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The Honourable Jackie Jacobson, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

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YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
Friday, May 25, 2012
Members Present

Hon. Glen Abernethy, Hon. Tom Beaulieu, Ms. Bisaro, Mr. Blake, Mr. Bouchard, Mr. Bromley, Mr. Dolynny, Mrs. Groenewegen, Mr. Hawkins, Hon. Jackie Jacobson, Hon. Jackson Lafferty, Hon. Bob McLeod, Hon. Robert McLeod, Mr. Menicoche, Hon. Michael Miltenberger, Mr. Moses, Mr. Nadli, Hon. David Ramsay, Mr. Yakeleya

The House met at 10:06 a.m.

Prayer

---Prayer

SPEAKER (Hon. Jackie Jacobson): Good morning, colleagues. Item 2, Ministers' statements. The honourable Minister of Housing, Mr. McLeod.

Ministers' Statements
**MINISTER'S STATEMENT 2-17(3):
NEW PUBLIC HOUSING RENT SCALE**

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NWT Housing Corporation is committed to implementing a fair and sustainable public housing rent scale. It is one of the strategic actions outlined in Building for the Future: Northern Solutions for Northern Housing. It was also identified as a key component of the 17th Legislative Assembly's priority to address housing needs.

Last month I released the public housing rent scale that will be implemented on July 1st. This rent scale addresses the many concerns we have heard from residents and Members of the Legislative Assembly over the past several years.

First, residents wanted the public housing rent scale to be simpler and more predictable. The previous approach was a complicated model with many adjustments in calculating rent. Tenants didn't always know what their rent was going to be from month to month. As an example, last month there were 311 public housing tenants with incomes between \$2,500 and \$3,750. These tenants paid 167 different rents ranging from zero to \$1,050. With the new rent scale, all household incomes in this range will pay between \$325 and \$365, depending on community. This will allow tenants to know their rent from month to month and plan their household budgets accordingly.

Residents also told us they wanted the public housing rent scale to address the disincentive to work. The new rent scale eliminates the bias against employment income, allows residents to earn extra income without rent changing, and provides for modest rent increases as income levels rise. The new minimum rent is set at between \$70 and \$80, depending on community, and

maximum rent at \$1,445 to \$1,625 with rent increasing as household income increases. This means that low-income tenants will pay about 4 percent of their income. Maximum rent will be 19.5 percent of income. The maximum rent under the old rent scale was up to 30 percent of income which translates into an overall 10.5 percent reduction in the maximum rents we can charge for higher income working Northerners in public housing. The overall changes to the rent scale will mean more money available to families to spend in the communities on their children and for the necessities of life.

The new maximum rents will be particularly beneficial for seasonal workers. During months that they are employed, seasonal workers often faced large rent increases, with rent as high as \$4,600 per month in some communities. These workers often depend on this income for the entire year and the new maximum rent will ensure there is no disincentive to residents that depend on seasonal income.

Finally, residents also wanted the new public housing rent scale to be fair. The new scale means that rent for public housing tenants will be the same for tenants with similar incomes, regardless of the community they live in. This helps to address cost of living in our highest cost communities. For example, it costs about \$42,000 per year to operate each public housing unit in Paulatuk. This is much higher than for lower cost communities like Hay River where costs are typically about \$12,000 per unit per year. Keeping public housing rent similar, regardless of community, contributes to the sustainability of all NWT communities.

The changes we are making must be done in a manner that helps ensure the sustainability of the public housing program. One result of the introduction of the new minimum rent is that seniors will now pay rent in public housing. I understand this is a major change and that not everyone is going to be supportive. The reality is that the number of seniors residing in public housing is increasing as the population ages. At the same time, costs to operate public housing continue to increase and funding from the federal government to operate social housing is being eliminated.

Fairness is also a factor in this change. For example, last month using the old rent scale there

were two households that earned essentially the same monthly income of \$3,690. The first household is a single mother with two children who was charged \$985 in rent, or 27 percent of the household income. The second household is two seniors living alone who paid zero rent. With the new rent scales, the single mother will pay \$325 in rent, about 9 percent of income, and the seniors would pay \$160 in rent or 4 percent of income.

The lower rent for the seniors with the new rent scale in this example, is because there will be an income exemption of \$1,000 for each senior in the household as part of the calculation of income. This lowers rent for seniors compared with other households.

Mr. Speaker, the new public housing rent scale is simpler, more predictable and fairer. It addresses the disincentive to work and it does these things while ensuring the program remains sustainable, given the declining federal funding. This change will go into effect on July 1st and I will continue to keep the Assembly updated on this initiative. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The honourable Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment, Mr. Ramsay.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 3-17(3):
IMPROVING THE NWT PARKS EXPERIENCE

HON. DAVID RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northwest Territories parks and campgrounds attract thousands of visitors to our territory every summer. They are a vital element of our tourism sector, and one we continue to invest in heavily by ensuring they are maintained, improved and made more accessible to visitors. These facilities are also enjoyed by our own residents and contribute enormously to the quality of life that we enjoy here in Canada's North.

The 2012 parks season formally opened on May 15th and two new initiatives from the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment are making it easier than ever for visitors to access the territorial parks system.

We have developed a new NWT parks webpage to enable visitors to learn more about our extensive network of parks and recreation areas, book campsites and plan their visits to the NWT, all in an attractive, up-to-date and user-friendly format.

Our new webpage contains valuable information about all 34 parks in the Northwest Territories system. It includes interactive maps, events calendars and photo galleries, and promotes and increases tourism by highlighting nearby communities, cultural experiences and wilderness attractions.

Use of the on-line booking tool for NWT campgrounds has continued to rise, and campers can book sites at more parks on-line.

We have also introduced a multi-park seasonal day-use permit in the North Slave region, giving parks users in this region full summer access to day-use facilities at the Fred Henne, Prelude Lake and Reid Lake territorial parks for a single reduced fee.

We hope that this initiative will encourage and allow even more residents, especially families, to discover and experience the naturally spectacular parks facilities that we have right here in our backyard.

ITI invested over \$1.5 million in infrastructure upgrades and enhancements to the parks system last year. We continue to work through our regional offices to identify project enhancements that will increase the attractiveness and accessibility of our parks.

Mr. Speaker, continued investment in the NWT's spectacular parks infrastructure is key to supporting and growing tourism in the NWT, and reflects this Assembly's priority and commitment to strengthen and diversify the NWT's economy. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Ramsay. The honourable Minister of Justice, Mr. Abernethy.

MINISTER'S STATEMENT 4-17(3):
ABORIGINAL POLICING
PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Mr. Speaker, I wish to update the Assembly on programs that give our Aboriginal youth a stepping stone to serving their communities in the RCMP.

Our Assembly has identified a goal of diversifying our economy, ensuring that people in each community and region have choices. The Aboriginal Community Constable Program and the Aboriginal Pre-Cadet Training Program are innovative training programs that support this goal.

The Community Constable Program continues the original pilot program with a second intake of candidates. There are two positions available for Aboriginal people 19 years or older to attend a 20-week session at the RCMP Training Academy in Regina. Each cadet will learn the skills they need to become sworn peace officers and leaders in their communities.

Each cadet is paid for the time they spend training, including a week-long trip back to their home community. Once training is complete, the constables have an additional six-month field training posting in an NWT detachment to round out their experience.

With the deadline for applications coming up on June 1st, we will have a number of candidates vying for the positions available. The training is rigorous, as the work community constables perform is

demanding. Cadets learn to assist regular police officers in investigations and to be secondary support response personnel. Most importantly, they are a vital link between the community and the RCMP.

The second program is for those aged 19 to 29 who want to see if the RCMP may be right for them and to gain valuable work experience. The RCMP Aboriginal Pre-Cadet Training Program is running from May to August. This 17-week training session will appeal to those who wish to learn about careers in policing or who want to challenge themselves mentally and physically. This program enhances self-esteem and encourages cadets to become role models. Graduates are ready to further their studies, work in justice-related fields or pursue career options with the RCMP.

Through these paid training programs, I want to highlight the rewarding career opportunities available to our residents. We are always exploring opportunities with the RCMP to encourage NWT residents to consider policing-related careers.

Although it is not an official program, I would also like to highlight today the good work recently done here in Yellowknife by bringing youth in the Canadian Rangers to Yellowknife to have them work with Corporal Tammy McKenzie of "G" Division. They received firsthand experience of what it is like to be an RCMP constable, including manning check-stops.

I ask Members today to let the youth in your ridings know about these programs, and I encourage anyone who is interested in a career in policing to talk to the RCMP officers in their communities or visit the RCMP website. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Item 3, Members' statements. The honourable Member for Tu Nedhe, Mr. Nadli.

Members' Statements

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON BENEFITS OF TRADITIONAL SPRING HUNT

MR. NADLI: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. [Translation] This time of year in the springtime a lot of people like to be out on the land, and in the mornings the birds sing and it's getting warm again. In the communities the freight comes in from down south also with the barges. Because of that, items are sometimes expensive. However, we do need things from down south in the communities. Things that come in from the South is either by barge or trucking, so sometimes when they do get the items from the South this is what urges the children in the communities with regard to freight and food, and things are kind of expensive. Sometimes we don't really know how to preserve the foods from other parts of the world. Sometimes people are in the

bush and thriving on wildlife food such as moose and migratory birds.

There's a lot of people that still live out on the land and it does seem like that way of living is still thriving well. Sometimes yearly there are people who do subsist on the wildlife out in the bush, they do get some assistance annually. There are some young people that sometimes help the older people out on the land and sometimes when they do kill wildlife they share it among the communities. Also, the elders help them in treating the wildlife meat.

There are some items that we have talked about as a government, is the Community Harvesting Program and it will be good if it continues to be used by people who do wildlife living out in the communities. Mahsi. [Translation ends]

MR. SPEAKER: The honourable Member for Range Lake, Mr. Dolyunny.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON LOWERING COST OF LIVING THROUGH HYDRO DEVELOPMENT

MR. DOLYUNNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In yesterday's budget address the Minister of Finance made a very bold statement about the importance of lowering the cost of living to the access of lowering our power costs generated by hydro. He further referenced the need for an outside-the-box thinking to resolve this dilemma. You know, he's very right; but does this government have the appetite to make the needed infrastructure investment to follow through with such a bold, motherly statement?

The NWT resident is facing unprecedented costs for living in the North, from high food prices to extreme travel costs to massive increases in their energy costs. I always wonder what truly keeps people wanting to live in the North with such a high living cost. That said, there is an outside-the-box project that could alleviate a large portion of this energy costing issue and immediately lower the cost of living. The answer is transmission lines.

The construction of a transmission line from the Taltson hydro plant via the South Slave through Hay River and connecting into the Alberta grid system would for the first time allow the full electrically capacity of the Taltson project. Think about it: Lower electricity prices for the South Slave, forfeiting the changeover of our government buildings to pellet boilers, and maybe the potential for export power to our southern neighbours. This would immediately affect all ratepayers, lower all the energy cost demands for the entire territory, wean us off our thirst for fossil fuels and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Now I know there are some naysayers out there that make reference that this cannot be done due to grading issues, NWT precipitation records,

technology challenges and cost investment. I say to these people: Offer me a large-scale alternative that will have the same economic and tangible return on our investment and I think the answer is very clear.

