve?

MR. VILLENEUVE: ...just something that we really have to take more seriously and push forward on more diligently, I guess. I just would like to see the Minister say this is what we have planned.

MR. SPEAKER: Do you have a question, Mr. Villeneuve? Do you have a question?

MR. VILLENEUVE: Okay. So what does the Minister have laid out insofar as timelines and setting up meetings with other jurisdictions, getting them all together to sit down at the same table and figure out a strategy that's going to work for northerners and southerners alike? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 292-15(5): Accuracy Of Caribou Population Estimates

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Member is correct; there's a lot of work that's got to be done yet and we've started the ball rolling. We've met with many governments. We've already met with the Yukon. We've met with Nunavut. We've met with Saskatchewan. We've met with the Tlicho leadership. We've met with the Yellowknives Dene. We've met with the Dene Nation. We've met with the NWT Metis Nation. We've met with the NWT Barren-Ground Outfitters. We continue to move forward and try to set up further meetings. We've contacted Nunavut. We are working on setting up some schedules there. We've contacted the federal Minister of Natural Resources. We've asked and indicated to him we'd like to have a meeting regarding some of these issues. We've also contacted Minister Baird and also, you know, we need to be able to have the resources put in place. We have some requirements that we've included in our budgeting, our forecasted budgets. We don't have the answers yet, but that's something that we'll be working with now that this government has identified some new resources. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Supplementary, Mr. Villeneuve.

Supplementary To Question 292-15(5): Accuracy Of Caribou Population Estimates

MR. VILLENEUVE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Okay, so we met with pretty much everybody who hopefully has an interest in caribou numbers. One person, one thing, one section of that that I didn't hear of is why didn't they meet with industry, the diamond industry? If memory serves me correctly, I think the herds started going down as soon as the world's largest diamond staking claim rush started happening in the NWT. That's when we started recognizing declining numbers in caribou herds in that area. Why don't we meet with industry and find out how the impact of industry is affecting the caribou numbers? I think that has a big impact in the whole numbers in themselves, but reducing outfitters' numbers by 493 tags, you know, those things aren't going to make any difference whatsoever. I think if we...

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Villeneuve. There was a question there. I'll allow the Minister to answer it. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 292-15(5): Accuracy Of Caribou Population Estimates

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we have met with industry. We've met with all the different governments, including the co-management boards. We've met with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. We met with Parks Canada. We met with the Canadian Boreal Initiative. We met with ConocoPhillips. We met with DeBeers Canada. We met with Diavik Diamond Mines, and BHP Diamonds and World Wildlife Fund Canada. Mr. Speaker, all these organizations and governments are partners with us. Most of them have provided dollars and information. Any information gathered at the sites are shared with us and we share our information with them. So this has been an ongoing process. We have worked with all the different governments. We've also worked with industry, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

MR. BRADEN: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. My questions this afternoon will be for Mr. McLeod, the Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, on the issue of caribou or, rather, people management when it comes to protecting and preserving our caribou herd.

Mr. Speaker, especially in relation to the stakeholder group, the outfitters in the NWT, you know, this government, in the 1980s, actually established this industry. This is not something that sort of grew from the outside or from demand for people who wanted to come in. This industry was created by this government as a way of diversifying and incorporating aboriginal culture and practice with a way to diversify our economy.

Mr. Speaker, while we have invested heavily in developing this industry and its promotion in the infrastructure side of it and in regulation, we still do not have a thorough and a complete and a comprehensive information base on which to make information. This is something that is widely accepted, and yet, Mr. Speaker, we have made

recommendations that will in effect eliminate this industry practically overnight. Do the math, Mr. Speaker. From 1,243 tags issued last year we're going to 750 tags this year. The recommendation remains on the book that there be 350 tags next year. Mr. Speaker, 350 tags is not enough to sustain an industry. Based on the lack of precise information on caribou populations, why does ENR recommend harvest levels of outfitters that will, without question, kill this industry? Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. The honourable Minister responsible for Environment and Natural Resources, Mr. McLeod.

Return To Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All our information that has been gathered over the last couple of years indicates that this herd has been declining. It's crashing. We're probably at the 50 percent of the population. Our view, the tag allocation, there is no sustainable yield. We have looked at how we can continue to provide efforts to save the herd and at the same time provide tags for commercial hunting. Our actions are based on the numbers that we've gathered for the Bathurst herd and we've provided an estimation of 4 percent yield. That proposal has gone to the Wekweezhii board and in the event now that Wekweezhii has indicated that they're not going to be providing a recommendation to us until sometime in March, or not do the hearings until March and then the recommendation in April. We went ahead and decided that we had to make a decision so the outfitters could have a number they could work with. We looked at the tags that were sold up to early January, I think January 8th. The hunts that were sold were forecasted to be or predicted to be at 750 and set our number accordingly.

Now, my job is the healthy future of the caribou herd. That's where my focus is. We can't have an industry if we have no caribou. So we have laid out a very thorough Caribou Strategy, management plan, that looks at a number of things; first of all, to engage partners. I think we've been working on that front for some time now to talk to all the different organizations and governments, to bring them to where everybody understands the situation we're in. Also we have to provide information for management.

...to engage partners. I think we have been working on that front for some time now to talk to all the different organizations and governments to bring them to where everybody understands the situation we are in. Also, we have to provide information for management. The third thing is to start working on education compliance. We also have to work on managing human activity. That is one of the areas that we have some direct involvement and can make some decisions that will have an impact on the herd. We also have to be able to look at the area of addressing hardships. So there are still a lot of different areas that we need to provide a lot more information. But, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is the interest of the herd is in the forefront for us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Short supplementary, Mr. Braden.

Supplementary To Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

MR. BRADEN: Mr. Speaker, the Minister mentioned the responsibilities that the Wekeezhii Renewable Resource Management Board has in this situation. The whole aspect of governance is really what is at issue here. Mr. Speaker, the Wekeezhii board I know has expressed in writing to the Minister its discomfort and its displeasure at the manner in which the board was pre-empted its role which is outlined in the...

MR. SPEAKER: Do you have a question, Mr. Braden?

MR. BRADEN: ...and has caused a considerable disruption in that governance training. Mr. Speaker, why did ENR undermine the authority of the Wekeezhii Renewable Resources Board when it decreed tag allowances for 2007 without waiting for this board's consultation?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, I think the Member is asking me why didn't I just sit on my hands and do nothing for this year. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't do that. Mr. Speaker, we had to make a decision. The Wekeezhii board agreement allows us to set quotas, if quotas are not set by the board in a timely manner. We took that clause and utilized that. We had to make a decision, Mr. Speaker. Our recommendation was 350. The caribou outfitters, some members, the Yellowknife members came forward and raised objections. They said that was too much. We did not have the Wekeezhii board onside for this, so we had to set a number for this year.

Mr. Speaker, on a couple of occasions, we have tried to have people reduce quotas. That has not been successful, Mr. Speaker. We had to step forward and make a decision. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Supplementary, Mr. Braden.

Supplementary To Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

MR. BRADEN: Mr. Speaker, while we are on the topic of consultation, I am wondering if the Minister could explain why ENR did not effectively and fully involve his counterpart, the Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, in making this devastating recommendation considering that that department also has a role to play in the management of the outfitting industry, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, the proposal for the Wekeezhii reductions and some of the management actions went to ITI prior to us releasing it. It also went to Cabinet. We also had the Premier involved with some of the discussions. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Final supplementary, Mr. Braden.

Supplementary To Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

MR. BRADEN: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting statement, because we now know that our caribou species, at least with the decisions that this government has made, we are not going to have an outfitting industry. The polar bears are also a species that are under considerable examination and threat. I am just wondering, in the very large and long-term perspective, Mr. Speaker, does the department believe that there can still be a sustainable and a successful sports outfitting industry here in the NWT for any species?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 293-15(5): Management Of The Barren-Ground Caribou Herd

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of species that are out there that are very much endangered. We have to be very mindful of that fact. There are surveys that we do to give us indications of where the species are at. We would like to continue to support hunting in this area. We would like to support ecotourism; we would like to support fishing, but those are all dependent on having a supply of the product. In this case, the caribou are in decline. We have to make some tough decisions. We are also under some extreme pressure from some of the other bodies out there that would like us to see some cutbacks and how the animals are utilized from all users of this group. Thank you.

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

Question 294-15(5): Issuance Of New Driver's Licence

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions today are for the Minister of Transportation. They have to do with our new, enhanced driver's licence that is supposed to be better for security and a whole lot of other things. In this day and age of travel and identification, Mr. Speaker, having appropriate ID is very important. A photo ID is especially important, so I would like to ask the Minister, with the program that is used to enter the name of the holder of a driver's licence, is there a shortage of space for people with long names like Groenewegen, for example? Some people have more than one first name. They have more than one given name. If they have three names and they go by the third one, they have to have all three of those on there along with their last name. I had constituents that have been having problems with this. Is there a deficiency in this area? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. The honourable Minister of Transportation, Mr. Menicoche.

Return To Question 294-15(5): Issuance Of New Driver's Licence

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member did raise that issue with me earlier in the year about a constituent that had to actually use their full name and was rather lengthy. We did have an issue in fulfilling the need in getting all the names on that driver's licence. We have been looking at it. I think we made some special provisions for that one incident, Mr.

Speaker. However, we are looking at it and continue to address that and see how we fulfill that need. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Supplementary To Question 294-15(5): Issuance Of New Driver's Licence

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it creates confusion when people have more than one given name and they go by a name that is not their first given name. It creates confusion for them in terms of their identification. At one point, I think it was suggested that this person would change their name. I think that the Department of Transportation should change their software for creating driver's licences. I would like to ask the Minister if consideration has been given to this. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return To Question 294-15(5): Issuance Of New Driver's Licence

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe when the department first ran across that issue, there were some insensitivities that had happened. Having a second look at that issue, the members of the public and the Member were absolutely correct, that that name could not be changed. So we did make some accommodations in that instance. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

Supplementary To Question 294-15(5): Issuance Of New Driver's Licence

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that very much. That was a solution on a one-off basis. I would like to ask the Minister if he would direct the people in his department responsible for the equipment and the software that generates driver's licences to look at this in such a way as to correct this as if it will be an ongoing problem. I think it could be an ongoing problem. My own children each have three given names and a very long last name. It is going to continue to be a problem. So I think it is a problem that we should nip now and not leave it until more people come forward with the same issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return To Question 294-15(5): Issuance Of New Driver's Licence

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, having a legitimate passport or driver's licence is important to all our residents, especially with the new rules for border travel. We have been contacting our issuing agents and made them more aware of this particular issue. Mahsi.