So I say to this government: If you truly mean what you say in wanting to lower our cost of living and energy costs, then I would expect us to stop putting these bold statements into print. Let's make the business case, let's do the proper investment, and let's leverage our support unilaterally to something we know that will have a direct impact to the bottom line of all taxpayers. Let's stop penalizing our residents with continued rate increases and energy costs and let's start generating the millions of dollars transmission lines could offer.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON ECE FRENCH LANGUAGE EXAM CHALLENGE POLICY

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to bring some emphasis to a policy issue within the Education department, a policy which will affect the post-secondary aspirations of our high school students. I think Members know that the NWT high school curriculum follows that of Alberta and I ask why then do our policies not do the same.

Last September, Alberta Education, in a misguided move, determined that French second language exams could only be written by students taking those courses, that other students could not challenge the exam. Not surprisingly, NWT Education followed Alberta's lead and we also removed the challenge provision for French second language courses from NWT students. But Alberta, once they fully realized the full implications of their new policy, rightfully reversed their policy decision one month later and they returned to their original situation.

NWT Education, however, did not. Our students are now at a disadvantage in comparison to their Alberta counterparts, and to what end? For what purpose? Any NWT student proficient in French is prohibited from gaining a potential extra credit, an extra credit that could make or break their acceptance to university or other post-secondary institutions.

Some schools require a high school language credit for entrance into a particular program and those same schools may not recognize an immersion language course, for instance, for that credit.

In addition, a student can be very proficient in French, a French-first language student, for instance, and they may not need to take a French second language course. They already have the

skills, yet they cannot now challenge the exam to get their needed credits for graduation.

It's hard enough for NWT students to compete for spots in post-secondary schools. This just makes it harder, Mr. Speaker. At a time when we should be helping out students achieve the greatest success possible, when they are embarking on a significant new direction in their lives, we are throwing up roadblocks for them to try to get over.

I've tried many times to understand the department's rationale. I've considered this issue in the last several weeks and I can see no valid reason for this policy change. Why are we doing this, Mr. Speaker?

I will have this and other questions for the Minister of Education at the appropriate time. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The honourable Member for Hay River North, Mr. Bouchard.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON TOWN OF HAY RIVER APPRECIATION NIGHT

MR. BOUCHARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague and I will be returning to Hay River this evening for an appreciation night for the Town of Hay River staff. We will be honoured to host the Minister of MACA, the Honourable R.C. McLeod, in Hay River.

The appreciation of the staff in Hay River is greatly appreciated there. The local jobs affect the community greatly. The staff there have the opportunity to take on training, skills development in first aid, equipment training, water treatment and mechanics. We feel these are very important staff positions in the community. These people spend their money in the community and throughout the North, so we're honoured tonight to attend that meeting. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON CONSTRUCTION OF HABITAT FOR HUMANITY HOMES IN WELEDEH

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to salute the good work going on in my Weledeh riding with the construction of two new homes with assistance from Habitat for Humanity.

Construction is expected to start in June on a new duplex in the Niven Lake subdivision, houses that will eventually be the homes of two four-person families. The new families will move from the rental market into home ownership, thanks to the socially progressive work of this organization and the affordable terms of construction and purchase.

Habitat for Humanity assumes a CMHC backed mortgage which families begin paying as soon as

the homes are completed. It's a no-interest, no down payment, 25-year mortgage. Payments are set at 25 percent of household income. Homes are constructed with volunteer labour and it's expected that there will be donations of building materials. The new owners participate in the construction, with the required commitment of 500 volunteer hours. These are the first Habitat for Humanity homes to be built in the Northwest Territories and 18 applications were received for the two units available.

Habitat for Humanity has applied the socially progressive approach to home ownership across Canada and around the world. Sixty-nine new homes are being built this year in Canada, putting the organization over the 2,000 mark in homes constructed. The organization has launched home repair and renovation programs and been honoured with a CHMC Aboriginal Housing Award among other plaudits.

Provision for adequate, accessible and affordable housing for the people of the NWT is one of this government's most critical challenges. While it's great to see concerned citizens organizing themselves to lend a hand, it gives us pause to consider how well we're doing meeting our own needs. We have made progress in offering our own home ownership programs and adjusting our rent scales, but far too many of our citizens still lack decent housing, rented or owned.

When it comes time to spend our tight capital dollars, we have to put the critical basic needs of our citizens first. Housing is a key factor in healthy families, communities and the economy. Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. The honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, Mr. Moses.

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
CONGRATULATIONS TO
AURORA COLLEGE GRADUATES

MR. MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before we got back in session, I had the honour to attend the Aurora College graduation in Inuvik where I was able to give a speech to the graduates. I was very honoured and grateful to participate and to see graduates of all ages right out of high school to even see seniors and older adults. For them to take the initiative and invest into their futures and accomplish what they had set out to accomplish, for that I respected each and every one of them for the hard work that they did to get where they were today.

Although I did speak only at the Inuvik event, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all graduates in the Northwest Territories through the Aurora College. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the instructors, the staff, the

mentors and the families that supported these graduates as they went through the course of their years to get the diplomas.

As we know, the cost of living in the Northwest Territories is very high, that student financial assistance only provides so much money and a lot of these families – sometimes single parents – go through a hard time to get through those trials and tribulations to overcome those obstacles to get where they are today. That takes a lot of courage and a lot of determination. For that we should respect our graduates of the Northwest Territories.

With that said, I would like to take the opportunity to address what I had mentioned in my speech to all of the graduates. I did mention that our greatest resource in the Northwest Territories is not our oil, gas or diamonds; it is our people. In the Northwest Territories it is very unique that we help our people. We share with our people. We take them under our wing and help them become better people. If they are struggling, we try to get them out of those situations.

We need to invest more in our education, our health and our wellness of our people so that they can become educated, they can become healthy, so that they are the ones who can go out and get the jobs in our education systems, our schools, even translators. We need to put that investment there.

Once all our resources are gone in the Northwest Territories, we are going to be left with the people who were here first. We are going to be left with the people that are struggling to get through these jobs, left with people who are starting to get sucked into the hardships of economy development with the alcohol, drugs and addictions.

As the economy slows, we have to look at investing into something else and that is people of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
IMPACT OF FEDERAL POLICIES ON
NATIONAL PARKS IN THE NAHENDEH RIDING

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I want to speak about the potential impacts of the federal government on our park system, most particularly the Nahanni National Park in my riding. The residents and the leadership of Fort Simpson are very concerned about these reductions to these programs and services in the parks budget.

A few weeks ago I issued a press release stating my concerns, and today I look to our government to take a position and advocate on behalf to the federal government about how these impacts may be negative to the region and the people.

Canada is saying minimal impacts but my biggest concern is that, as we agree to expand our park, they had promised increased expenditures, increased jobs to the Nahendeh region and to the communities. Our region is a have-not and does benefit from the increased activity as a result of the expansion of the Nahanni National Park Reserve. I don't want to see those opportunities missed there.

Once again, I would like to call upon our government to take a position and speak with the federal counterparts, that future plan cutbacks or reductions should not happen and we will have the discussion with the appropriate Minister during question period. Thank you very much.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
MAY 26 – NATIONAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL
HEALING AND RECONCILIATION DAY

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow, May 26th, is a very important day in the Northwest Territories. The last government recognized May 26th as National Residential School Reconciliation and Healing. The point that I want to raise this morning is that tomorrow is a day that this government is the only government in Canada that has recognized this day for residential school survivors.

In the Northwest Territories we affect over 10,000 students, and many communities in the Northwest Territories are feeling and healing on a recovery and healing through the residential schools. This is a chapter in our life as Aboriginal people and people in the communities that was sadly enforced by policies of the past governments and the federal government, and for whatever reasons they were operated by the churches. It had a huge impact on our people and today we're feeling the effects of it through the amount of alcoholism, the amount of addictions, the amount of issues dealing with families and even with our languages.

Tomorrow gives the acknowledgement to the students, to the families to say we no longer want to be the part of a victim; we want to be part of the people that stood for something that you were okay and that what was done to you may not be done anymore in the future.

This government needs to be applauded for taking a stand to acknowledge. I know June 11th, when I was working, I never thought I would hear a Prime Minister stand up in the House of Parliament and say on behalf of his government that he was sorry to the Aboriginal people, to me when I was six years old living in residential school.

We have to look at this and I look forward to this government doing something to commemorate tomorrow and future years as to what we can do to

begin the reconciliation process and strengthen that process. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON
DEH CHO BRIDGE PROJECT

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of us in this Chamber may have heard of a little project referred to as the Deh Cho Bridge. As a matter of fact, it's the largest infrastructure project that our government has ever supported to date. With all projects, it certainly has had its challenges, its issues and certainly it's had its concerns. But frankly, let's put it on the record: what project hasn't had problems, challenges, or issues or concerns?

We all know that the Deh Cho Bridge was a project born out of the vision and aspirations of the people and the community of Fort Providence. It's a project that brought together an excellent partnership to the table, the Dene and the Metis of that region. In an area that often has been described to me as certainly an economically depressed region, this was a great opportunity for these people to be involved in a project.

It's well known that I've been a stalwart supporter of this project, this partnership, and I've certainly stood behind them steadfastly, the people of Fort Providence, who want to be part of their own destiny on their traditional lands. On a number of occasions the Deh Cho Bridge project has been referred to "a gong show." Clearly in Hansard it is, in my opinion. I'm not speaking for the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation or certainly the people of Fort Providence, but I'm not sure how anyone can see or hear those repeated comments referring to it as a gong show as constructive criticism in any way; a viewpoint that I think is insulting and even maybe personal at times.

In speaking to the former Member, who I got to know over eight years, the Member for Deh Cho that is, he often told me how language use like that in the House is very hurtful to the people of the community, the proponents of the project, the vision of the people. So I'm not here to split hairs today, Mr. Speaker, but the fact is although there were numerous examples, the challenge is out there to find one example that seemed to stand for picking on a project of that nature.

Mr. Speaker, implied or direct, I want to make clear in this House today that any attempt to paint a picture that I do not support First Nations' projects and their aspirations is wrong. I will continue to question the realignment of Highway No. 4 on the process, not the project, and certainly not the successful proponents and any attempt to make it any other issue will certainly be met head on by me.

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

MEMBER'S STATEMENT ON BUDGET PROCESS

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we just received the budget address yesterday, very well delivered by our Minister of Finance, I must say. Many minutes of speaking on many pages, I said he didn't skip or miss a word the whole budget.

On the matter of how we get to the budget and the speech that Mr. Miltenberger delivered yesterday, the address that he delivered, I'd just like to talk about a few anomalies as I see them.

We as Regular Members sit on standing committees that consider the business plans. The departments come to our standing committees, they outline for us what the activity of their departments is going to be, and we have some input. Mind you, a lot of the time that we spend looking at this is us receiving information about what the department is doing. However, even after that it is still received at a very high level. Those of us on this side of the House do not really get a close-up, first-hand kind of look at what goes on in the departments. The numbers that we get are large numbers, generally speaking, and they refer to activities which are also rather large. So if during this process we do come up with a creative idea for a change in focus or a new, modest initiative, we then feed that information back to the government. Alas, by the time it gets to them, it's generally too late to include it in the budget.

These are anomalies that I see from my perspective and I'm sure the Cabinet could agree or disagree. It's too late to work them in there, so now we are left with what other options do we have to bring that kind of input and suggestion and change to the process that we would want from this side of the House.

We're often told that when there is such an initiative or change in policy, or focus, or priority, that the government has no money. So if you want that, Regular Members, then you need to look at the budget and find where you want to cut. I have a problem with that. We're not in a position to look at that budget and see where we want to cut. Do you notice that when the government has an initiative? Often it will happen, interestingly, and they will say, oh, we have funded that from within. We do not have that opportunity on this side of the House to find out where there could be some money within a department to fund anything that we want as a priority or as an initiative.

I think that when we come up with these ideas, I don't think the response should be from the

Cabinet, well, you decide where you want to delete something. Because that's all we have the ability to do, is delete when it comes to the budget. I think we should turn that back to the Cabinet and we should say, this is our priority, you find the money, you tell us what you're going to cut.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs. Groenewegen. Item 4, returns to oral questions. Item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery.

Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

MR. SPEAKER: I'd like to welcome our visitors here in the public gallery here today. Thank you for taking an interest in our proceedings.

Item 6, acknowledgements. Item 7, oral questions. The honourable Member for Hay River North, Mr. Bouchard.

Oral Questions

QUESTION 24-17(3):

MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEE TRAINING PROGRAMS

MR. BOUCHARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my Member's statement today I was talking about the appreciation night for the Town of Hay River today, but my questions are for the Minister of MACA. I'd like to know what training MACA provides to municipalities for the help of the employees.

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

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through the School of Community Government we have about 11 core courses that a lot of the municipalities take us up on. For example, in 2011-2012 we had 11 training events that were attended by 135 participants. We work very closely with the communities to offer them programs and training that will allow them to do their job a lot better and with a lot of support from MACA.

MR. BOUCHARD: My next question is: What funding does MACA provide to the municipalities to do its training in the community itself?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: The communities are given an O and M budget. When they feel that there's training that is necessary in their community, then they will, for the most part, use their O and M money to offer training in their communities. However, as I said, again, we do have a lot of courses that are offered through the School of Community Government that a lot of municipalities take us up on, and they meet other people from across the Northwest Territories that are doing similar work and they can share experiences and best practices.

MR. BOUCHARD: As I indicated, the economic benefit that the municipalities provide to their local economy is very strong and I'd like to know from the Minister if MACA is considering increasing some of the funding they provide to the municipalities to do infrastructure development.

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: The New Deal that was done about five years ago is up for an evaluation. It was supposed to be evaluated after five years to see how we can improve how we work with communities. I have to say that with all the infrastructure money that we've been giving to the communities, they have the responsibility for the projects that they want in their communities. It's a program that's worked very well. We've heard back from many of the municipalities that have done a lot of good work with the money that they've been given. However, we are looking at re-evaluating or evaluating the program and seeing how well it's worked. In my opinion, it's worked very well for the communities.

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

MR. BOUCHARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister indicated that there will be a review completed. Can the Minister tell me the expected date on that review completion?

HON. ROBERT MCLEOD: We're just starting the work now; however, I will keep the committee updated on the work as we go forward and hopefully have a finished product for them quite soon. I will keep committee updated on the work that we're doing.

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

QUESTION 25-17(3):
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS FOR
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SURVIVORS

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I spoke about the government's declaration of May 26th tomorrow for the residential school healing and reconciliation process and I want to ask the Minister of Health and Social Services if his department has been looking at what type of programs within the field of mental health and wellness counselling and other sorts of areas that could support residential school survivors to take...

---Interjection

MR. SPEAKER: Continue, Mr. Yakeleya. Sorry about that.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the department look at what type of programs are there for residential school survivors and the ones who are also affected by it?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. The honourable Minister responsible for Health and Social Services, Mr. Beaulieu.

HON. TOM BEAULIEU: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We recognize that a lot of the truth and reconciliation in residential schools have become a very high-profile issue in the government. The department is putting together the action plan that we're going to be rolling out in the next two years. In addition to that, we have about \$6 million, a little over \$6 million in the Community Counselling Program. We have one residential treatment facility that's still operating and we also have about a million dollars or a little over targeted into the communities for aftercare and also for on-the-land programs, if that's something that the communities are interested in carrying out.

MR. YAKELEYA: I do look forward to the Minister's release of that document sometime in the near future and certainly give him support where it's needed to be. I want to ask the Minister, we do have Nats'ejee K'eh Treatment Program at Hay River Dene Reserve. We have what Mrs. Groenewegen talked about, a facility also maybe being opened up in Hay River. We looked at Inuvik where they have possibly a facility, or even in Fort McPherson. So there are some facilities that are going to be available. I want to ask the Minister if there's anywhere in that action on addiction or treatment programs, anywhere in the plan of the department where we can possibly slate a residential school treatment program specifically for survivors of residential school.

HON. TOM BEAULIEU: Within that action plan and also a commitment from the government that we would look at more treatment in existing infrastructure, we will be asking in the action plan that a Minister's forum be struck on well-respected people within the addictions and mental health field to travel to the communities and see first-hand what is required. We are going to be supporting that forum with a request through a supplementary appropriation of about \$300,000 so that they can gather and hear firsthand from the communities what is needed. We believe, from our initial travels, that there is a requirement or a request for some sort of residential treatment in the Beaufort-Delta for residential school survivors.

MR. YAKELEYA: When we look down the Mackenzie Valley and you look into the communities, we have small communities. In a lot of our small communities probably about 60 to 70 percent of the people who live in our communities have some direct impact of residential schools, so there's a high need for this. I want to ask the Minister where in his department is there a policy that says that if you, Mr. Yakeleya, want to go to a program for your family and yourself – and I have a lot of brothers and sisters and they had big families

too – where in the policy that we can go to the department and say we want to go to this program. Is there a policy that will take a family of four or five and say you're going, or are we going to have to wait to future time where we could look at this through the action plan that he's indicated in the next couple of weeks?

HON. TOM BEAULIEU: Right now the residential treatment that is being offered is individual treatment. They used to have couples treatment, but it was decided by the facility that they would be better off to have individual treatment, gender treatment, actually. Right now we don't have residential family treatment available, with the exception of something that could occur on the land. It appeared as though in the communities when we travelled and heard first hand that the communities felt that a solution could be to have families, several families, in fact, going out on the land and going to that type of on-the-land treatment with some counsellors on the land, but at this time we don't have anything as far as family treatment goes unless they go out of the territory.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Your final, short supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, the policy of the genocide intentions by the federal government was to take the children away from the family and do that. We're no different than doing this with this program here, taking people away and looking at treating them in this manner. I think what we're looking for is a family treatment program. That's the power and the strength of the people here. I ask the Minister, would he look at this as one possibility, one solution of family treatment programs on the land as a starting point where they start doing the true healing and reconciliation of the suffering that was done of the residential schools.

HON. TOM BEAULIEU: Mr. Speaker, as part of the action plan and as part of the Ministers' forum, we want to look at all aspects of treatment and if family treatment is something that's proposed by many of the communities, then it's something that we will try to work into our action plan. Thank you.

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

QUESTION 26-17(3):
ECE FRENCH LANGUAGE
EXAM CHALLENGE POLICY

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are addressed to the Minister for Education, Culture and Employment. I highlighted in my statement an unfair situation, I believe, which exists within the Department of Education relative to students being able to challenge a French second language exam.

I'd like to initially ask the Minister what the rationale is for this particular policy change. Our curriculum is allied with that of Alberta, and Alberta made the change and changed it back to the original. We've maintained this change in policy, and as I've said, I think it's unfair, and I'd like to ask the Minister why we're doing this. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. The Minister responsible for of Education, Culture and Employment, Mr. Lafferty.

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. There has been no policy change in the senior secondary school administrative handbook on this particular subject. The core French 30 does not exist anymore in Alberta. French 30 did not have a former exam from Alberta, as well; Alberta education. In no other subject do we or Alberta permit the students to challenge a course in which outcomes have been covered in previous level courses.

This is a particular issue that was discussed with the French coordinators at the divisional education council and the district education authority in June 2011, and they also agree with the rationale. We're following with what the discussion that was agreed upon. Mahsi.

MS. BISARO: I appreciate the response from the Minister. I'm having great difficulty because I have looked at a policy for secondary high school education from Alberta and from NWT and they do seem to be definitely different in that Alberta both policies state that any student can challenge any course. I need to obviously have a better explanation from the Minister as to why what I'm reading doesn't obviously jibe with what he's reading.

I guess I need to ask the Minister again why, when I read the policy, I see that French immersion students may not challenge a French first language exam, and yet it appears to me that the Alberta high school policy does allow it.

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: This is this information that we received from the Department of Education in Alberta. We follow their curriculum, as well, and the examinations. They've also provided some information and also within our department working with the French coordinators that there were some concerns raised where some groups, if the French immersion students increased their average with a course where the outcome is already credited, how fairly are they competing against other students that are applying for the same post-secondary institution. There could be an unfair practice as well. All those are taken into consideration. We are following what the divisional education council has recommended and we continue to work with that.

MS. BISARO: I have to disagree with the Minister. I mean, what I'm hearing the Minister say is that we have students with special skills and we have students who are very proficient in French, and we are penalizing them. We're not allowing them to get an extra course. For some of these students it's the one credit that they need to get them into the particular course that they need and we're saying, no, I'm sorry, but you can't do that. Go back and take the whole course and then maybe you'll get the credit.

I really feel that the Minister is suggesting that students who already have these skills shouldn't be able to challenge an exam and get an extra credit. It is unfair and I really have to wonder if the Minister considers, and I ask the Minister if he considers it's an acceptable way to run a department, to penalize students with special skills over those that don't have those special skills. Thank you.

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: All I can say at this point is that I can bring this information back to the French coordinators at the divisional education council and work with our colleagues in Alberta, as well, on this particular subject, and I can get back to the Member on the outcome of that.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Your final, short supplementary, Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Minister for his commitment. I guess I would like to ask the Minister, if he's going to consult with French coordinators, I would ask him that he also consult with parents. There has been little, to my understanding, consultation with parents whose students are involved in this particular situation. It's one thing for a French coordinator to say that this is the way it should be, but I would ask the Minister to consult with parents and to consult with students as well. Thank you.

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: Mr. Speaker, I agree that we need to reach out to the parents, as well, along with the French coordinators and the divisional education council. We will do that. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. The honourable Member for Range Lake, Mr. Dolynny.

QUESTION 27-17(3):
 LOWERING COST OF LIVING
 THROUGH HYDRO DEVELOPMENT

MR. DOLYNNY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today will be for the Minister of Finance as well as the Minister of the Power Corporation. I think known here was in this agreement. We have seen some pretty good things in the budget address yesterday, especially in areas of community-based alternative energy programs out there. Again, my hat's off to a lot of those great programs in solar, wind, biomass. I think these

projects are definitely needed to enhance our position statement on cost effectiveness for the residents of the Northwest Territories. In a lot of cases, these initiatives are really no more than throwing rice at a freight train for some of the urban centres. I think the fact that remains is that the hydro project which was mentioned in the delivery of the budget address was a motherly statement at that.