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

Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to also ask some questions about the caribou issue to the Minister of ENR. Mr. Speaker, I think I understand the need for action on the part of the Minister and everyone involved to save the caribou, because I would hate to think of a time where we would not have enough caribou for the people that depend on it for sustenance. I think the government could not possibly spend enough money to supply food to the communities if they didn't have caribou to provide them with. At the same time, Mr. Speaker, I would think that, if we are at such a stage that cutting 600 tags from the industry this year or so, 600 plus or 300 plus next year, is a solution, that speaks to a real serious situation. I don't think we are there yet, and yet that sort of measure would result very possibly in the demise of an industry that is very important to us. I think the question is here. I understand the need for the government to act, but I am sure the Minister would even admit that if he could do it again, he would do it much differently or better. The Wekeezhii board was not consulted, I understand, or they were not ready to receive this recommendation from the Minister. I don't think the industry or other departments of government have done enough to support the industry to deal with the consequences of it. I would like to know if the Minister and also the department is aware of the fact that industries plan two or three years down the road on tag distribution. Would the Minister consider working on a time frame that would have gone for a year or two to reduce these tags if the Minister had to do it this way? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. The honourable Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Mr. McLeod.

Return To Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The issue of caribou tag reduction has been discussed for several years now. There was an attempt last year to have the tags reduced. That couldn't take place. In 2005, it was the desire to bring the tags down to 924. However, the department couldn't follow that because the outfitters sold more than that by the time the decision was to be made. So that was bumped up to 1,163. Last year, the Minister sat up in this House in session during February and announced that we would be going back to 1999 tag allocations. However, there was going to be another survey done. Based on that survey, a decision on tag allocation will be made. We met with the outfitters again in the spring. We met with the outfitters again in the fall. We had a workshop and compiled all of the information and looked at the number that we could allocate. That was a small number by standards of what was being accrued for the outfitters. But we have to remember, when the tag allocation was increased in the year 2000, the allocation was for an interim basis. The outfitters were all in agreement and all acknowledged the fact that tags would be reduced if the caribou numbers went down. As soon as we got the numbers, we put it and packed it up in proposal form. We shared it with ITI. We brought it forward to Cabinet and then we brought it forward to Wekeezhii. Wekeezhii indicated they were not in a position to make a decision. That is a real problem, so they needed to go through a process where they have a public hearing and then look at the results and provide the information back to us. The outfitters will also be making

a presentation to the Wekeezhii board and I believe the Tlicho Government will also be making a presentation to the Wekeezhii board. That information will come forward and we have committed that we will, by June of this year, provide information on caribou quota for next year. However, in the interim, we had to make a decision on what the caribou numbers were going to be for this year because the outfitters needed to know what they were dealing with. We surveyed the caribou outfitters and looked at how many tags were already sold. At that time, there were already 700 and some sold and limited to 750 for this year, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary To Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must admit, I have learned more about the caribou management issue and the caribou outfitters industry over the last couple of months than I ever had before. My understanding is, actually, there is a disagreement on a lot of facts, obviously. There are, out of the 10 industry outfitters, there were some who voluntarily reduced their numbers because they noticed that the caribou weren't behaving the same way. They noticed all sorts of things, less numbers and such, and calving practices and such. But there are other outfitters who have been really growing a lot over the last two or three years. I am wondering why it is that...and especially in an industry that is highly regulated, because these businesses aren't selling widgets or making chairs and selling them. They are selling natural resources by tags given to them by the government. I want to know why some outfitters were allowed to expand and grow while others were conserving and trying to reduce numbers on their own. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the companies that provide these services for commercial caribou hunting operate in different set-ups and the attitude is different in all of the outfitters out there. There are a number of outfitters that have been working very closely with our numbers and have taken it to heart that there is a serious concern with caribou herds and have reduced their numbers accordingly. There are also outfitters that are still resenting the information that we provide as that they are not real numbers and they continue to sell as many tags as they can and wanting to go out there and continue the way they have done business historically. I can't tell the Member why that is. There are some outfitters that have taken different positions. I believe it is just a model and the way they do business. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Supplementary, Ms. Lee.

Supplementary To Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are lots of points of disagreement. I obviously can't cover all of that,

but narrowing it down to one and that has to do with even what to do with the 750 that is given to the industry for the coming year. There are some who say it should be divided equally by 10. Obviously, that would seriously affect those who operate much bigger operations. So this is just one of the things that need to be addressed. I understand the government has to take action for sure. It is only fair to ask that there be a better plan for everybody to adapt to any changes. Is there a possibility for the Minister to postpone the time of the effect for this policy for the next hunting season so at least we have the coming months to address this issue? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I indicated earlier, we set the 750 tag allocation based on what information came forward to us that was sold by the January 8th date. We did meet with the outfitters and proposed to them that we allocate this either on proportionate to what was being allocated the year before, the numbers they used, or on an even amount, even breakout. We couldn't get any agreement from the outfitters. Some supported the proportion to what they used last year and some supported an even breakout. We had to take it back and make the decision. We decided on even allocation of 83 per outfitter and a pool that was similar to the year prior. Mr. Speaker, for 2008, the recommendation will be made by June. We will have that information well in advance. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Supplementary To Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

MS. LEE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there still remains so many unanswered questions; there is at least for the industry. I am sympathetic to the industry. So far as businesses investing on their businesses, on certain forecasts, and they are in an industry like this in caribou hunting where so much of it depends on government decisions, I think it is very fair for them to ask for some notice. I would like to ask the Minister again, there is not a lot of difference between 750 and 1,200 given all of these uncertainties. Five hundred is not going to save caribou if we are in that much trouble at the moment. Could I ask the Minister to revisit the time frame and implement this policy for the next hunting season? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. McLeod.

Further Return To Question 295-15(5): Caribou Tag Reductions

HON. MICHAEL MCLEOD: Mr. Speaker, that has been the approach up to now in regards to tag allocations. The government sets a tag number, industry pushes back and the government reallocates a number to where the outfitters or the users want to have that quota set. Mr. Speaker, we set the tag number at 750 this year. Our intention was to have it at 350. That may not be a big number to bump it up from 750 upwards, but if we start looking at where we wanted to be, 350, it's a huge

amount. We have to start conservation somewhere. The decision to go with 750 was made by this government. It's an amount we can live with for this year. However, next year we are expecting that tag allocation to be reduced. I would not be in a position to reconsider the number that we have already put out to industry. The decision has already been made. Thank you.

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

Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, day number four in my quest to get a resource revenue sharing deal. I understand that Ottawa pulls a wild card, but I believe we have the rest of the deck to make a bit of an argument.

My question is for the Premier today. I try to come up with creative ways to ask the same question, but I can't so I will just go right at it. I would like to ask the Premier if we were to get a revenue sharing deal from Ottawa, would that affect our transfer payments from Ottawa? Thank you.

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

Return To Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have made the arguments. Aboriginal groups have made the arguments. Other Premiers have made the arguments on our behalf of the federal government with regard to both the formula and resource revenue sharing. The Prime Minister has committed to giving us good news in the upcoming budget. I think that's roughly around the 20th of March. Mr. Speaker, he has also made statements to the effect that we are entitled to the principal amount, the main amount of the resource revenues free of a clawback. We shouldn't get it on one hand and then have it taken away from the other. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Supplementary To Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

MR. MCLEOD: Is part of the delay for the negotiations, Ottawa's position, that we owe them for all the transfer payments that they have made in the past? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Handley.

Further Return To Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, no, I don't believe that factors in in a big way with the delay. Mr. Speaker, the fiscal imbalance is an issue right across the country. Of the 10 provinces, this affects provinces as well as territories. Five of them want more resource revenues included in equalization; five of them want more excluded. All three territories have taken the position that we want the O'Brien report recommendation that 50 percent comes to us. So there is no consensus across the country. The

dilemma the Prime Minister has had is trying to get a consensus. He hasn't been able to. Mr. Speaker, we were going to have a Premiers' meeting last week. It was downgraded to a teleconference call, because we went into that knowing that we were not going to get everybody outside.

So, Mr. Speaker, the biggest delay was caused by the absence of an agreement among all the provinces as much as it is by the federal government delaying. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Supplementary To Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Premier for that. We do look forward to the good news coming down on March 20th. I would like to ask the Premier, he spoke a few times about some outstanding issues that are delaying the negotiations. Have we made any progress on the outstanding issues? I believe there was six of them. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Handley.

Further Return To Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, I don't believe that there has been an initialled-off agreement on any of the six. What has happened in the last couple of negotiating sessions is a great deal more understanding by the federal negotiator of why we are taking the position we are on those issues. Mr. Speaker, some of them, on the treatment of human resources, for example, we've made some good headway and I think now we know more clearly what the federal government's position is going to be on that. Transition costs we've made headway on. On the A-base we've made headway on, but we've not initialled off any of the six, to my knowledge. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Final supplementary, Mr. McLeod.

Supplementary To Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I continue to ask the Premier these questions. I think this is the kind of pressure we should be putting on Ottawa all the time and maybe they will...I would like to ask the Premier, how many people do we have dedicated to this file and are they in Ottawa negotiating right now as we speak? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Handley.

Further Return To Question 296-15(5): Resource Revenue Sharing Negotiations

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate the Member's questions because I agree with him; we have to keep this as a debate issue in our Legislative Assembly. Mr. Speaker, we have a negotiator and we have, depending on the issue, usually two or three people who are there to provide backup to him. There was a negotiating session the week before last, and the next

one, I believe, is scheduled for the first week of March. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Handley. Oral questions. The honourable Member for Sahtu, Mr. Yakeleya.

Question 297-15(5): Contracting MOU For The Sahtu Region

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Transportation, Kevin Menicoche. I want to ask the Minister, in terms of issuing out winter road contracts, some of the contracts fall outside our region. Sometimes these contractors come into our region and they bring their own workers, they bring their own supplies in. What type of arrangements do we have for outside contractors coming into the region? Do they have to work with the local community people? Is that part of awarding their contracts to the contractors? Thank you.

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

Return To Question 297-15(5): Contracting MOU For The Sahtu Region

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member is bringing up some contracting issues. Our government follows the business incentive policy, preferential treatment, and using local resources and local contracting companies to fulfil those needs is a priority that we continue to press. We continue to look at those contracts seriously in all our regions and communities. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Time for question period has expired; however, I will allow the Member his supplementary questions. Mr. Yakeleya.

Supplementary To Question 297-15(5): Contracting MOU For The Sahtu Region

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question to the Minister is, when these contracts are given out to outside contractors of a region, does the Minister direct these contractors to go into a community and negotiate or talk with the community businesspeople and then at the end of the season, do these businesspeople show the amount of work that this company brought into our community through the winter road contracts or winter work? We can see it in black and white. This is the amount of money they left in that community with that business. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Menicoche.