What are this government's plans with the hydro project and, more importantly, with the Taltson project? Thank you.

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

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the Member's interest and comments about alternative energy and his interest in hydro.

I would point out that we have done a significant amount of retrofits, for example, and we are saving many hundreds of thousands of dollars, which is a lot of rice. It should be appreciated for the value that it brings. I know that the Member supports that approach.

In terms of the hydro project and in Taltson, we spent over the last probably two Assemblies about \$13 million doing technical assessments both on the project at the Taltson site and the other piece was the initial plan to put a transmission line up to East Arm straight to the diamond mines. That project did not go ahead. The technical work was all done, the geophysical work, the engineering work, all the environmental approvals were there to do the project.

Now we are revisiting the issues that the Member is wisely talking about, the benefit of linking the Taltson and the Snare grid, the ability to be able to power and provide energy to places like Avalon, Nechalacho, Thor Lake, the NICO mines. There are going to be some energy requirements at Giant. There is over \$100 million heating market here in Yellowknife. There is also eventually a long-term benefit if we not only had those grid connections but a southern grid connection so that we could move power north and south. There is tremendous opportunity.

Minister Ramsay's economic plan and his Mining Strategy are going to be contingent upon us being able to deal with that energy issue, so this is a big issue for the government, for this Legislature collectively to be looking at in the coming months. Thank you.

MR. DOLYNNY: I do agree with the Minister that there is great economic opportunity and I'm not disagreeing with the fact that a lot of money has been spent on the project and enhancing it especially for our diamond or mineral sector. The problem we have here is that the residents

themselves are suffering greatly. We are seeing some increases in power consumption and rates that will probably push the cost of affordability in this territory to probably one of the highest in the country.

I am really concerned that we need a long-term strategy. We need a legacy project to push power and energy costs at the forefront so that we can put this to the people of the Northwest Territories to make it more affordable.

When can we see these economic opportunities in print? When can we see them on paper? When can they be debated in the House? When can we see a business case statement that we can actually debate here? Thank you.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Mr. Speaker, there are three key components to a broad territorial-wide Energy Strategy that I believe in the coming life of this Assembly. One of them is the one the Member has talked about, which is the Hydro Strategy. We are visiting that. There are also significant opportunities, for example in places like Deline to put in power in a very environmentally sustainable, friendly way. The Solar Strategy will help us address the crushing diesel costs in the thermal communities. Then we have the broader issue and the pressing issue of sorting out the Inuvik long-term energy needs.

All of these pieces are being looked at. There's work being done internally here as we talk about the way forward in these critical areas that have implicated that were coming forward with the Solar Strategy, for example, and I would suggest within the next five months or so we should have our thinking clear enough that we'd be able to put things on the table.

There's been a tremendous amount of work done on the hydro piece and it's a question of looking at some of the very specific issues like the Member has mentioned, which is going to focus on not the technical work on the actual dam expansion but the transmission lines and what route would we go and how would we pay for it. Thank you.

MR. DOLYNNY: Today, for the first time, we're hearing a move forward from this government that sounds like it's putting hydro in the front seat of their decision-making rather than the backseat. I think that's a very clear message that I'm hoping we can earmark further.

The Minister indicated within the next five months, but yet we've already talked about the budget address here. Is there any possibility that the Minister can make a firm commitment that this policy, moving towards a stronger hydro commitment to the people of the Northwest Territories, will be done sooner than later? Five months is a long time from now. Thank you.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: I will commit to take the Member's request under advisement. I'll report back and we'll have a discussion in the Ministerial Energy Coordinating Committee to see how fast we can move on this.

There's a lot of work that's been done, but there's more required, and as I indicated, there's also some important related work like the Mineral Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy. So there are a lot of pieces at play here and that are linked. We want to move those along as quickly as we can, I agree with the Member. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Final, short supplementary, Mr. Dolyunny. The Member for Hay River South, Mrs. Groenewegen.

QUESTION 28-17(3):
IDENTIFYING FUNDING FOR
SMALL COMMUNITY PROJECTS

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I dare say that occasionally Members on this side of the House have a really good idea, and there are many small things in our communities that this government could fund, which would make a huge difference, but we can't be told no, we have no money, and if you do want that money, find out where you can cut something. We do not have the resources at our disposal to identify where those funds are.

Let me just give you a couple of examples. In Hay River, recently in just talking with people, the youth centre needs a piece of land, the youth treatment in a seed group that wants it going, we have people who just need shelter at nights in existing accommodation, we have a soup kitchen that needs a container to store the extra stuff donated to them. These are small things, but these harness the passion and volunteerism of people in the community that make a huge difference. The Persons with Disabilities Council was just told in Hay River no, you can't have an increase from your \$33,000 a year because we don't have any money. So you go out and fundraise harder. You know, this is a difficult message to deliver for us.

Could I ask the Premier is there any possibility that he could go to his deputies and go to his Ministers and go to his departments and say could they identify some place, some savings within the departments that are low impact, that are not going to upset the progress of government that could come up with some kind of fund that would allow us to take some wins back to our communities on behalf of our constituents for some low budget stuff? I'm talking about things under \$50,000 that in smaller communities would have a huge impact, but we don't have access to anything like that. I'm not asking to sit around with a multi-million dollar capital budget and we're going to divvy it up from this side of the House. I'm talking about some small

wins or some small things for some communities and regions outside of Yellowknife. Thank you.

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

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We would welcome the opportunity to do so. We have a number of processes that we can use to do that and we also have the business planning processes and we always welcome all the good ideas from the other side of the House. We're quite prepared to look for those pots of money, but we obviously would need the support from the other side of the House as well. Thank you.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: I'd like to thank the Premier for that response. I've obviously been a part of some previous governments and I can remember sometimes when we were going through cost-saving exercises as a government and we went to the bureaucracy and said, you know, what could we cut to save some money and the list they sent back to us was so unpalatable. I mean, they would go, oh well, we would never do it. So maybe it's not actual cutting, maybe it's reductions in certain areas where we can find some money, as the government always says, from within to come up with a program. I think it would send a very positive and clear message to the people out there that are trying to undertake good on behalf of our constituents if we could do something like that.

So is the Premier prepared to have a discussion, with our support, with the senior management at the deputy minister level in the departments to find some savings? Like I said, not to change the course of government but find some savings from within that could allow us to access some funds for some initiatives in our communities. Thank you.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Over the years we have made a number of attempts of doing so. I think in the last government we looked to find ways to find funding that we could use to fund strategic initiatives and I think I understand what the Member is talking about, I think on a much smaller scale, to look at specific funds that we could use to meet some immediate needs and I think that we have a number of processes that would allow us to do so. I think it's just a matter of us getting together, talking about it so that we can give some specific direction to our senior management, so that we can find ways to identify funds, for example, for disabilities and other projects or programs that the Member has outlined. Thank you.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Again, I think that the people of the Northwest Territories will take heart with that response that the Premier just provided. I don't condone or support our government throwing money out there, either, kind of willy nilly and hope it hits the right place. So I think that we would need to have a process whereby we could make a case, we could get the support of our colleagues, we

could make a case, we could make the pitch and the onus would be on us to a large extent to show that there's continuity and there should be accountability structures. So how soon do you think we could have this discussion? Thank you.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: I would think that we could come up with some sort of a framework that we could have a discussion with committee. For example, I think we have \$350,000 in it and every time we call for applications it's oversubscribed by \$1 million or so. So I think that if we put our minds to it we could come out with a process and also look at how it would be tied into our existing planning processes, because we are talking about public funds. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. Final, short supplementary, Mrs. Groenewegen.

MRS. GROENEWEGEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think the Premier's suggestion of perhaps enhancing the NGO Stabilization Fund may be the perfect vehicle for which to do this, because these are small things I'm talking about, but they make a huge difference in supporting the efforts within our communities. So I would just like to close by thanking the Premier very much for his response to this request. Thank you.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: I welcome comments and they do give good ideas on the other side. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. McLeod. The Member for Deh Cho, Mr. Nadli.

QUESTION 29-17(3):
SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF
TRADITIONAL ECONOMIES

MR. NADLI: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, plus the Minister of Finance. I know we're kind of in budget mode right now and we live in a very unique part of Canada, of course, called the Northwest Territories, and on a scale of advancing the economies, perhaps communities that live in a have-not kind of a domain as part of the Northwest Territories are kind of described as traditional economies. At the very high end we have a booming industrial-based resource economy. For the large part, these smaller communities and people are reliant on the traditional activities like fishing, hunting and trapping just to sustain and supplement their high cost of living. For that matter, in small communities as well there's an absence of opportunities in terms of jobs, business advancement, growth. What I would like to ask the Minister of Finance is: What unique approaches would the Minister apply or employ in efforts to invigorate traditional economies in communities? Mahsi.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Nadli. The honourable Minister responsible for Finance, Mr. Miltenberger.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a range of existing initiatives across government. The Minister of ITI is looking at an Economic Development Strategy. We're talking about, as well, and I reference in my address, the fur and trapping programs that we're trying to encourage people to put money into the hands of trappers to get kids, young people on the land. We have the seed funding that is available through ITI. There's a range across government.

More importantly, I would ask the Member – even though it's not my position to ask questions in this House – if the Member has specific suggestions that we could look at that would inform our decision-making. There's a budget process underway, as he said, but if he has specific suggestions, then we – if I can speak on behalf of Cabinet – would be very happy to hear what those are to see how we, as we have just done with Mrs. Groenewegen, collectively accommodate good ideas.

MR. NADLI: I'd like to thank the Minister for his response. One of the suggestions that I've made is examining in terms of how unique communities are in their circumstances. I think I've floated the idea of perhaps a community economic model that could be perhaps profiled and maybe generically considered in terms of development strategies to try and help local economies be invigorated.

My follow-up question is: I know, I mean it's a fact, that up here in the Northwest Territories we have a high cost of living. Fuel is expensive. Of course groceries are expensive, too, in small communities. Therefore, our people that try to survive in the have-not communities supplement their existence by going out on the land and harvesting food. My question to the Minister is: Is the department or this government considering perhaps an initiative to try and curb the cost of goods that are transported up here in terms of examining maybe the concept of a food subsidy program so that at least we improve to try and help the people that are living at ground level in the communities?

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: There's no food subsidy program being contemplated other than we are peripherally involved in the existing Food Mail Program that is run by the federal government.

I would point out, as a Legislature and government we want to proceed and continue on with the Rural and Remote Communities committee which will provide a table for the MLAs from the small communities, like the Member himself, to gather around a table to have discussions about this business planning process that's starting up for 2013-2014 in June. The benefit of having the

committee gather and get mobilized would provide a venue to have that kind of a discussion in a more thorough way to provide advice and feedback into that process.

MR. NADLI: It seems that the Minister of Finance might be suggesting that at some point there could be some form of an economic conference to involve small communities to ensure that at least they have a hand and input in terms of how it is that we could all help each other and work in unity to ensure that the economy is sustainable here in the Northwest Territories.

My final question is: Has there been consideration across perhaps each sector of the economy in terms of whether it's manufacturing or transportation or tourism, but for the most part to try and ensure that at the receiving end the consumers, the people that live in communities could be perhaps assisted in terms of trying to curb the high cost of living? Has the Department of Finance considered further subsidies? For example, subsidies to businesses to transport goods up here.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: As the Minister of ITI proceeds with the work on his Economic Development Strategy, there will be a consultation of the nature that the Member has raised.

I would also point out that I referenced the suite of programs and opportunities that are there related to traditional pursuits. There are programs that deal with the northern fishery, there are processing opportunities, we have a Manufacturing Policy, we have a Business Incentive Policy.

The work we're doing long-term with all the energy initiatives are all geared towards trying to lower the cost of living in communities. One of the biggest costs, of course, is with energy. We're going to continue that. There are no additional food subsidies or there are no food subsidies contemplated. We're focusing more on trying to design the system to make it as efficient and effective as possible.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Final supplementary, Mr. Nadli. The honourable Member for Inuvik Boot Lake, Mr. Moses.

QUESTION 30-17(3):
ABORIGINAL POLICING
PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

MR. MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Minister of Justice with regard to his Minister's statement today. He mentioned there are two programs; and just before I begin I want to recognize that it is a great program. We have a lot of outstanding RCMP officers in the Northwest Territories who've taken this program and who have succeeded and become

strong role models for other members and our youth.

The first question I wanted to ask him is: In selecting for the first program the two candidates that would go through this program, would he look at making it a priority if he can look at the smaller communities and take some of the youth through the small communities in terms of some of our small communities needing RCMP officers and also having a presence in the small communities? It would provide jobs, as well, outside of the regions and the capital, so it would be providing jobs and a presence in the smaller communities.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Moses. The honourable Minister responsible for Justice, Mr. Abernethy.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Aboriginal Community Constable Program is a fantastic program and it's in its second year of piloting. I have had an opportunity to speak to the commanding officer of "G" Division and we all agree that we really would like to see somebody coming out of a small community going into this program. There are communities that would be able to facilitate an officer upon their return and this is the direction we would like to go. Ultimately it would be up to the RCMP who the final candidates are, and I encourage you and all the Members to get out and talk to the residents of your community and encourage them to approach the RCMP well before June 1st and submit their application if they're interested.

MR. MOSES: I know it takes the responsibility of our Members and especially the ones in the small communities to bring this up and will be looking at youth who might be interested, especially the ones that are going through the Cadets Program. However, since this is an initiative through the Department of Justice, what type of marketing and recruitment has the Minister done in the small communities on his own, working with the RCMP?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Ultimately this is an RCMP pilot and it is the RCMP's advertising. They are aggressively, actively advertising both the Pre-Cadet Program as well as the Aboriginal Constable Program. Recently I've had an opportunity to travel to some of the communities throughout the Northwest Territories, and every community I've went to I've mentioned that this program exists and I've encouraged people to apply. I've talked to the community justice committees in a number of communities, as well, and encouraged them to have people apply. The RCMP is actively marketing this program. It's a good program and I hope to get individuals from the small communities. I hope they apply and I hope they get selected.

MR. MOSES: Would the Minister be willing to, once the youth go through this program, have this youth be working in a regional centre and taking

one of the regular members and putting him into a community where there is no RCMP officer presence right now? Would the Minister be willing to bring that suggestion forward to the "G" Division to see if that's a possible plan so that these small communities do have a presence, qualified presence in the communities?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Obviously it really, truly depends on who the candidates are and whether they're successful through the program. We are willing to work with the RCMP and we are willing to try to find the appropriate location for the candidates when they do successfully complete. Whether that's in a community with a large regional centre or whether it's a smaller community with a detachment, that needs to be determined based on where the candidate comes from, what their interest is and what capacity they have. We will be working with "G" Division on this.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Final supplementary, Mr. Moses.

MR. MOSES: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister mentioned that there is a second program here for those aged 19 to 29 to see if they would be willing to enter this program. Should he not get any response in that second program, would the Minister be willing to use that funding to offset any costs for further applications to the first program, and would he be willing to use the funding for that second program to make more people go through the first program if there is a waiting list and more applications were on there?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: These are two separate programs. They are facilitated through the RCMP. The first program, the Aboriginal Community Constable Program, is in its second year pilot. We don't know if that program is going to continue to exist after this second delivery. We would like it to and we continue to work with the RCMP and encourage them to continue this program because we see it as valuable.

The second program, the Aboriginal Pre-Cadet Program, that's an ongoing program and the intake is actually completed for this fiscal year, but it's an ongoing program so there will be intake in future years. We already have candidates in it during this May to August session. In fact, there is one candidate in Inuvik. We have had uptake on this program on a fairly regular basis over time. We hope that it will again and I will continue to promote the program, I will continue to work with the RCMP to promote the program, and I would like it if Members could work with us to promote the program as well. We want northern youth and we want Northerners to get involved in the RCMP. We see a significant opportunity here and we don't want to miss it.

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

QUESTION 31-17(3):
ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the lead Minister on the Anti-Poverty Strategy, Mr. Abernethy, and I want to note that there are good things happening on the Anti-Poverty Strategy development. I'm told by my people, constituents and acquaintances, that good collaborative basis has been established in carrying the work forward. I'm also encouraged that there's at least one roundtable, maybe a couple established to get together and discuss this as it develops.

The one thing that I am concerned about is that there is an inexplicable attachment to a December 2012 deadline. A pretty tight time frame, but seemingly to be achieved at almost any cost. Now, there's plenty of time for Mr. Abernethy to consider business plans in September, so there's lots of time for planning there. Given that perhaps another month or two would add to the value of it, can the Minister explain why there is such a tight adherence to this bizarre deadline for an integrative process that has been set and whether or not he will commit to ensuring the process is given the time needed, regardless of the end of the calendar year?

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Bromley. I just want to remind Ministers and Members that preamble on your answers and your questions, shorten them up a little bit. I still have four more Members to go and we have 12 minutes. Fourteen minutes. Thank you. Lead Minister responsible for the Anti-Poverty Strategy, Mr. Abernethy.

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a lot of work being done on the Anti-Poverty Strategy. We are happy with the progress that has been done to date and we are looking forward to continue working with committee and the public on the completion of an Anti-Poverty Strategy.

Ultimately what we want is the right Anti-Poverty Strategy as opposed to right now. We think we can get it done by the end of the calendar year but we are open to input from those involved, including the committee and Members, and if it doesn't look like we're going to have the right policy at the end of the calendar year, we're open to further discussion.

MR. BROMLEY: I appreciate the Minister's flexibility there. It sounds good. Even the best Anti-Poverty Strategy could fail to produce strong results without concrete action to carry it out.

Because the solutions to poverty lie at the community level, we will need to work out our partnerships, roles and programs to ensure success. As the lead Minister begins the work to create an Anti-Poverty Strategy, recognizing that he's already drawing upon work done as he mentioned and so on, will he also commit to

creating an implementation and action plan as an integral part of that strategy?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: The first part is obviously to get the framework done and the strategy done. We will be working with our partners. This has to be done with partners. For anti-poverty to be successful, we do need to work with organizations and agencies outside of government. Once we have the framework, then we will be able to have the discussions on next steps, which would include action plans. Those action plans will involve actions from individuals outside of government, so we will have to work with them to come up with that.

MR. BROMLEY: Thanks for the Minister's remarks there. Nunavut has obviously been very successful in developing an Anti-Poverty Strategy thanks to their approach of community participation. One big lesson was that community events such as the community-based review of a draft plan must be carried out with the support of locally hired conveners.

As plans are put in place to create the draft strategy and take it out for community review and NGO review, will the Minister assure us that wherever possible community members will be hired to help carry out the community participation?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Right from the beginning when the Premier announced this, he indicated that this would be a collaborative process and that's the model that we're following. We have engaged a large working group, which consists of a significant number of NGOs, Aboriginal governments and industry, and we will continue to engage that. That group has identified a steering committee which is chaired by the Government of the Northwest Territories but includes Aboriginal representation, NGO representations, as well, and this is one that I'm really excited about, an individual who has actually lived in poverty and is contributing first-hand knowledge. That group will be steering everything. There will be a meeting in Hay River in late June to bring the working group together to start looking at everything that's been pulled together to date, look at other jurisdictions that have done things, like Nunavut, Manitoba and Newfoundland, where positive work has been done, and to engage any other stakeholders that might be interested. Then there will be a validation project after that.

As we move forward we are collaborating with people. We will be bringing people in from communities. It's not just Yellowknife. It's not just government. It's the Northwest Territories.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Your final, short supplementary, Mr. Bromley.

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thanks again to the Minister. I'm assuming that that will

include hiring local people to help with those local meetings.

The other aspect of this, of course, is that this is a very cross-departmental approach, and the Minister is leading this cross-departmental approach. Ultimately, the delivery of the program will depend on our public service across departments, again, delivering it. This is stepping out from the normal course of events. It will require an unusual degree of cooperation. What is the Minister doing to ensure that those mechanisms are in place and that our public service is able to work effectively across departments to deliver this?

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: We recognize that although this needs to be beyond just government, there is going to be some government responsibility and action required at some point. We have pulled together a committee of the deputies of the social programs departments who will be working on this file on behalf of government. But also, I happen to be the chair of the Social Envelope Committee which consists of the responsible Ministers and we are talking about this, monitoring the progress and providing direction with support of committee and committee's input as well. We are working across departments as well.

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

QUESTION 32-17(3):
FEDERAL BUDGET REDUCTIONS
FOR NATIONAL PARKS

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to follow up with my question with regard to the seasonality of operations at Parks Canada and how they impact the operation of Nahanni National Park. I'd like to ask the Premier: Has this government been updated on the reductions and the cutbacks that will be affecting those operations? Thank you.

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

HON. BOB MCLEOD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like everybody else, and listening to the federal budget of 2012-13 where we learned that 19,689 jobs will be eliminated from the federal civil service, I have not been apprised of the specifics of where the cuts are or what departments and how we will be affected here in the Northwest Territories as of yet other than media reports that we hear occasionally.

MR. MENICOCHÉ: The concern is being raised from the communities that I represent, Nahanni Butte, Fort Simpson, the leadership that's there, only because we just recently created this new national park reserve. There were increased operation expenses. As well as they're looking at some capital expenditures in Nahanni Butte and

Fort Simpson, and the increase in jobs. I was very pleased to see that lots of local people did get hired there. But for this season alone they're saying it's a very limited impact. But my concern there is that our government hasn't taken a position. Because I believe that they're decentralizing some jobs perhaps in the future, and I don't want to see Fort Simpson lose any jobs because we're a have-not region and any job loss – you know the story of the marvelous bouncing buck and the impacts – for every job we lose it impacts the community. I'd like to get the government to take a position on the reductions and possible job reallocation with the Nahanni National Park Reserve office in Fort Simpson.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: As a government we're very concerned about any reductions in any kinds of jobs in the Northwest Territories. As a matter of fact, it is a priority for us to focus on getting more people to live and work in the Northwest Territories. We certainly want to make sure that we keep the jobs that we have, and as a matter of fact, even increase it.

I have already written to the Government of Canada, asking for specific information as to quantify the cuts and also how the Northwest Territories will be affected.

MR. MENICOCHÉ: I'm pleased that our government is taking action on this. I believe that if the Premier can raise more specifically the Nahanni National Park Reserve, the operations, the future plans. Like I said, as far as I know right now they're just affecting seasonal operations, but long-term plans, I'm concerned because we have lots of young people that have been hired by our parks system in Fort Simpson, and hopefully they'll stay in that system and stay in the communities.