Further Return To Question 297-15(5): Contracting MOU For The Sahtu Region

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do use the business incentive policy. That is one of the ways we encourage to generate the work in our communities and our regions. That they do use local businesses. I think the Member is getting at monitoring and tracking of how much they actually use. I am not aware of any system right now that we do use, Mr. Speaker, but that's something I can get more information on for the Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya.

Supplementary To Question 297-15(5): Contracting MOU For The Sahtu Region

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the Minister if he would seriously consider looking through his department to show that the contractor comes out from outside a region and works in our region, such as the bridgework that Mr. Menicoche mentioned in the Sahtu region? This contractor, whoever it is, will state that this is the amount of work he's given the local people in our region. I don't know if it's through other departments, but they can show they are bringing benefits to our region and show that to myself. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Menicoche.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Speaker, the Member is referring more to the MOU that we have and it's more appropriate to the Minister of ITI. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, Mr. Bell.

Further Return To Question 297-15(5): Contracting MOU For The Sahtu Region

HON. BRENDAN BELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the Member is well aware, because the Member has been lobbying very hard to see a Sahtu MOU that speaks to an agreement between the Sahtu governments and our government and talks about procurement, my department, Mr. Speaker, as Members will know, has the lead with the Gwich'in MOU, but largely the responsibility to deliver on the commitments falls to the largest procurement departments. Public Works and Transportation are amongst those. We are looking forward to being able to sign an MOU very shortly. I want to thank the Member for his work in this respect as well as the Sahtu leadership. I think we are very close and we will have some good news soon. Thank you.

---Applause

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bell. Before we go on to the orders of the day, Members, I would just point out that we had 10 questions today before the time expired. I know the Chair respects the fact that we have some very important issues in front of the House, but we have had some extremely long preambles and some extremely long answers on the Minister's side today. I would request that you maybe shorten up your answers and preambles in the future, or I will have to take more forceful action.

I would also like to remind Members that if the Chair intercedes when you are speaking, that the Chair would expect you to respect the authority of the Chair and cease speaking and take your chair until you hear the ruling of the Speaker. Thank you, Members.

---Applause

Written questions. The honourable Member for Great Slave, Mr. Braden.

ITEM 7: WRITTEN QUESTIONS**Written Question 42-15(5): Caribou Management Actions**

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources, Mr. Caribou.

---Laughter

Provide details on the actions taken to date as a result of the caribou workshop December 4th to 6th, 2006, and Caribou Summit, January 23rd to 25th, 2007.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Braden. Written questions. Returns to written questions. Replies to opening address. Replies to budget address. Petitions. Reports of standing and special committees. Reports of committees on the review of bills. Tabling of documents. The honourable Minister responsible for the Public Utilities Board.

ITEM 14: TABELING OF DOCUMENTS**Tabled Document 89-15(5): 2006 Annual Report Of The Public Utilities Board Of The NWT**

HON. KEVIN MENICOCHÉ: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the following document entitled 2006 Annual Report of the Public Utilities Board of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Menicoche. Tabling of documents. Notices of motion. Notices of motion for first reading of bills. Motions. First reading of bills. Second reading of bills. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Bill 18, Bill 19, Bill 21, Committee Report 7-15(5), Committee Report 8-15(5) and Committee Report 9-15(5), with Mrs. Groenewegen in the chair.

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

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): I will call Committee of the Whole to order. What is the wish of the committee? Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Madam Chair. The committee wishes to consider the NWT Housing Corporation at this time. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Does committee agree? Thank you. We will do that after a short break.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): I would like to call Committee of the Whole back to order. The department we are going to be considering today is the NWT Housing Corporation. At this time, I would like to ask Minister Handley, Premier Handley, if he would like to provide his opening comments. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am pleased to present the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation's main estimates for the fiscal year 2007-08 for a total GNWT contribution of \$51.210 million.

This is an increase of 39 percent over the 2006-2007 Main Estimates. This increase is due to the \$16.250 million federal northern housing trust funding received for the affordable housing initiative. This increase is offset by an equal reduction in other source revenue. In addition to the GNWT contribution, the corporation will receive an additional \$68.060 million in other source revenues. This funding includes contributions from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation of \$17.220 million and public housing rental subsidies of \$32.454 million received from the Department of Education, Culture and Employment through its responsibility for subsidized housing. Public housing rental clients will contribute an additional \$4.441 million towards their shelter costs. The remainder is made up of lease revenues, mortgage and investment interest and projected sales proceeds from the disposal of housing assets.

During 2007-2008, the NWT Housing Corporation will spend over \$119 million on housing in the Northwest Territories. A total of \$32 million will be spent to construct 168 dwellings in communities across the NWT. Included in this allocation are 71 public housing replacement units and 97 homeownership units to assist families to become successful homeowners. The new public housing units will allow us to improve housing conditions and replace older, single detached units with modern, multi-configured energy-efficient housing. Our new homeownership programs will allow prospective homeownership clients, who have previously been unable to secure mortgage financing, to realize the benefits of homeownership.

Implementation of the affordable housing initiative is also assisted through partnerships, both with the Department of Municipal and Communities Affairs on land requirements and with communities themselves to ensure that their housing and land development needs are met.

The Housing Corporation plans to invest \$6.822 million in modernizing and upgrading our rental stock through our local housing organizations. We have also set aside \$4.226 million to fund homeownership assistance and residential enhancements to address deficiencies in the homeownership stock throughout the Northwest Territories. The new renovation program has broadened access and expanded eligibility criteria that will allow us to increase the number of residents we can support.

In addition, we have also developed a client counselling curriculum consisting of courses designed to prepare participants for the requirements of homeownership through education and counselling.

The corporation will also contribute \$61.584 million to our community partners in support of our 3,100 unit rental housing portfolio including subsidized and market housing operations. The remaining \$14.479 million supports our corporate operations which represents 12.1 percent of the NWT Housing Corporation's total budget.

The Housing Corporation's mandate has been redefined in the past year to better reflect the needs and expectations of our residents. The views expressed by stakeholders during the consultation have shaped not only our mandate, but the strategic initiatives and program implementation being undertaken by the Housing Corporation.

The Housing Corporation remains committed to reducing core need throughout the Northwest Territories. The

investments to be made during 2007-08 will contribute greatly to reducing core need in communities through a combination of public housing replacement, new homeownership and modernization and improvement projects.

As we begin to see the impact of declining federal O and M funding for public housing, it is critical that we continue to make improvements to our stock if it is to serve us in the future, as well as to take steps to secure revenue from our existing portfolio.

Madam Chair, that concludes my opening comments. At this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Premier Handley. At this time, I will ask chair of the Standing Committee on Social Programs if she would like to provide the committee's response to the budget of the NWT Housing Corporation. Ms. Lee.

NWT Housing Corporation

Introduction

MS. LEE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Programs, as members of the Accountability and Oversight Committee, were involved in the new pre-budget consultation process with the people of the Northwest Territories in late August of 2006. Hearings were held north and south of the lake, and gave ordinary northerners and non-governmental organizations the opportunity to provide input to MLAs on the priorities that the budget should focus on.

The committee met with the Minister and his officials on Wednesday, September 25, 2006, to review the draft business plan of the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation.

Members considered the draft main estimates, including the changes to the budget of the NWT Housing Corporation since the committee reviewed the business plan in September, on January 16, 2007.

The committee noted the total operating budget for the Northwest Territories Housing Corporation for 2007-2008 is planned at \$119.270 million. Of this total amount, the corporation proposes \$68.060 million in revenues or non-cash items, and a GNWT contribution of \$51.210 million.

The following outlines committee members' issues from their review of the 2007-2008 budget-planning cycle.

Pre-Budget Consultations

Housing and lack of available land in the communities were once again major issues brought forward by residents during the pre-budget consultation process.

Members of the Accountability and Oversight committee heard that the lack of available and affordable rental units in communities like Fort Liard are impacting on the ability of the Dehcho Education Authority to hire and retain qualified teachers.

The committee heard many complaints about the way in which the NWT Housing Corporation delivers housing programs in the communities and how contractors are not always living up to their obligations. Members were told of

examples where contractors had moved on to the next Housing Corporation contract without doing the final finishing work on the previous contract. Homeowners are finding it next to impossible to get some contractors to finish the work on their houses.

The Social Programs committee has discussed the issue of contractors not fulfilling the terms of contracts with the Minister and has received assurances that with the hiring of new technical officers in the regions and an improved inspection process, the issue of contractors not finishing should be resolved. However, contractors that abuse the process should note that if they continue to not fulfill the terms of contracts with the NWT Housing Corporation, they run the risk of being not allowed to bid on subsequent contracts.

Seniors also raised many issues during the pre-budget consultation process. The biggest concern is the gaps in services between seniors who choose to stay in their own homes and those seniors who are in Housing Corporation units.

Seniors living in Housing Corporation units do not pay any rent or major utility costs, and have all maintenance issues handled by their local housing authorities, whereas those seniors living in their own homes are responsible for the cost of utilities and paying for the upkeep of their homes.

Leaving aside the heating and power subsidies and home care, there is a shortage of government programs that encourage seniors to stay in their own homes.

On a positive note, the Housing Corporation, as part of its program consolidation, has changed the eligibility requirements and income thresholds to access their repair programs. For example, there were many seniors that were not eligible for the previous Repair Program because they had already accessed funding through the Housing Corporation. Under the new Repair Program, the fact that you have accessed funding in the past is no longer a factor, and eligibility is determined by income and the nature of the problem.

This should make it easier for lower-income seniors living in their own homes to access funding for repairs, especially those residents who were among the first homeownership clients of the Housing Corporation and are now seniors.

Members also heard from seniors living in public housing who are more than willing to pay rent based on their income. There are cases of northerners retiring and liquidating significant assets, like their homes and businesses, so that they can move into public housing. This does not meet the intent of public housing, which is to help those who cannot meet the obligations financially or physically of running their own homes. It is anticipated that this will be dealt with through the Income Security Program review currently under way under the leadership of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

The committee plans to continue monitoring the issues that were raised during the pre-budget consultations and will be incorporating them into a transition report for the Members of the next Assembly, to make them aware of the situation and the steps taken by the Housing Corporation and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to alleviate the problems. Madam Chair,

at this time I would like the Member for Great Slave to continue with the report.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Braden.

New Mandate And Structure For The Delivery Of Housing In The NWT

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. Much of the discussion at the committee level over the budget planning cycle has focused on the new mandate and structure for the NWT Housing Corporation.

Madam Chair, there was a breakdown in the committee consultation process that has been addressed and remedied. Members of the committee were provided the opportunity to comment on the program redesign and were pleased that a number of their suggestions were incorporated into the final product that was announced at the start of this session.

Federal Funding For Social Housing And Non-Market Communities

The issue of declining funding from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the CMHC, to maintain existing public housing stocks remains a concern of the committee. In 2006-2007, the first year that there was a significant drop in CMHC funding, we lost \$328,000. The decreases will vary from year to year, but the end result is the total lapse of CMHC funding by the year 2037-2038. Again, the Minister is encouraged to work with his provincial and territorial counterparts to lobby the federal government to reinstate funding for the building and delivery of social housing.

The effect of the declining CMHC funding is exacerbated by the reluctance of the current federal government to live up to the terms of the Kelowna Accord, which would have provided significant funding to meet the housing needs of aboriginals.

Again, the Minister, as the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation and as the Premier, is encouraged to work with his provincial and territorial counterparts and aboriginal governments to see this agreement fulfilled. Madam Chair, to continue the report, I will turn it over to my colleague, the Member for Inuvik Twin Lakes.

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

Land Issues

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is noted that since the review of the last main estimates, the Housing Corporation has been resourced to increase the number of employees involved in the development and acquisition of land to build housing units at both the headquarters and regional level.

It is hoped that these new positions and the importance that the Housing Corporation is placing on acquiring the necessary lands to deliver their programming will result in more building lots in the communities.

However, it must be made clear to aboriginal and local governments that they have a role to play and must cooperate in the development of lots in their communities. The committee understands that under the northern

housing strategy, if lots cannot be developed in a community for whatever reason, the corporation will have no choice but to move new housing to communities that do have available lots.

This issue will be mentioned in the transition report to the next Assembly so that progress can be measured.

Mortgage Arrears

Since 1995, the figures on mortgages in arrears have gone from 40 clients owing \$106,164 to 463 clients owing \$6,853,539. This is a disturbing trend that shows no sign of abating. If we do not take immediate action, it will become unmanageable in a few short years.

The committee has been briefed on the steps that the corporation is planning to take in dealing with clients that are in mortgage arrears and has given its support. The focus of the plan is to work with each client to develop a repayment plan. In those cases where a person is unable to work out a repayment plan, they will be asked to sign the asset over to the Housing Corporation and begin paying rent. As long as a person is willing to follow one of the defined processes, and meet the criteria to live in public housing, no one will be put out in the cold. It should be made clear, however, that just as a person can be evicted from social housing for not meeting the terms of their rental agreement, so can a person be forced out of their home if they are not meeting the terms of their mortgage agreement.

One of the goals of the 15th Assembly is the development of self-reliant people. Homeownership is an important part of self-reliance. By not taking remedial action with those who are behind in their mortgages, we are encouraging dependence and, worse, we are putting these people further and further into debt. The lack of action is also unfair to NWT residents who either have a mortgage in good standing with the Housing Corporation or who paid the taxes that allowed the corporation to lend money for mortgages in the first place.

This issue will also be outlined in the transition report to the next Assembly. The committee will be strongly recommending that the 16th Assembly support the NWT Housing Corporation's plan to address mortgage arrears. At this time, Madam Chair, I am going to turn it over to my colleague for Sahtu, Mr. Norman Yakeleya.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. With that entrance, Mr. Yakeleya.

Program Redesign

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Housing Corporation has decreased the number of programs that it delivers and has consolidated the remaining programs into four program areas. The intention is to simplify the application process and to make access to the programs easier for low-income homeowners.

Income thresholds and base house prices have been established for each community in the NWT, and sliding scales that clearly define the amount of assistance that is available have been developed.

The committee was very concerned that the Housing Corporation was going to continue its "step" scale for

assessing assistance levels, in which there were some very sharp drop-offs in eligibility. For example, a person earning \$50,000 a year would be eligible for \$85,000 in assistance and a person earning \$50,001 would only be eligible for \$75,000. Losing \$10,000 in eligibility for earning one dollar more was seen to be extremely unfair and could be a disincentive to work for some people who were considering buying a house using a NWT Housing Corporation program.

Members were pleased that the Minister agreed with the committee's concerns and has introduced a sliding scale that is directly tied to income and has no drop-off points. So under the new sliding scale, if you made \$50,000 you would be eligible for \$85,000 and if you made \$50,001 you would be eligible for \$84,499.

In addition, the corporation will be introducing an appeal process for those who feel they were not treated fairly by the application process. This appeal process will be modeled on the Student Financial Assistance Appeal Committee. It is a two-step appeal process, with an appeal committee that will make a decision in 15 days or less, and, if the person is still not satisfied, an appeal board that will make a decision in 45 days or less.

The committee's concerns over the appeal process centred on the methodology that would be used. The SFA appeal process is seen by committee to be both fair and timely. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. At this time, I will ask the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation if he would like to bring witnesses into the Chamber. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Yes, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, does the committee agree?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you. I will ask the Sergeant-at-Arms if he would, please, escort the witnesses to the witness table.

Mr. Handley, could you please introduce your witnesses for the record?

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. With me are Jeff Polakoff, president of the Housing Corporation; Jeff Anderson, the chief financial officer for the corporation.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Okay. Thank you, Mr. Handley. General comments. First on my list I have Mr. Ramsay.

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to welcome the Minister and his staff here to the proceedings this afternoon. In the Minister's opening remarks for the Housing Corporation, he talked of some money being spent on constructing 168 dwellings in communities across the Northwest Territories in 2007-2008. The figure of \$119 million would be spent on housing and a total of \$32 million will be spent to construct 168 dwellings. The question I have, Madam Chair, is last year when the affordable housing strategy was rolled out, to my knowledge it was 300 units. If the Minister could perhaps make those numbers right, it was 300 last year and if this

is 168 now, did we not get some funding that we were supposed to get or when will the other 132 dwellings be constructed?

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Last year, in 2006-2007, the number was 185. This year, the number is 168. Then in total, the three-year amount for these houses will be 530 units. That's an estimate that can vary depending on cost of construction and the kind of units we build over the three years. Thank you.

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

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Of the 185 units last year, how many of those were actually constructed and in use today?

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Roughly 100 of the units are completed and occupied or ready to be occupied. Madam Chair, remember that we already started late in 2006-07, so we didn't get as much as we would have liked to have done. But the balance of the units are pretty much scheduled to be completed by late this summer/early fall. It's our view that this will not impact on the 2007-08 allocation.

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

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have got a couple of other comments that I wanted to make on the Housing Corporation. I see that there is a 17-position growth in the corporation and I guess most of that centres around the land and the acquisition of land in the various communities to put the housing. What I am wondering, and I have to applaud the Housing Corporation for the streamlining of the programs and the program delivery down to the four main programs that the Minister made in his statement today on outlining those four new programs. Given the fact that you are looking at the streamlining down to four programs, there is no correlation there in terms of position reduction. In fact, we are looking at a 17-person hike in positions just to address the affordable housing strategy.

The other question I have, Madam Chair, is I would like to know if the Housing Corporation ever entertained the notion of going out to the private marketplace to contract some of these services that would see the provision of land and the availability of land in the communities addressed by a private function instead of looking at hiring civil servants to carry out some of this work. Some of this work might be contracted out by some of the same individuals we hire to do the work. So I would like to ask the Minister that question. Thank you.

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Madam Chair, of the 16 positions that we increased, those are lands people and also technical people. In terms of the land, this issue is one that we are working with MACA on. It's a critical one. If we

don't have land, we don't have houses. While it might be possible to get some people from the private sector, I don't think there is that kind of expertise out in the private sector to be able to do that for us at the same kind of price we can do it ourselves.

On the technical side, again as we have heard other Members mention, we are often frustrated because the private sector is so busy in some regions, it's very difficult to find people who can take this on and do it on a timely basis. So some Members are asking us to take more staff or do more training.

Then the final point is these positions are tied very much to the affordable housing initiative, so they are not indeterminate positions. As we flow through this, our intention is once the land issues are dealt with and we no longer need people, then the positions would disappear. Regarding the technical positions, my own feeling is that we need to have the technical staff and we will continue to need more technical people out in the region at least until our economy slows down to the point that the private sector can once again handle this for us. Thank you.

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

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair. An issue I have had that goes back a couple of years with the movement of \$30 million to ECE in terms of the social housing policy side of things, there wasn't a corresponding reduction of positions in the Housing Corporation. In turn, we went and hired 13 or 14 new positions in ECE to carry out the social policy work at ECE. There was never a corresponding reduction at the Housing Corporation. Again, the Minister didn't really answer my question with regard to the streamlining of programs. Are you going to need the same level of staff to carry out the four programs today that you had to carry out the multitude of programs you had previously? I think that's a legitimate question and I would like to ask the Minister that. Thank you.

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. The piece that ECE took over is with the rental assessments, assessing people's eligibility and the amount of rent they are entitled to. On that side, we lost five positions. The LHOs still have to do the management of the public housing stock and so on. So they continue with the same responsibilities except for those assessments.

So, Madam Chair, we lost five positions, we've added 16 positions in but we are delivering a bigger program, a much more aggressive program now with affordable housing than we did before. We still have to maintain the federal programs as well, by the way. So that means we continue with the same responsibilities there. So even though we rolled this into four programs, rolling it into four programs doesn't necessarily reduce the amount of work our people have. In fact, it may increase it. What it does is it makes it more understandable for the clients out there, so they know that if they need repairs to a unit there's one program that deals with repairs. That's where they go and our people help them to fit their unique situation. It doesn't save us money. It doesn't save us time, but it certainly makes the programs more easily understood by the clients. Thank you.

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

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Minister for his response. The good news in all of this, I guess, is the streamlining in the programming, especially the sliding scale. I think that, to folks, to people out there who want to access that program, with a sliding scale in place I think it makes it much more accessible and the drop-offs aren't there like they were before. With that, Madam Chair, I'd like to thank, again, the Minister.

I am encouraged with the changes that I'm seeing at the Housing Corporation, aside from the position growth. I've been quite consistent with that since I got here three and a half years ago. Government just grows and I think we always have to try to do the best we can without just going out and adding positions. I think there's a function here or a role for the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs to play in the rollout of land availability in the communities. Nobody knows the communities in the Northwest Territories better than that of MACA and their staff and I think every effort should be taken to utilize the staff at MACA, the expertise they have in the communities, and not try to duplicate any efforts that are going to be obvious. That's where I'd like to leave that off, Madam Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. I didn't hear a question there. It was general. We're on, after all, general comments. Next on the list I have Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have just a few general comments. We, as a committee, had a number of meetings with the Housing Corporation over the last number of months, and I just want to tell the Minister and the officials there that it has been generally a very positive relationship. I think just by happenstance of having a new Minister and a new president of the corporation might have, not that I'm saying anything bad about the former ones, I'm just saying that sometimes new players bring an opportunity to work on something. I'm happy to note that we have been able to work through the mandate and the consolidation of new programs. I don't believe there are a lot of changes being made because of the consolidation, but it is certainly streamlining and improving in some areas.