HON. BOB MCLEOD: I might add that as soon as I read the Member's press release we did the letter to the Government of Canada. But we will approach the Environment Minister to get some more specific information as to how the amount of cuts and also how they're affecting the operation of the federal park system in the Northwest Territories.

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

QUESTION 33-17(3):
DECLINING NATURAL GAS RESERVES
IN NORMAN WELLS

MR. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask some questions to the Minister of Finance. This morning I heard the Minister of Finance on CBC talk about the budget, and one part that he mentioned was about the Inuvik gas situation and he also added in a couple comments on the Norman Wells gas situation.

I want to ask the Minister what type of support will he be giving to the residents and to the businesses of Norman Wells once they make a decision as to what types of options they have to convert household supplies and appliances and also for the businesses to also convert to either propane, diesel or any other options that we see viable.

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

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to Norman Wells, we have assurances from Imperial Oil, and NTPC will still be able to operate on gas, which takes a huge pressure off of the community, unlike Inuvik where we have had to switch NTPC to full diesel to protect and extend the gas reserves for the citizens of Inuvik. We also have ongoing work with consultants, and folks at ENR are looking at other options in terms of the biomass, in terms of some people wanting to switch to diesel and looking at, with consultants, what would be the best plan and the most feasible alternative for when the day comes when there is not gas available to the people of Norman Wells. As that work progresses and it becomes clear what the options are, we will continue to work with the community, with the MLA trying to sort out the best way forward. A lot of individuals are also making their own determination that they are going to switch already. Thank you.

MR. YAKELEYA: The government has supported the thinking with the Town of Norman Wells as how to best utilize their time, because Imperial Oil for 2013-14 will turn the gas off to the town, and the residents and businesses. We need to help them with their conversion of appliances. They are looking at options such as propane, diesel and biomass. It's going to be a mixture. Hopefully one day they'll have an easy conversion back to the natural gas situation.

I am asking this government, once the dust has settled, is this government going to be in their capacity to help the people and businesses to convert their appliances to whatever they choose to do to use that sort of energy, whether it is biomass, propane or diesel? Will the government have some financial support to help them offset their cost to conversion?

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: The Government of the Northwest Territories has been involved in this process, a party to the work that is underway. We have a commitment and an obligation, as we have assisted in the past in Inuvik when they converted from the high temperature system to natural gas, to work through the process with the community and to make sure that we are there to assist so that there is not an undue burden placed on individual citizens of Norman Wells. Thank you.

MR. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, the Town of Norman Wells, because of the strict discipline financial fiscal policy they have, they had surplus money. When the situation became an issue for them, almost a crisis stage, they had to use their surplus money to help them keep the light and heat on in their houses. They applied for extraordinary funding from MACA, which MACA said no. They told them they are not eligible and besides you have extra money, so once you guys use that. They are suffering in the town of Norman Wells because they had to use their extra money that they want to do other things with, but they had to do the right thing, which was to keep the lights and heat on. That's why I'm asking this government – we have been stung once – will we get stung twice in terms of the conversion, in terms of how this government here can be relied on to help the Town of Norman Wells? Their taps are being turned off.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Mr. Speaker, the reality is, for all of us, communities included, we get hit with unanticipated events, be it extra costs for a dam or in Yellowknife, energy costs because of gas in Inuvik, pipeline breaks outside of Norman Wells that shuts off supply, the natural gas issue. We all collectively have to be prepared to do our part.

I am committing here today that we are prepared to do our part. We will work with the community, work through this process so that they are not in this alone. We demonstrated our commitment in Inuvik. We are going to demonstrate our commitment in Norman Wells. We are going to be there as we work through this to get to a logical conclusion. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Final, short supplementary, Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Town of Norman Wells feel very strongly that with the situation that happened in the town, the situation that was occurring that this government wasn't there for them. They had to dig in their own bank account and take out the money and say, we will pay for the Hercules. We will pay for propane tanks. We will do this. The government did not come up and say, we will help you. To make insults worse, they said no, you are not eligible for extraordinary funding to help offset this here.

It's a good thing they had strong financial planning that they were able to do this. That's what they're asking when they come to this situation, that the Government of the Northwest Territories is there for them when they do their conversion to what energy sources they are going to use. That's what they want to know. They haven't yet got it from this government. They committed to help them with energy planning, but they haven't got to the \$64 million question.

Will you be there for us when they want to convert and that tap gets turned off by Imperial Oil? They haven't had an answer yet from the territorial government, even the federal government.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Mr. Speaker, there are things that have happened in the past that have their own character and complexity and annex. The reality is, and I will say it again, the Government of the Northwest Territories is involved and will continue to be involved with the community of Norman Wells in looking at its long-term energy needs as we deal with the direction and indication from Imperial Oil that their access to gas is going to be cut off. That work is already underway.

The good news is, as I have indicated, we have assurances that NTPC will not be impacted in the near term and the work is underway with the community to look at the conversion and a conversion to what. I agree with the Member; it won't necessarily be one source of energy, but may be multiple sources. As that work proceeds, we will be involved in that work and we will be there when we look at the final option to see what financial role we should be playing along with the community to resolve that issue. Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. Item 8, written questions. Item 9, returns to written questions. Item 10, replies to opening address. Item 11, replies to budget address. Item 12, petitions. Item 13, reports of standing and special committees. Item 14, reports of committees on the review of bills. Item 15, tabling of documents. Mr. Abernethy.

Tabling of Documents

TABLED DOCUMENT 4-17(3):
REPORT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
JUDICIAL REMUNERATION COMMISSION, 2012

MR. ABERNETHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the following document, entitled "Report of the Northwest Territories Judicial Remuneration Commission, 2012." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Item 16, notices of motion. Mr. Yakeleya.

Notices of Motion

MOTION 2-17(3):
SETTING OF SITTING HOURS BY SPEAKER

MR. YAKELEYA: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that, on Monday, May 28, 2012, I will move the following motion: I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Thebacha, that the Speaker be authorized to set such sitting days and hours as the Speaker, after consultation, deems fit to assist with the business before the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Item 17, notices of motion for first reading of bills. Item 18, motions. Item 19, first reading of bills. Mr. Lafferty.

First Reading of Bills

BILL 1:
AN ACT TO AMEND THE
STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ACT

HON. JACKSON LAFFERTY: Mahsi, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Yellowknife South, that Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act, be read for the first time. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Lafferty. Item 20, second reading of bills. Item 21, consideration in Committee of the Whole of bills and other matters: Tabled Document 3-17(3), Northwest Territories Main Estimates 2012-2013, with Mrs. Groenewegen in the chair.

Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Okay, I'd like to call Committee of the Whole to order. We have the budget document in front of us, Tabled Document 3-17(3), Northwest Territories Main Estimates 2012-2013. What is the wish of committee? Mr. Menicoche.

MR. MENICOCHÉ: Thank you, Madam Chair. The committee wishes to continue on with general comments on the NWT Main Estimates 2012-2013 and also deliberate the departments of Human Resources and Public Works and Services.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Okay, we'll do that after a short break. Thank you.

---SHORT RECESS

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): I'd like to call Committee of the Whole back to order. We are on general comments on the main estimates. Next I have Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Miltenberger, would you like to go to the witness table and call your witnesses?

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Yes, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Is committee agreed?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Agreed. Thank you. I'll ask the Sergeant-at-Arms to escort the witnesses to the table, please.

Mr. Miltenberger, for the record, would you please introduce your witness?

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have with me Mike Aumond, deputy minister of Finance.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. We'll continue with general comments and first I have Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Madam Chair. My points I am going to be speaking on this afternoon are going to be around the way we do our operations as a government. As we're well aware, the federal government gives the territorial government, the people of the Northwest Territories, about 75 percent of funding to do our own operations. We have not yet grown up enough for them. We need to do our own work to be fully accountable for our own spending and for the raising of our own money and operating as an independent, strong government. We still rely on the federal government for funds to operate our programs and services in the Northwest Territories.

From the other 30 percent of our budget, we raise our revenue through our own taxes and fees, et cetera. At the end of the day, we have about a \$1.3 billion budget that we're talking about today for our operational expenses.

We serve over 33 communities that have various needs. Some of the needs are greater than others for reasons such as some of the communities don't have all-weather roads into their centres. Some regions don't have the economic stimuli that we see that other regions have. There are many factors that impact expenditures in our communities.

We as MLAs all bring our own wish list to the Legislative Assembly, and through this budget process we bring our needs of the people to this Assembly. That's the fine art of balancing our needs and our people's needs with the government's needs.

The government, through the bureaucracy, has a system where they would look at programs and services that we're asking for to serve our people. Sometimes the policy doesn't quite meet the exact needs that we want to have in our communities.

They also have to look at their own infrastructure. We heard the other day, Madam Chair, how much money it's going to require just to update, maintain and build our infrastructure in the Northwest Territories.

So I wanted to say that when we sit on this side of the table as MLAs, we go through this process with the Minister and various Ministers to put our priorities on the table and look at how we can meet the needs of our people in our communities.

Cabinet also sits on the other side and it goes through its own process with their own deputies and directors asking what the government needs. We try to come up with a balance to say yes, this

budget we can live with. Our needs are always higher than our revenue coming in. The Minister is well aware that one of the solutions to our dilemma and taking charge of our own destiny, we've said it privately and publicly, that devolution is one vehicle that we can use in the future for helping ourselves.

I talked a little bit about the situation in Norman Wells. Depending on which side of the table you're sitting on, there's a lot of TB going on there in that area, the Tulita district. We certainly can look at situations like that that haven't been planned for. Just like the Norman Wells natural gas situation with Imperial turning the taps off in 2013 and then finally in 2014. We know the situation; we know the challenges to help our people deal with that situation. The government, for us in our communities, we see them being there to support us. We need to look at some of these policies in the budget where they support the people. We know our jails are overcrowded and 90 percent of those in jail it's due to alcohol. It's clearly written in the judges' sentencing, in RCMP reports and it's known in our communities that these people are in jail because of alcohol. It even shows up in our liquor revenue charts that we, in the North, we drink. We drink a lot. In Sahtu last year we drank \$2.1 million of liquor sales, booze. It's known there.

We need to take a step back and say this is what we need to do. We need to get to the people and let the people know we are hearing them. We need to continue to be connected to them. We need to know that this government is going to look at dealing with this issue in a comprehensive, cross-departmental way. We're too small to think like we're in Ottawa. We are only 19 MLAs. We need to look at the communities and say this is what we need to do to help you.

Sometimes we hear we can't do this, we can't do this. That kind of thinking has to go. The thinking that we can say what can we do to help you, how can we help you, that's what we need to hear from the government policies, the appeals, the process.

The Minister talked about a \$74 million surplus. I hope that's an opportunity for us to sit around and see how we can help our communities, such as emergency funding. We should be there when there's flooding. Departments need to be there for the people, not for themselves or the government system that we've set up. If we're responsible for that, then we're responsible for changing that. It means we might get bit in the hand, but we've got to do something.