I'd like to know from the Minister whether that will be used as an opportunity to continue to improve and to refine the programs and such, with a main goal that we would like to have as much housing and houses built and enhanced in our communities as possible.

Another question I want to ask is we know that the federal presence in the housing contribution to the North will continue to decline. I know that I've heard...I'm sure the Premier, or Minister who is also the Premier, is looking for ways to impress upon the federal government that we need them to step in further. There have been media reports about what's happening in that regard, so if he could update us on whether there is any movement in that regard.

My third question has to do with land. Our committee report spoke about passing the issue of all the players working together to increase the availability of land, because obviously that's the essential part of any housing initiative; however, that's not to say that this issue is not

urgent. We would like to see the corporation and the government move as far and as quickly as possible on that issue. I'd like to know if the Minister could update us on what sort of measures he's taken to move that process along.

Gee, I'm being really quick today. I don't want to have too long of a preamble because we've been here for, this is the fourth year and I've probably said everything I need to say, unless of course I want to have some follow-up to some of the answers that the Minister will give. However, the fourth one has to do with what we found in our committee review. We mentioned that in the report, about the fact that lots of contractors, well, maybe it's not lots, but there are a few contractors who don't do the work as well as they should or not completing the work in a quality way. I think we were overly generous in our report saying that, you know, if you don't do the work, you're not going to get work. I would like to know, why hasn't that happened before? In any private contract thing, say if you're building a house and somebody doesn't get the job done, then they are not going to get paid. I would like to know if the corporation has such a policy in place where I would think that any contract work...The payment plan could be divided so that you do the first part of the work...It could be money upfront, but, you know, payments are made on a base-by-base basis with the last payment being held back until all the work is done, or done in a satisfactory way. I would like to know from the Minister what is in place to make sure that happens. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Let me say, first of all, that the restructuring or the consolidation of the programs has in some ways taken all the pieces and built four new programs. However, it has also added some new emphasis in it. One of our goals, as a government and as a Housing Corporation, is to develop self-reliance. We realize more than ever that we have to have a more structured way of doing the education, the training, the preparing of people so that they can successfully move into homeownership. The STEP program is essentially new. We were doing some training, but this is a more structured way, the four modules that people go through and they understand financing. It will also help them in areas outside of housing and we certainly make that program available to others.

The other one that is new as well is the Transitional Lease Program, where we will help people to go into a lease arrangement where they're assisted while they get used to the idea and the responsibilities of homeownership, including the financial as well as maintenance of homes.

Those two are our new emphasis. Then the others are really taking a lot of the other programs, rolling them together and working. We also, in addition to our own GNWT program, we also deliver a number of programs for CMHC. Gradually, we want to see those programs, like the rehabilitation programs rolled into ours so that we don't have four programs plus the federal programs but they all fit together under the CARE program, the Contributing Assistance to Residential Enhancements, and so on. There is a change; it's a subtle one, but I think it's an important one in terms of building self-reliance.

Madam Chair, on the other one, we have to work together more cooperatively as departments and as corporations in the government. Certainly, MACA and the Housing Corporation people have to work together very closely on the land issues. I like the direction, the advice of the committee and so on, with regard to streamlining our income support system along with housing so that everybody has fair opportunity and a level playing field, so we don't have one system over here and another one over there. It's important that ECE and the Housing Corporation continue to work very closely together.

The other issue the Member raised has to do with contractors. While it is written in every contract that the contractor has to complete that contract, we may not have been as diligent as we should have been in the past in making sure that everybody does a job and they do a good job when they do it. Too many times things were beginning to slip and they just weren't getting them done on a timely basis. Sometimes it would go years where they wouldn't put the trim on or wouldn't put some small piece on to complete the house. We're not going to tolerate that any more. It's frustrated too many people by having a house that isn't entirely completed. While we don't have a written policy on it, we have, through the president and myself and the regional people and so on, made sure we got the message out to the contractors that they have to complete the job. Otherwise we may not give them another contract. In fact, our approach is going to be that they don't get another contract until they finish up what they're doing. There may be overlaps because they get, or the time isn't up to finish one of them, but we want them to do the complete job. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Handley. Ms. Lee.

MS. LEE: I think committee will be looking to see how we improve that contractor/contractee situation. With the remaining minutes here, I would like to comment on what I'm hearing out there about this transfer of housing subsidy, or housing program, to ECE, some part of it. Sitting where we are sitting and having been advised and briefed about why this transfer came about and what its objective is to achieve, it sounds good sitting here; however, listening to the people out there, there are a lot of problems.

As a committee, we heard of people losing jobs because they couldn't go through the training program properly in the communities. We heard of backlogs in application process for housing and everything being forced to move to the regional centres. In the city of Yellowknife we are hearing, and I think the Minister might want to check this, and I guess now with the ECE department, but I understand that the rental complaint from those people who are having problems with arrears because of the changes and calculations and what's being included. I mean the number of appeals filed to the rental office as a result of this transfer, as I understand it, has tripled, if not doubled, in the last year.

From where we sit, I remember hearing that ECE was going to take the money and that they were going to come up with a detailed plan on this before we would have a chance to do this. I don't think we had a chance to go through all the details, and I'm still not clear as to why we had to do this, other than making everything consistent. However, I don't think our objective is to make sure that,

you know, that...Not all programs are the same and we don't need a situation where someone working in Income Security Program telling somebody who's in the Housing Corporation that, you know, I know that you sold something in YK Trader website and you have extra income and you have to come and report that or people who have...People who get housing assistance from the Housing Corporation aren't necessarily those who would be eligible for income support, for example. I'm not saying that any one group is better than another or anything like that. I'm just saying we have all sorts of programs in government that are aimed at different people with different needs at different points in their lives and I don't think we, as a government, with this transfer, have done enough to make sure that we don't lose sight of the program end, you know program objective we're trying to achieve.

I guess I'll have to ask the Minister, what role does the Housing Corporation play anymore in this regard? Or is it just all being transferred to ECE and you have nothing to do with it anymore in terms of some of the complaints that we're hearing? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Ms. Lee. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Housing Corporation hasn't just handed it over to ECE and washed its hands of it. We do continue to work with a steering committee, a very active steering committee, lead by, I think, the deputy minister or one of the senior people in Education and senior level in the Housing Corporation. They have been working regularly. They have met with the LHOs and are meeting again in a couple of weeks and continuing to iron out the rough spots during this transition.

Madam Chair, the transition, we knew would take some time but, overall, I have to say that the number of complaints we're hearing is far fewer than it was even three months ago. It's improving a lot as people get used to the new system. The main reason for doing it, Madam Chair, really comes down to having us, as a government, having one system of income support that is fair and equitable to everybody. What we were developing is...We got \$128 million out there as a government and with so many different ways of subsidizing people we were ending up with some people getting, if they went this route, they'd get one answer; if they went over here, they'd get something else. Now we've got that down to one, so everybody is treated equitably.

There has been some adjustment period. That's necessary, we knew it, both for LHOs as well for the Education people and we're working our way through that, I think, quite successfully. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Handley. On the list I have Mr. McLeod and Mr. Braden for general comments. Mr. McLeod.

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to thank the Minister and his officials for appearing before us. There has been quite a change in the last year with our relationship with the Housing Corporation. It seems to me like you are starting to listen to what we have to say, and what we have to say is what we're hearing from back home.

A couple of comments and a couple of questions, if I may. In responding to the question from Mr. Ramsay, the Minister said that there was 185 units last year, 100 of them were complete, so that leaves 85. We're getting 168 this year. Is that 85 figure included in this 168? Or is this 168 plus the 85? Did we lose the money for the 85 that we had last year? I'll start with that for now, Madam Chair. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Madam Chair, we are getting 168 for the 2007-08 money plus we'll get the total of the 185 for the 2006-07 money that will flow into it. We don't lose any units. The 85 or so outstanding are not part of the 168.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Handley. Mr. McLeod.

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for that. So we're getting 253 units this year? Okay. That sounds like a good number.

The one thing that I do want to comment on is the mortgage arrears. I think the Minister and his department are doing a good thing starting to go after people that carry large arrears. It's really not fair, like we read in our report, to the people that are paying their mortgages on time and they look at their neighbour and they are three or four years behind and nothing is happening. That doesn't send a very good message. I commend the department for starting to clamp down a little harder on them because that just casts a whole shadow on this whole housing ownership issue when you have 463 clients owing that much money. I support that mainly because there are people who are faithfully paying and then this is taxpayers' money that we're speaking about, too. It's not fair to the taxpayer who is paying \$1,500 a month mortgage to see something like that.

One other question I do have, you mentioned a figure of \$4.441 million. Now that, I'm assuming, is the money that comes from the actual public housing tenants. I think we got a \$36 million figure and this is the money that's actually out of their pockets. Am I correct? Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. With regard to arrears, our approach to this is to try to stem that increase in arrears. It has been growing and we want to limit that. The way to do it is to make sure that people are making their current payments plus paying something down on the arrears they've developed. Second is to catch those arrears early, because once it gets to be an unmanageable amount then people just give up on. Our approach is going to be to try to be firmer earlier on.

In terms of the housing clients and the rental that they pay, it is the \$4.441 million that I referred to, that clients in public housing pay to the corporation as their rent. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Handley. Mr. McLeod.

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for that. That comes to \$1,432 average per unit a year. That's a pretty good deal, if you ask me.

The other question that I do have is with regard to all the programs that you have coming out this year. The public housing units, I believe you said you've got 71 public housing replacement units. I'd like to know -- and this is a concern that I've heard from contractors and I've brought it up to the Minister and his officials before -- is the amount of time that it takes to get the contracts out. You've got 71 public housing units coming. Of the 85 units that were carried over from last year, I'm not sure how many of those are public housing units and how many are homeownership, but with the public housing units do you have the plans ready to go, do you have the specs ready to go? Is that something you can put out to tender the minute the Legislative Assembly approves the budget so you know what you've been approved for and if you have them out? The contractors have said you'd get a better price having them out early and you get a better product. So is that something we can look at? Do you have plans ready to go as we speak and are just waiting for the budget approval? Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, the amount we have in rental collections is low, it's fourteen-hundred and some dollars I think, if the Member's math is right. It's true; we do have a good deal. Some people get the public housing units for zero for seniors, some get it for \$32, some pay considerably higher, but it does average low. So we do provide a great deal of subsidy in public housing. In terms of getting the contracts out on a timely basis, that one we've set as a high priority and, Madam Chair, yes, we do have plans, we do have proposals that are ready to go out. In some cases we might run into delays because of negotiated contracts, but we'll work our way through that.

Madam Chair, I must say that we do stick our neck out a bit here. For example, in the Sahtu region we already have packages that are purchased on the assumption that the Legislative Assembly is going to approve something for us, but that is the only way to get them in on the winter road. Otherwise, we're going to be waiting until fall again. So we're taking some chance here. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Handley. Mr. McLeod.