So I want to raise that, Madam Chair, that we need to look at some of the first things first and addiction is a big one in my community. A lot of good people out there know the harms of it, the destructive behaviour and they want to get out of it, but we need the government to help us. In our budget we give about 45 percent of our funding to the

communities through contributions and grants. We sometimes treat our communities the way the Government of Canada treats the territorial government. It just filters down.

Madam Chair, I hope through this budget process that the Minister and Ministers have some understanding, flexibility where we need to make some changes and connect back to the people. Sometimes the system is not quite understandable for our people. I think that the Minister has some things in here that I like. I was hoping we would hear a little more on some things in the Sahtu and that there are some other things in play that would maybe satisfy me to say yes, we can do this budget this year. It's all about trust. I trust the Cabinet with what they say they are going to do and see where we need to make some change. We have a lot of work ahead of us, Madam Chair, and I look forward to going through this process with the Minister. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Minister Miltenberger.

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the Member's comments on how we're structured and how we rely on the federal government and some of the challenges we have.

I would point out when it comes to the development of our budget, we are one of two unique jurisdictions in the country where all MLAs are involved in the budget process in extensive detail from start to finish. In other systems where there are party politics, nobody would have seen this budget until yesterday or the day before when we walked through the door of the House, and it would have been dropped on the table and then you'd be given a week or whatever to have debate and then you'd vote on it. We have a much more inclusive process, I think, that allows us to come up with the good work that we do.

I agree with the Member about devolution. It is an important tool and we look forward to resolving that. The Member and I did have a discussion in the House during question period about the Norman Wells gas issue. We've made the commitments there.

The Member's comments about alcohol abuse and some of the concerns in his region I know tie back to the concern of the liquor store and the hours. We're tracking those numbers and we're committed to and interested and willing to sit down with the Member in the region and communities as those numbers come in, keeping in mind that our whole government has been designed around trying to make sure that communities have the legal authorities wherever possible and decision-making and control over issues in their communities. So within that context, we are prepared to have those discussions.

In terms of how the government can help with our inclusive process and as we were talking about in the House today with Mrs. Groenewegen, for example, about the need to have flexibility, we are prepared to have those discussions. Minister Robert C. McLeod is engaged in discussions on the emergency funding issue and I think there's going to be some room there.

The final comment, Madam Chair, the Member mentioned the issue of trust with Cabinet. He and I have now served together going on nine years. This is my fourth year as Finance Minister and we've been building on that relationship over the years and we want to collectively continue with that. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. For general comments, I have Mr. Nadli and then Mr. Moses. Mr. Nadli.

MR. NADLI: Thank you, Madam Chair. I need to commend, firstly, the Minister and the Department of Finance for bringing forth his budget. I think the primary focus in terms of priorities of this budget, it's very clear that the greatest assets that we have in the North are the people. Therefore, the budget highlights a fairly big chunk of the \$1.4 billion towards people resources. Given our greatest asset is our people and that we need to put greater effort in maturing that down the road, our people have at least a standard of education that is comparable to Canada, for that matter. At the same time, there are training opportunities as well.

In that respect, I think the department has to be commended in bringing this forth and providing at least financial leadership and bringing an overall understanding of how we're going to go forth over the next four years.

The budget, for me, is about fiscal consolidation, ensuring that we're bringing the expenditures under control, ensuring we have a sound level of revenue that's streaming into the government. It's the balancing act of ensuring that we have a healthy surplus at the same time we're addressing the deficit. So in that effort, I think it's a good plan. It's almost like a status quo plan connected to the previous Assembly.

I think if there's anything that stands out, there's always room for creativity. In times of financial hardship, we always have to prioritize what our needs are compared to what our wants are. I'm encouraged by the possibility where perhaps we are trying to break, almost, the conformity. I look at some very unorthodox and perhaps some very unique partnerships with communities to ensure we meet them halfway while at the same time we're trying to help out the local community economies.

I think we're very fortunate at this time to have the diamond industry. So for that matter, the North is very distinctive in terms of having a resource-based

economy. I think for some time diamonds have been the North's best friend, and the industry has really grown since then. I know there are some discussions towards the development of a strategy to ensure we make efforts to not be so reliant on the diamond industry, but also at the same time trying to diversify our economy so we have a solid foundation. We're in very volatile times. We're almost at coming out of the brink of a depression. So I think we all know that what we do here in the North somehow affects what happens in the Middle East, and of course, the big thing there is oil and gas. So we're in a very global system at this point, so we have to be very cognizant of that.

If there's anything else I wanted to mention, it's that I've always wanted to ensure that this government is in a supportive and encouraging role in terms of ensuring that at the end of the day we have the spur and the push of all the land claims tables that are happening throughout the Northwest Territories. There are a few of them that are outstanding. I think the role of this government is critical in ensuring that progress is made at all tables, that the two levels of government – the federal and territorial government – don't always pick on First Nations, because it's the First Nations that have the uphill battle of trying to institute formal governance and at the same time infuse it with public principles of government.

So for those reasons, I think if you can create a climate with certainty in terms of how governing institutions are going to work with the economy, of course it gives the level of confidence to industry to do their business up here in the Northwest Territories. So for that matter, I think even if we look at perhaps efforts to try to unite all parties here in the Northwest Territories, I think we can go a long ways.

One example is this effort towards devolution. I have some questions whether it's the best deal we can get at this time or if we're just basically accepting what's been offered at the table and we don't have a choice. The context in that is that governments have said we're under restraint, we can't really give you anything more, so here it is, and we take it. Perhaps that's the case. If that's the case, then we need to make a better effort to try to unite with Aboriginal groups to form a united front to ensure that we put forth a very good package that's reflective of the aspirations of the people of the Northwest Territories, and at the same time consider the high cost of living, and also at the same time considers the unique circumstances of our communities. So for those reasons, I think if those things were considered and effectively employed as we go forth as a government, then I think we can be successful.

I just wanted to spend some time in terms of talking about the challenges at the community level. It's

pretty clear, when we come here periodically, there's a big contrast in terms of have communities and have-not communities. We live in the shadows of the diamond industry; we live in the shadows of major public infrastructure projects. In small communities we don't have the pleasure of having direct access and benefits to large diamond mines, oil and gas, or large public infrastructure projects. So we're kind of left trying to struggle, maintain our families, maintain our businesses, maintain our schools, basically to maintain a living at the community level. We go as far as trying to supplement our diets, because the high cost of living basically sets the stage for... It's really hard struggling at the community level where you have to go to the store and the cost of consumer goods is pretty high. So we put effort into trying to supplement our diets to put food on the table for our families. We go out hunting periodically to ensure at the end of the day we have something to eat, or at least provide some sustenance to our children.

In that sense, I think communities have emphatically made the statement that we need to look at almost a community model. Communities are very unique, perhaps at the lower end of the economic progress. You know, they're described as traditional economies. We need to perhaps kick-start them. At the end of the day, we might have some communities that are conducive and very successful, where they reach the maximum or the optimal peak of development where they basically have an industrial manufacturing plant of some kind. We need to try to approach some considerations for the circumstances our communities are considering.

At the same time, government needs to ensure that we don't abandon the communities. We have very aging infrastructure. We have old buildings that are beyond renovation, are beyond patchwork, and there's still a very high need for buildings. For example, schools. We have some...(inaudible)...communities where schools are needed. At the same time, there are existing buildings that have become beyond repair. So sometimes it affects programs, the progress of education, and we have to look at other options. At the community level we don't really have that many options or the pleasure or the leisure of trying to find money to establish building other buildings. We don't really have that leisure. At the same time, we think government still has an obligated role to ensure that governing organizations have at least the financial capacity to be in a position so we can deliver the services that people expect of us. At the same time, we should not at this point in the volatile economy constrict or constrain further local bodies that provide those services by withdrawing funding or putting them in a very irrevocable position where they have to fight back. I don't think that is the approach we need to undertake.

We need to ensure that we work closely with local government organizations to ensure that at the end of the day we still provide the services that this government provides at this time, and at the same time ensuring that we meet the needs of communities.

More than anything I wanted to mention is the effort towards things such as the initiative. I know this government is considering some very different initiatives, and one of them is the well-being of our people. There are some very distinctive events that happened recently that would say that we need to develop some strategies to ensure that the well-being of our people is priority.

Some initiatives that we've undertaken this far is the Anti-Poverty Strategy. We need to ensure there's a baseline of people that at least, perhaps at a very, very minimal threshold, have the basic needs of a house, food and shelter. We need to ensure that we maintain those services.

At the same time, I think the mental health of our people is very stark. We need to make sure we do some extra efforts in terms of trying to meet them halfway. We've just come out of the experience of the residential schools. At this point, governments have perhaps done all that they can and they're leaving it at the behest of our individuals or people who have gone through the system to be on their own. I don't think government should do that. We need to ensure that there's at least consistent linkages with this major initiative that has struck the very core of First Nations across Canada. We need to ensure that programs and services that are required by people are readily available, and that it's a comparable service that is at least across Canada.

So those are points that we need to be mindful of. I've heard it at the level of this government since the fall that we need to ensure that we keep reminding ourselves that usually the very core things that people expect us to do and uphold for them. We become their voice. I think this budget is a positive step forward and I look forward to playing a helping hand in ensuring that the constituents of the Deh Cho are helpful in that sense, too, and ensuring that we all work together. Mahsi.

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

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the Member for his kind words about the budget and the work that we've all put into developing this, both MLAs, Cabinet and, of course, the people in government.

I want to reassure the Member that he talked about not abandoning the communities and don't take back the funding and withdraw funding. In this budget there are no program cuts. We've reinvested and are continuing to support all the

departments' programs and services that we do provide.

As we talk about a climate of certainty economically, we, as well, agree and we want to, for many reasons, but it makes good sense. It provided comfort to the private sector and it lets people in the communities know, as well, that there is stability.

We have the work that we've talked about with the Minister of ITI in terms of the initiative that he has underway, plus all the work related to the traditional economy and the work we want to do as we engage with the Rural and Remote Communities committee.

The issue of devolution, and the best deal or not at this point, these negotiations have been going on for almost nine years and in light of the deficit reduction of the federal government now that's underway, the significant cutbacks taking \$4.5 billion a year out of government, the deal that we've negotiated, in my mind, will be looking even more positively as it did before as they've cut 20,000 and extract money from government. We have a commitment from them for a base amount that was negotiated before the significant restraint that is currently underway. My suggestion would be if, in fact, we were currently negotiating devolution, it would be a much tougher climate than it was a couple of years ago.

The issue of a community model and the need for an economic base is one of the whole focuses of the Economic Development Strategy that, once again, the government through ITI wants to lay out within the broad policy framework of the Land Use and Sustainability Framework.

The strategy on the well-being of people, anti-poverty, mental health, will be addressed and are committed to and will be discussed by the Minister of Health and Social Services. There are response letters that have gone back to committee in regard to their specific requests that have come out of their review of the business plans and their advice and recommendations back to government. Once again, I'd like to thank the Member for his very positive, supportive comments. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Minister Miltenberger. Next I have Mr. Moses.

MR. MOSES: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll try to keep this short, seeing the time we have left and we want to get into Human Resources here. I just want to mention a few comments based on what was mentioned yesterday and what was before us.

It is mentioned in here that we have to make tough decisions and sometimes those tough decisions are based on the facts, the stats, all the reports and recommendations that come before us as we sit in committee and as we bring things down here on the

floor. Sometimes those don't always seem to be addressed.