MR. MCLEOD: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Do we have anything on the go for Inuvik? Any prior commitments for Inuvik?

---Laughter

No, I think that is a good idea. Like you said, take advantage of the winter roads. So I fully support something like that, but I do just want to say that I do appreciate the fact that the Housing Corp seems to be listening to what we're saying now and I appreciate the fact, and a lot of people sort of appreciate the fact, that they are providing housing. There's a lot of older stock there that will eventually be replaced. So there's going to be a lot of complaints coming in regarding the state of some of the units, not all of them, because I've seen units

that are old that are well looked after, but I think we're on the right road here and I just want to encourage the Housing Corp to continue to just get their house in order and I think everything else will follow, because I think we are starting to see some improvement in the Housing Corp and I'll look forward to the same thing next year, hopefully. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. McLeod. I don't think there was any question there, unless the Premier would like to respond. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just very briefly, there are 81 units out there with a condition rating lower than 60 percent and of those, half of those are, right now, slated for demolition or repair or fail. If there are privately owned units, homeownership units, then there is nothing preventing us from using affordable housing money to bring those up to a good standard as well. We don't necessarily have to just ignore the privately owned ones if people need assistance from us. So that will be another way. We're spending roughly \$7 million on repairs and upgrades to public housing units this year. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Handley. Next I have Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. One of the things I was looking at and committee, Madam Chair, should be reminded of just what the level of accountability and approval is as we review the Housing Corporation. This would, I hope, lead into my first question here, Madam Chair. Looking at some of the documents that we received, the budget address from last year and the budget address from this year and if you look back in the neighbourhood of the appendixes to the budget address, Madam Chair, or I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, last year in the summary of operations there was indeed a line for the NWT Housing Corporation of \$36.8 million approximately, but this year there is no line. I wanted to ask the Minister where is the accountability for the Housing Corporation's expenditures when indeed committee votes and when the Assembly votes on this appropriation? Has there been some change in the way we consider our voting and in the way the Housing Corporation is accountable for what it brings before us, Mr. Chair?

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As the Member may recall, the Auditor General questioned the way accountability was being managed with the Housing Corporation and recommended that it be flowed through the Financial Management Board. So we've made that change to respond to the concerns by the Auditor General. So it will appear through the Financial Management Board. Thank you. Board Secretariat, to be exact. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you for that, Minister Handley. Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Premier assist us, or I'm sorry, could the Minister assist us then in explaining how does that assist committee in examining the corporation and in bringing our concerns forward? Is that sort of correctly done here and to what

extent can we vote and approve what we hear with the Minister before us? Thank you.

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It doesn't affect or change the way or the process we use before the committee here. This will still be the same way, but when it comes to the Auditor General's report, then that's where the change will be and the accountability will be done differently, but in terms of our process here it's the same as it was last year.

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

MR. BRADEN: Thank you. So I guess when we conclude our review of the Housing Corporation, Mr. Chair, there really will be nothing to sort of vote on or approve, the approval really then is vested under Financial Management Board Secretariat and, indeed, the Minister who will be before us then will be Mr. Roland. So are we going to be voting through Mr. Roland then to approve the Housing Corporation?

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the final sort of vote for the Housing Corporation budget will be through the Financial Management Board Secretariat through the Minister of Finance, that's correct.

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

MR. BRADEN: Sorry, Mr. Chair, these things get sometimes a little convoluted and difficult to connect all the dots or see what the logic is all about. I guess one of the challenges that committee has had then, or that I have had with the corporation's act and its accountabilities, it is quite removed from the level of scrutiny and approval that departments otherwise have when they come before the Assembly, Mr. Chairman. This is, in effect, a corporation, but it does not have a board of directors unlike our Power Corporation or our Business Development and Investment Corporation who carries some degree of accountability through appointments by the Legislative Assembly. The Housing Corporation, yes, arguably does have a Minister, but the levels of accountability to the public are I think quite shielded and this has been a difficulty. So I just want to be clear, Mr. Chairman, as we go through the numerous pages of the Housing Corporation, that our ability to affect change in this process now before us is virtually nil and that we are going through this for information and debate, but there is, in effect, no approval permitted for committee at this point. So perhaps our clerk or our staff can correct me, or the Minister and his staff, but I just want to be certain of what is before us and what is not before us, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Braden. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think if I understand what Mr. Braden is saying, then essentially that's correct. We will go through this, we will approve page by page and section by section, but the final vote on the appropriation will be done when we do the Financial

Management Board Secretariat with the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Chairman, I might also add that the two things that the Auditor General is looking at as part of the report that will be coming forward, hopefully in time for the May-June session, is governance and accountability. So at that point we'll have more recommendations from her. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Anything further, Mr. Braden?

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the other members of committee or the report has highlighted it. There is one, I guess, residual program that the corporation undertook early in the life of this Assembly, and I believe it was called the market housing initiative. It was a program that I think the Legislature requested and this was to assist, especially the smaller more remote communities, Mr. Chair, who had difficulty attracting and keeping essential community workers, and we're especially looking here at teachers and health care workers. Mr. Chairman, over the course of two years, this program has caused some issues here in terms of its delivery, its implementation, its cost, value for money spent. I wanted to ask the Premier, I'm sorry, the Minister, if they could provide a snapshot of just how successful or otherwise was the market housing initiative. I believe it said they put some 44 units on the ground in a number of communities. Just how successful was it, Mr. Chairman, in supplying housing for essential education and health care workers in the smaller communities, Mr. Chairman?

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Very quickly, in the first year we did a total of 22 units. Of those 22 units three were sold, three are under our Supported Lease Program and the others are rented. In the second year, we did a total of 20 units. Of those 20 units, there are two where there are technical problems, freeze-up-related problems we are dealing with. There's two that were delayed due to land issues and two were transferred over to the Supported Lease Program. All of the others are rented.

Mr. Chair, I might say that as we travel around the communities, we continue to hear about the need for more housing, particularly for teachers, for nurses, for other people employed in the communities and so on. So I think this program has worked well and there certainly is demand for it in some communities, not every community, but I think Fort Simpson was one of them where I heard that there was a considerable shortage in there. We couldn't even find a house for our regional director in that community. So there is a need for it. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Staying with general comments, next on the list I have Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I would like to focus on the arrears that we're faced with, the \$6 million figure that's been thrown around in our report and during our committee discussion. The Premier's opening remarks touch on a federal northern housing trust or affordable housing initiative, public housing rental subsidies, \$32 million for 168 dwellings, 71 public housing

replacements and 97 homeownership units. These are all great initiatives that are coming forward, but at the same time there are huge arrears here that I think we, as a government, need to focus on. There's \$6 million owing on arrears through the Housing Corporation. As I understand it correctly, the breakdown is about a third in my riding that's owing in that amount. We talked at length in the Social Programs committee about how we want the government to pursue this avenue. It's a huge arrears and it has a huge impact on certain individuals that do owe money for various reasons. So I would like to ask the Minister with respect to the \$6 million in arrears, Mr. Chair, why are these arrears growing so rapidly? The Minister did say that his department is aware of it, when another Member asked about the arrears. Has the department met with these clients that owe money, a substantial amount of money, at the community, and develop an understanding between the client and the Housing Corporation? Was there or are there arrangements made between the parties to deal and resolve these issues of outstanding issues? That's my first question, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Lafferty. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. One of the initiatives under the new consolidated programs is for us to get out there and speak with the client. We have talked to a lot of them, not all of them, but our intention is to get out there to give them letters to remind them, to also do some education with them in terms of the necessity of paying their mortgage in the same way that they pay for their truck or other acquisitions they might have. So a lot of it I think is as a result of the transition from public housing into homeownership and getting people's minds around the responsibility there that it has to be dealt with in the same way as truck payments or anything else people have, because people sometimes think of housing as being the last thing they should pay for, they should pay for the other things first and that doesn't work very well.

One of the things that has made a big difference is where we have had good leadership from the community leaders to be able to explain this, to understand it, then we see the collections coming up. Our concern, of course, is the \$6.7 million in arrears that's out there. But the biggest thing now is to work in education, financial planning, help people so we don't see this amount continue to grow and grow and just get unmanageable. We're not quite as ruthless as some landlords might be in other parts of the world. We want to work with people. We understand people are not trying to avoid it, they just don't realize the responsibility. So we will continue our efforts to communicate with these people. We'll work with community leaders and work our way through this, but I think it's something we expected when we moved from public housing to homeownership. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, this outstanding \$6.6 million has been growing for a number of years, ever since I got elected, even prior to that when I was on a local band council it was I guess at that time rising. So the Minister has indicated that the department has met with some clients, but what I would like to see is meet with all clients that owe money because we have to deal with this issue, it's a serious matter. At this time, Mr.

Chair, my next question is, has the department earmarked their target for 2007-2008? What I'm trying to get at is, is there a plan to collect a certain percentage for this year and next year from the \$6.6 million owing? Because I certainly don't want to see \$8 million next year owing. So I would like to see a plan. I'm sure there is a plan, a worked on plan. What's the department's plan on collecting? Mahsi.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Lafferty. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Mr. Chairman, the first part of the plan is to get out, as the Member has requested, and meet with all the clients. I think the first objective has to be to stop the growth in the arrears so we get that stopped and people paying their current amounts so that arrears aren't building. Once we're able to do that, then gradually collect more, a higher and higher percentage of those outstanding arrears. You're right; some of them have been there for 10 or more years and it may be that at some point this government is going to have to write off some of the old, old ones that are lost in history somewhere. But our intention is to meet all the clients, meet with the leaders. I know the president is going to Behchoko to meet with the people there on the 22nd of this month and it is a high priority for us to get this under control. I also want to thank the Social Programs committee for the advice and support they've given us as well in pointing out that we've got to get this under control. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Chair. Yes, the hard working Social Programs committee members, for the record.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yeah.

MR. LAFFERTY: Thank you, mahsi, Mr. Chair. I'd like to thank the Premier as a Minister in his department, especially with a new team member or leader, Jeff Polakoff, on addressing this issue because it has been brought up at the community level. They've heard it over and over in the communities throughout the North and I think with the transition of changes from traditional lifestyle to a modern lifestyle, it's a fast pace and there's been so many changes and people are finally adapting to payments. It wasn't there before, as you would know, when the people were living out on the land, but now they have to start paying. They're receptive to it, it's just a matter of it's a learning curve. So that's part of the reason why I've invited the department to come out to my community and explain in detail, in plain language detail, to community members of what's out there. I'd like to thank the department for that. More sort of a general statement, Mr. Chair. Mahsi.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Lafferty. I didn't hear a question there. We'll stay with general comments and next on the list I have Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. Villeneuve.

MR. VILLENEUVE: Mahsi, Mr. Chair. I guess just to start off I think a lot of the questions that I was going to bring forward have already been asked by other Members, so I'll keep my questions brief. Again, I just want to thank the Minister and his staff, Jeff and Jeff, for providing us with it seems like good numbers, I guess, with the increase of 39

percent from the main estimates of last year. I just wanted to ask the Minister, I guess, he must have put a lot of thought into these nice acronyms that they have, the STEP, the HELP, the CARE, the PATH. Gee whiz, you know, that must have taken some real putting your heads together to come up with some housing acronyms that fit into these, but I like them anyway. They seem to be enlightening, I guess, for a lot of LHOs out there.

Just talking about the LHOs, I guess that's where a lot of my questions are going to be surrounding. I know there's always issues surrounding communication gaps between the LHOs and the headquarters, departments and the regional staff as to housing needs, housing processes, appeal processes and getting money from ECE or from the Housing Corp, and who's got the money and why isn't it at the LHO level. You know, issues like that. Updating our universal partnership agreements I think with the LHOs is way overdue. I think the ones that are in place now are pretty generic old documents that, as far as I can remember way back when I was with housing, they haven't changed it a bit.

I know that Mr. Polakoff is well aware that the Public Housing Steering Committee usually meets once or twice a year. They're comprised of managers, the LHOs, some of the ECE staff, Housing Corp staff to provide some recommendations to the Housing Corp, ECE and the government in general on how we can deliver housing more efficiently and effectively.

I just want maybe some general feedback on how seriously, like when this steering committee comes back with some recommendations to government, to the Housing Corp and to ECE on how we could make some positive changes in housing, are a lot of those recommendations really seriously put into what the Housing Corp wants to deliver over the course of the next year and why aren't those recommendations coming to our committee on Social Programs after their meetings are concluded? I know I got the minutes from the last couple of meetings that they had here in Yellowknife and there's a lot of good concerns and recommendations in there on how we can address some of these outstanding issues of arrears and market rent versus social housing and stuff. So are a lot of these recommendations every year put into this housing plan that we're going to deliver here for the next two to three years? I'll start with that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, the recommendations from the committees are taken very, very seriously. They are built into the corporation's work plan. There are people in the corporation who are assigned responsibility to carry through on those that are going to be acted upon. In fact, the number and the breadth of senior people who participate in the meetings has been broadened to make sure that our staff and the LHOs are on the same wavelength. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Villeneuve.

MR. VILLENEUVE: Thank you, Mr. Chair. That's probably the biggest challenge in the delivery of housing, is ensuring that the LHOs and headquarters and the regional staff are all thinking on the same page when

dealing with specific issues, especially with arrears and evictions and in LHO financing agreements with the GNWT and ECE. I just want to touch on one issue at the LHO level dealing with the vacancy rates that are applied to public housing rental units in the smaller communities. A vacancy rate of 6.1 percent I think is across the board in the NWT when setting rental rates for various public housing units. I just want to ask the Minister why is this vacancy rate of 6.1 being the bar, why hasn't it changed over the last number of years? I know vacancy rates are different all across the Territories. A lot of the people that live in public housing are transients, either be it in Yellowknife or some of the larger centres. So that raises the vacancy rates up for all of the smaller communities in which people usually remain in public housing. Therefore, we've got lower vacancy rates, but the rents reflect the vacancy rates in Yellowknife, which affect the smaller communities. Why does the department carry one rate territory wide as opposed to maybe a regional rate? Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The 6.1 percent is the average across the Territories in terms of the number of vacant units. That one is calculated annually. So that's what it is now. Mr. Chairman, I'll make the note that that vacancy rate of course drives the rates that are charged for units in a different region. We noticed that the rates for this year compared to last year, if you take the same months, is about 1 percent less because of the savings that have been achieved through utilities and operating costs and so on. So the system is working for the benefit of renters.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Villeneuve.

MR. VILLENEUVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know that the government doesn't subsidize the LHOs for any vacant units in their communities. A vacancy is determined on a day-to-day basis on a sliding scale of some sort. Why did the vacancy rule change from 15 days per month to a daily basis per month for communities to receive funding? Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will ask Jeff to answer.

---Laughter

...I am not familiar with.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Anderson.

MR. ANDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In our consultations with the local housing organizations, we did make a change to our rent calculations effective April 1, 2007. So for communities that have a vacancy rate of 6.1 percent or less, we left them at 6.1 percent through our consultations with the local housing organizations and steering committee. For ones that were higher than that, the Housing Corporation and the Department of Education and the steering committee, local housing organization members, agreed to a rate of 10 percent. So we have

that in place for April 1. The overall rental rates for next year actually went down about half a percent, as Mr. Handley mentioned. It's something we are going to challenge all of our local housing associations to do to work towards getting the vacancy rates as low as we possibly can, in terms of speeding up renovations and getting rid of any surplus units due to migration and that sort of thing.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Anderson. Anything further, Mr. Villeneuve?

MR. VILLENEUVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that, Jeff. Just on another point just for getting some of the public housing units in the smaller communities, some of the older units, in some of my communities the transaction period from when the Housing Corporation says we are going to give you this unit for \$1 and you are going to assume all the property tax and everything that goes along with homeownership, some people have been working with the Housing Corporation for upwards of five years to get this transaction completed. I am just wondering why it is taking so long for the Housing Corporation to get rid of or offload public housing units which is part of the mandate for the Housing Corporation. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Villeneuve. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am not sure why it is taking so long. It is taking a long time. It seems like it should be pretty straightforward to get an appraisal on the unit, and that determines the price. I am not sure what the delay is, whether they just can't agree on the price or whatever it may be. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Next on the list I have Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have three questions for the Minister and his staff there. This one has to deal with the federal northern housing trust fund in terms of the affordable housing initiative. In his opening statement, the Minister talked about the increase due to this type of funding we are receiving from the federal government. I want to ask the Minister if this type of funding would continue. Is there a time frame on this? Is this a one-time funding initiative? Will I tell the people in my region whether this type of funding will continue until a certain period of years before it lapses? Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, this program, the affordable housing initiative money is for a three-year period; from 2006-07, '07-08 and '08-09. So by the end of March '09 it will be the end of the program unless a new one is negotiated, but this is one-time three-year funding.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, the increase of funding for our affordable housing initiative in the Northwest Territories, I want to ask the Minister with regard to reducing the core need throughout the Northwest Territories. Is the Minister aware that

recent past reports have indicated that the people in my region, the Sahtu region, had a high core need followed by the region of Nahendeh? Can the Minister advise me today if this number is decreasing over the years and we will see a decrease where it will be an acceptable, satisfactory level at least for me as an MLA and the people of the Northwest Territories? Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I can assure the Member that the core need will go down in the Sahtu. For example, we are putting in 94 units over three years. The core need in that region is...Do we know what it is? It will be reduced by 94 units less the number of new people who move in and so on. In total, putting 530 living units in the Territories with a core need of about 2,300 units should make a noticeable difference. Sorry, Mr. Chairman. There were 240 houses in need in the Sahtu. We are putting in 94. So it will help. It isn't going to solve the problem, but it will make a difference.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chair, the high core needs in my region, as in other regions, we have different needs and different areas of concern and I wanted to commend the Minister just on taking the risk of having some of these units be brought into my region due to the limitation of our winter roads and the extra care to bring these units into our region because of what we are faced with in my region as opposed to the regions having an all-weather road here.

Mr. Chairman, I wanted to ask the Minister, in terms of reducing the core need and hoping we get the point where we could somewhat feel comfortable in my region, is the Minister working and his staff working with my region in terms of looking at some creative solutions like you guys mentioned, in terms of bringing in these units before the winter road closes? Otherwise we have to wait for the barge and all the other things that go along with delays. I think that's good thinking. It's proper thinking. It shows leadership.

I wanted to ask the Minister in terms of working with our region on these specific areas that need to be addressed from the point of view of the Sahtu region, at least. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the Member and all Members' support in stepping out ahead and taking some risk in taking units into areas like the Sahtu. It's not tolerable, in our view, to have, in Colville Lake for example, 76 percent core need. So the only way of getting them in is with winter road or by flying them in. So we have to step out in front and it's true in the other communities as well. Now we're working much closer with the communities. In Deline, for example, where we've got 42 percent core need, the community corporation is building a five-plex on their own. So we'll continue to work with all of the communities to work toward getting that core need down to where it should be. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, the Minister also commented on his opening statement to us here, on page 2 he talked about community affairs on land requirements with the Department of MACA. Are the department and the NWT Housing Corporation working very close, because there's land officers' positions in our region that you need to have the left hand letting the right hand know about these land issues in our small communities that need to be developed and I guess some more forward thinking in terms of getting these lots available in all of our communities? The Minister indicated a number of units being considered for the Sahtu region over the next three years, that requires a lot of work. So I wanted to ask the Minister in terms of I need to see something I guess in terms of, for my own satisfaction, give me something general. So I would like to ask the Minister in terms of his type of support he's getting from his staff to see that land will be ready, land will be available for units that are planned for the communities that are indicated for the Northwest Territories. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, we realize that we have to work very closely with the community and community leadership and also with MACA in order to meet the land needs to keep up with our schedule for new houses. We are working closely, and a good example is the project we're working on in Good Hope to develop a 30 lot subdivision. Those are important arrangements. We've also made this a priority with our regional management committee, because it does involve more than just the corporation to make sure that we have the land. If we don't have the land, we can't build the houses. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, my last one will be a comment on my last question, but I wanted to ask the Minister here in terms of the units we have now available for our people that are through the rental units and some of these rental units, some of the owners have, and I think the Minister made some comments at least to ourselves as a committee that these units could be sold to people who have lived in them for 20 or 25 years and they may have some difficulty. I think the Minister has alluded to some of the new programs that may help alleviate some of these issues to have renters become homeowners. I think that's very wise. I think it's a real good move to start having people now take responsibility for their homes and to start taking the ownership of these homes now and not have this dependency be so strong. So I think the Minister has a tough job ahead of him in terms of how do we uncreate that dependency? We have an interdependency in terms of homeownership. So I think he's going to have a challenging time to have these units... They should be only for people that really need them like the elderly people, people who are disabled. But people that could own their home should really own their homes now. We have to create that sense of independence of ownership for these homeowners, because right now we have too many people dependent on units. So I just want to leave that

with the Minister. I don't know if there's a question there, Mr. Chair, I know my time is up. So I wanted to leave that for him. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Mahsi, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Minister.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's exactly our objective, is to get as many people back into homeownership as possible. It is a huge job. We do have some of our reorganization or consolidation programs set up so that we, number one, through the STEP program we're able to help people with the education side of how to manage a home, financial planning and so on, those modules. Second is we've got the Transitional Lease Program through the HELP program that will help people to make that transition into homeownership. Mr. Chairman, it will be a task that's going to take more than a year, it's going to take time, but I think people want to be independent, they want to be self-reliant and we're going to focus our efforts and that of the LHOs to do that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay): Thank you, Mr. Minister. General comments, next I have Mr. Braden.

MR. BRADEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to pick up on the line of questioning that we ran out of time on and that was on the market housing initiative. The Minister advised of certain numbers of houses that had been built and then leased out and rented. The information I was looking for though, Mr. Chairman, was how many of these 42 units actually went to the intended emergency requirement, which were nurses and teachers? We went through quite a bit of work to try to get these houses in place as soon as we could for these people, but I know that as we were going through the implementation, there were issues regarding the cost of the units, whether or not they were furnished, whether or not they were set up on time and we were having difficulties serving the intended tenant group. Just how are we doing now? Out of these 42 units, how many have gone to the teachers and nurses in our communities, Madam Chair?

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. All of the units in phase one, except for three, are being rented. Now they could be rented by a nurse, by a teacher, by a person working in the community for the band, but they're there for the purpose. The purpose was to increase the amount of market housing. These people are paying market prices for their houses. Three of the units were sold to someone else, and even in that way they helped to meet a housing shortage in that community because somebody now is living in a house that they bought. Now three of the ones, when I say that out of the 22 houses three are on a Supported Lease Program, which one of our objectives is to get people into homeownership, so they're being rented, they're the Supported Lease Program, three are sold, the rest are rented. Did you want me to finish answering? Maybe I'm off track here, Madam Chair.

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

MR. BRADEN: Madam Chair, the Legislature undertook to finance this project on an emergency basis because we were having trouble housing essential workers in communities. The objective was not, when the program was first brought to us, was not to create a housing market in these tiny communities. Don't give me that. I wouldn't have bought that in the first place. We wanted units in there so teachers and nurses could get a good place to stay and these communities would be able to stay there. I don't care if they're rented or leased or sold to other workers in the community. That was not the objective that was brought to this House and not the reason we approved it. Can the Minister tell us yes or no or how many nurses and teachers are housed through the 42 units put on the ground for the market housing initiative? If he can't advise of that information, that's fine, perhaps he can at a later date, but I want to know did it work to satisfy the initial objective, Madam Chair?

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Madam Chair, maybe very quickly I'll go through year one, because I almost have to go through it community by community, but in year one in Tulita, of the units there, there were three units taken into Tulita, two are occupied by teachers, one unit was sold. In Fort Good Hope, there's two units there. One is rented by a professional -- I'm not sure what the person does -- and one is rented by the Yamoga Land Corporation. In Fort Liard, one unit is rented by a health care provider and one unit is rented by a teacher. In Lutselk'e all the units are occupied. Two are rented under the Supported Lease Program; one is rented by a health care provider, one rented by a teacher. In Fort Resolution, all the units are occupied and one unit is rented by the Supported Lease Program, one unit has an offer to purchase on it through the Supported Lease Program, two units are rented by teachers and one unit is rented by some other professional, I don't know who. In Norman Wells the same thing, one unit is rented by a health care provider, one rented by policing services and three by other professionals. In Fort Good Hope there was one unit and it was sold to a community resident.

But has this achieved its purpose in terms of housing for professionals? Absolutely. Did it do it 100 percent? No, we never believed it would and we weren't going to leave units vacant because of the make-up of teachers or nurses in that year we didn't need the unit quite the way it was or people didn't want that big a house, there are other people in the communities who had needs too.

When we go into year two, it's the same sort of thing. By far the majority of these houses are being rented by professionals, teachers, nurses, whoever they may be, in a way that allows the community to provide their needs for professional services. Madam Chair, as we go through with these market units though, we're going to leave, as much as possible, latitude for the community leaders to decide how these units are going to be used. If they choose to put the band manager in one of them, that's okay. The band manager gets a house and pays market rent for it. While the original objective was to create market communities, the end effect is we need to have, when a teacher comes into the community, some choice for that teacher. If it's a single person, they don't want a four-bedroom house, they want a one-bedroom house and so on. So there has to be some flexibility built in as this program continues. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

MR. BRADEN: Madam Chair, I wasn't expecting 100 percent effectiveness or uptake. From the list that I got for the first year, nine out of 22. Now maybe I wasn't hearing it correctly or maybe we need to get something on paper to look at again, but perhaps around 50 percent uptake. Still, Madam Chair, and I'm very pleased to see that these units are, for the most part, being used and occupied by people who are residents of the community and that's great, but this Assembly, and I looked at this and I voted this money at a time when there wasn't a lot of money around here to try to solve a given problem. It didn't quite work out that way and it morphed into something. Yes, it did the communities good, I'm not taking away from that, but the original intention and the purpose and the request that was put before this committee was not as worked out in the end and even a 50 percent success rate is not that great. Madam Chair, my point here is I was seeking some accountability for what the Housing Corporation put in front of us, what, four years ago, three years ago now? I'm trying to seek some results. What happened in the end and what I'm getting here is about a 50 percent success rate. It's not a great success rate. But what I have problems with is when a Minister or department brings something in front of me and then as it rolls out or as it develops or as it changes, it becomes something else and it's sold as a success story. I don't like that. I'm going to be watching very carefully for things that are put in front of me as one, and then over time might develop into another. That's why I'm seeking some information and results on this program, Madam Chair. That will do.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Braden. One thing that, I guess, I'm not going to get over there for general comments, one thing I'd be curious about is if the government can actually market housing and then tell somebody you can't rent it because you're not a teacher or a nurse. If somebody qualifies to rent and the government is putting housing out there, I don't know. I'm curious to know what the Premier thinks. If the government is renting housing, can you restrict who can apply if they qualify and have the resources to pay the rent on who can rent and who can't? I mean if it's leased by the education or the health services and then subleased to their employees, that's one thing, but I don't know if the government can do that. Mr. Handley.

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. These units were not just meant to house teachers and nurses and we'd leave it empty if there was no teacher or nurse to go into it, but they were there to enable a community to be able to attract the professional services they needed. Now when I go through it, and I went through it pretty fast, Mr. Braden, but when I count off the ones who went through here, there are, in the first year, 15 out of 22 of the units went to clearly government-type employees, professionals, teachers, nurses, police and so on. Fifteen out of 22, not nine. So somewhere, when I went through it, we missed some. Then on top of that, one was rented to the Yamoga Land Corporation; make it 16. But you're right, Madam Chair; we can't and we wouldn't want to say to somebody because they're an engineer working for somebody else in that little community that they can't rent the house because they're not a teacher. We're there to make market rented houses available for that community's purposes and that's why we want to give the communities

more flexibility. Let them decide what services they need most.

So I think 15 out of 22 is a pretty good mark, and if I got that on my university exams I was happy. So I'm happy here.

---Laughter

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Handley. Thank you, Mr. Braden. Alright, I have one last person on the list under general comments and that's Mr. Ramsay. That's going to take us almost up to winding it up here today folks, so I think that will be it. Mr. Ramsay, you're up last.

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the Minister for his indulgence on a few more questions. Last year when we had the Housing Corporation before us, I made mention of the fact that perhaps a shift in government policy towards more multi-unit, multi-dwelling units would be a better way to go. I think having travelled to a number of communities here in the Northwest Territories, one of the demographics that people often talk about is the young single professional. Oftentimes it's a teacher or a nurse or whoever is in the community who needs housing. They don't need a stand-alone house; what they need is a roof over their head and a place to sleep at night that's comfortable. I think, as a government, we have to try to move towards more of a multi-unit, multi-dwelling set-up. Gone are the days when we can afford to build a house for everybody. We need to really take a good hard look at where we're spending our money. I don't know if the Minister, in this circumstance, has the information in regards to a breakdown of what the 580 units will entail. Are they all stand-alone? What's the mix of multi-unit dwelling and single households, Madam Chair? Thank you.

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

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. We heard the Members loud and clear last year and I can tell you that there are no public housing units being built as detached homes. We're not doing that anymore. They're all multi-family, multi-unit homes. Now when we look at the 530 in the affordable housing initiative, most of the units, I don't have an exact breakdown, but most of the units are part of multi-plexes of some sort. They're duplexes, they're four-plexes, they're six-plexes, there's even eight-plexes and so on, but we are going away from building just stand-alone houses. They're too expensive and often not what people want to afford or can afford to rent or to purchase.

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

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to comment on that. I think that is the right thing to be doing, especially given the cost of fuel and utilities in the smaller communities and having more of economies of scale and all under one roof is much more advantageous to us and to the scarce resources we have to build houses in the Northwest Territories. With that, I want to say thanks to the Minister and to his staff. Again, I do applaud them on the work that's been done there. I am not a member of the Standing Committee on Social Programs,

but I do watch the progress and I have been impressed with the progress. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. Any closing comments, Mr. Handley?

HON. JOE HANDLEY: Are we concluding the Housing Corporation now?

---Laughter

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Okay. That would have been just comments, but that's okay. What is the wish of the committee now? Mr. Lafferty.

MR. LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Madam Chair. I move we report progress.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. The motion is in order. The motion is not debatable. All those in favour of the motion? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress. Thank you, Mr. Handley. Thank you, Mr. Jeff Anderson. Thank you, Mr. Jeff Polakoff. We'll see you tomorrow. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Report of Committee of the Whole. Mrs. Groenewegen.

ITEM 21: REPORT OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 21, Appropriation Act, 2007-2008 and Committee Report 9-15(5), and would like to report progress. I move that the report of the Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Do we have a seconder? The honourable Member for Range Lake, Ms. Lee. The motion is in order. All those in favour? All those opposed? The motion is carried.

---Carried

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

ITEM 22: ORDERS OF THE DAY

CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Mercer): Orders of the day for Tuesday, February 13, 2007, 11:00 a.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Oral Questions
7. Written Questions
8. Replies to the Budget Address
9. Petitions

10. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
11. Tabling of documents
12. Notices of Motion
13. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
14. First Reading of Bills
 - Bill 9, Write-off of Assets Act, 2006-2007
 - Bill 22, Supplementary Appropriation Act, No. 3, 2006-2007
15. Second Reading of Bills
16. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Bill 18, An Act to Amend the Education Act
 - Bill 19, An Act to Amend the Archives Act
 - Bill 21, Appropriation Act, 2007-2008
 - Committee Report 7-15(5), Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight Report on the 2007-2008 Pre-Budget Review Process
 - Committee Report 8-15(5), Standing Committee on Governance and Economic Development Report on the 2007-2008 Pre-Budget Review Process
 - Committee Report 9-15(5), Standing Committee on Social Programs Report on the 2007-2008 Pre-Budget Review Process
17. Report of Committee of the Whole
18. Third Reading of Bills
19. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 13, 2007, at 11:00 a.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 17:55.