Looking at what was said in here, a couple of things really caught my attention. The first one, first and foremost obviously, is going to be our Inuvik gas situation and the depletion of that. It's going to be a harsh reality, and as I mentioned in my Member's statement the first session here, it's something that's going to be really affecting not only Inuvik but it's going to have a rippling affect right across the Northwest Territories. I did mention that you just have to walk into the local post office in Inuvik to see how many local houses are up for sale already. You don't know if those are professionals, teachers, health professionals, people we need. We already have a depletion of resources on hand.

Not only are we going to be possibly losing our professional staff but businesses are going to be taking a big hit, if they haven't been hit already with the low economy that we see before.

With that said, there is a page here on the economy and it looks great on paper. It looks like the NWT's doing awesome, but it doesn't take anybody, it doesn't take a whole lot when you go to the communities and see a lack of jobs, a lack of opportunities and a lack of work for our contractors. It looks good on paper that our economy is doing well, but in reality it's not. Look at the income assistance that we have that is increasing in the Northwest Territories. That reflects on the people not being able to work. People can't find work. Contractors have to take that route because there are no jobs out there in the regions. Sure, some of our regions are doing really well; however, a lot of our other regions are suffering the impacts.

Going back to the businesses, they're going to have to recoup their costs somehow. Especially the bigger ones that provide a greater service, they are going to have to recoup their costs. They're going to increase the prices for their goods and services which in turn is going to reflect back on the residents who already have a high cost of living. It's going to put a lot of people in poverty and that's something that I don't want to see while I'm in this government and I'm sure nobody wants to see in their communities. In Inuvik we've got just a particular situation where it doesn't look very promising and I know we're going to be moving forward in trying to find some solutions. Hopefully those solutions can be looked at that would have a positive impact on Inuvik which would decrease the effects across the Northwest Territories.

With that said, I just wanted to touch base on this rent supplement for market families. There is 1.2. As we get into the details I'm going to try to see what that program is, because the high cost of living and things that have been in the Northwest Territories. For instance, it's cheaper to buy a house in Yellowknife than to rent now because it's

such a high cost of living. It's industry that's setting those costs because things are flourishing here in Yellowknife and a lot of people are moving here.

Then mentioned later, the economic development, the increase of addictions that have been taking. Alcohol and drug abuse, there's a budget for \$276,000 to develop a strategy. When we're pretty well at status quo running the same program when we don't even have programs to reflect this but we're going to try to come out with a strategy that it says here, Community Safety Strategy. We already got the Mental Health and Addictions Strategy that's going to be tabled this session. Some of these dollars could probably be better spent doing the action rather than developing another strategy. When I talked earlier about making tough decisions, the PRO office, the program review office, does a lot of work and gives us a lot of recommendations and it's our job to take those recommendations and put them into place so that this government saves money so that money is more efficiently spent across the departments for the departments that really need it. The Auditor General's report, we get that on a regular basis and how often do we reflect the Auditor General's report that tells us how much money we could be saving that could be going into other programs. Just some simple suggestions and if we start following some of these recommendations, we could start having a little bit better impact on how we deliver our services and programs, what we invest in, so that at the end of the day this government can say we spent the money the best way we could in quality services and efficient services and it's something that would reflect right across the board.

A couple things. There was that \$818 million that the Minister spoke of yesterday when he was talking about education and early childhood development to one of my colleagues here. That was for health, education and justice. As we go through the business planning sessions throughout this week, we'll go through the details and see how we can efficiently spend those dollars. I mean the more that I read in this government, the more that I see there are areas that we can improve on. The program review office gave us a lot of recommendations. The Auditor General's report gave us a lot of recommendations, specifically in the area of education, as well as housing. We can look at those as we move through in the business planning session and see how we can better efficiently spend our dollars and take those recommendations so that we're not overly spending on programs that we can improve on.

The RCMP violence coordinator, I was really happy to see that. However, with the level of problems that we have in the Northwest Territories it would almost be better to have more than just one coordinator, because with the issues that we're seeing across the Northwest Territories, one coordinator, kind of

like the midwife that we had in Yellowknife last year who got over-exhausted dealing with all the issues and they didn't get the support that they need. It looks great that we're getting one, but what I can see is over-exhaustion and quality of services possibly decreasing.

Once again, I'm glad to see the Inuvik-Tuk highway highlighted in here. Any of my colleagues here, Members that want to see a region that's really suffering from this economic downturn just have to come up to Inuvik, Tuk, the Beaufort-Delta region and see how bad of an impact. There are no jobs up there. To see a big project like this, one that this government is looking into is something that we should seriously look at and create some jobs and get people off the income support.

Early childhood programs, prevention, promotion, once again when we get into the details of that big budget we'll look into that.

There were also some monies here for health care facilities. In the stats, we see that the elder population is increasing and will continue to increase, but there's no talk of long-term – well, there's talk of long-term care facilities in certain regions but not across the whole Northwest Territories. When we're putting \$30 million into health care facilities, I think it's a great opportunity to look at long-term care beds as well as beds for other mental health issues. Once again, mental health can go into that, but we'll get into the detail as we go through that big budget.

We're in a government where I know it's tough to put a budget of this magnitude together with so many different departments and so many responsibilities and nobody wants to lose the programs that they're delivering. We have to find a way where we can kind of audit our own government to see which programs are really being successful, which ones aren't, how we can work together both as Members and Cabinet and how Cabinets can work together as departments to better spend their money and move forward. It comes down to tough decisions and obviously nobody wants to lose out any dollars out of their department, nobody wants to lose any jobs in our communities, but where some regions are flourishing, others are suffering. We talk about fairness in this government and we have another over three years to look at those corrections, look at those suggestions, recommendations, and move forward and start looking at our communities as being the backbone of this territory and not just the capital of the Northwest Territories. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Member is correct in terms of his comment about having to make tough

decisions. We identified that and identified that in the budget address yesterday as well. The next two years are going to require our fiscal discipline and resolve as a collective to meet the targets that we're trying to set out for ourselves.

We are committed and will have the ongoing discussion about the Inuvik gas situation.

While overall I agree with the Member that from a high level the overall indicators for the economy in the Northwest Territories are good, it's not that evenly spread. There are areas that need attention, that are struggling.

Minister Robert C. McLeod will be very happy to have the discussion about the detail of the rent supplement budget that has been laid out.

I also made note of the Member's comment about the money being spent for addictions strategies and the concern about doing more and studying less that's been raised, and we'll continue to have that discussion to make sure that we have the proper balance. As you do more you'll want to make sure you have a plan to do more, but you don't want to spend all your time on planning and not doing, so we'll look forward to that discussion.

The Member's comments about the program review office and his final comment about the need to audit our programs for best value, the whole intent of establishment of the program review office was to do that. The ongoing discussion and planning has been as we evolve in our thinking on this, is the program review office structured adequately. Do we have it focusing in the right areas? It's been suggested they could be doing a lot of work on decentralization in terms of identifying areas. The Member has indicated the need, a greater, maybe, possible attention to auditing our own programs. We just have to give them ideas of where they should be looking. I think there's room to move there.

I'd also point out the commitment we made as a government to try to sort out our red-tape obstacles as well, not just the broad regulatory reform ones that are being addressed through the federal government initiative but our own internal red-tape issues as a government and our own red-tape issues that may exist as the government does business with communities and industry.

The Member's comment about the \$818 million or 60 percent or so of the money spent of our budget on social programs and the need to look at that collectively and are we doing things in a coordinated way is a comment that we share. We know that there are areas for improvement and we're looking for the advice and feedback of committees and individuals or MLAs to do that.

The Inuvik-Tuk highway, we laid out that process and we intend to move forward and are moving forward on that.

My final comment, the long-term care facilities needed across the NWT, we agree the one region that has no long-term care facility and has a project on the red flag list would be Norman Wells. The Sahtu has no long-term care facility and we're looking there, as well, as at the need to upgrade their facility, in terms of actual long-term care. That would then give us some coverage in every region. Once again, the Member's concern is noted. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you, Mr. Miltenberger. General comments. Next on the list I have Mr. Bromley.

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have some brief comments. I wanted to follow up on the response of the Minister to my and other general comments yesterday. Specifically, the Minister estimated the impact of the recommendations from committees, the financial impact of our recommendations at about \$4.1 million and acted as if that was impossible to deal with. I did a quick calculation dividing \$4.1 million by \$1.5 billion and multiplying by 100 to get the percentage of what we're talking about here, and it turns out that the 11 Members on this side of the House were recommending 0.25 percent of the budget be spent in the way that our constituents would like to see it spent. That's 0.25 percent. That is one-quarter of 1 percent of the budget. It may be tough. All decisions are tough when we decide how to spend dollars.

I also quickly looked at what the increase in revenues are this year and I found that the Minister mentioned our revenues are increased by \$132 million this year. I want to say right off that I think he has underestimated what we are asking for. My calculation, when all is said and done, he's chosen one committee to focus his estimate on. When we look at our various committees, I think our estimate might be four times that; essentially 1 percent of this budget.

Now, we are in a consensus government supposedly here. We do go through an extraordinary amount of work and I think our public appreciates fully the opportunity provided by this process of business plan reviews. I can't imagine what we spend in that process but I'm sure it's significant.

There are 11 Members in the question and answer period with each and every Minister for each and every department carefully going over everything that we're presented with and considerable debate, both during and afterwards, as we summarize those and try and boil our biggest concerns down to our greatest points to be made at minimum cost. We've done that and let's say that we came up with \$15 million or \$16 million worth of recommendations. Again, 1 percent of the budget. In a consensus government, again, I don't see that as out of line. I

don't see it as being out of line to expect that a Cabinet, a Premier and Cabinet will be listening to those voices and finding ways to respond in a productive and cooperative way, reflecting that consensus government approach.

I do recognize these are tough decisions to be made, but they obviously are being made, and a number gave examples where millions and millions of dollars, tens of millions of dollars are being spent in ways and were somehow found in this budget for things that this Cabinet is interested in pursuing.

I just wanted to present that perspective. It's just a comment, and I appreciate that opportunity. Mahsi.

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

HON. MICHAEL MILTENBERGER: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the Member's comments about the committee letters. The responses have gone out. They should be available to Members. They went out this morning.

In regard to the recommendations coming out of committee, we're also scheduled to meet with committee at the rise of the House on Monday to have further discussion about the detail.

I would point out that while we anticipate and are planning for \$74 million surplus in 2012-13, the reality is we have debt of about \$656 million. The majority of that, while it is self-liquidating, leaves us with about 240 to 260 million dollars of short-term borrowing that we have incurred that we're trying to manage as we set ourselves up to be able to increase our infrastructure investments in years three and four of this Assembly.

While there was some increase in revenue, there has also been an increase in our costs as a government. There is no free money. We're trying to practice fiscal discipline. The Member indicates it's only, in his estimation, \$15 million, \$16 million. It's only a fraction of a percent, but it's all borrowed money. I would once again suggest we don't want to let the public have any sense that this document is just a Cabinet document, that these main estimates here that we worked on for six months that represents \$1.5 billion of government expenditures building off the priorities of the Legislature is a creature only of the Cabinet. The only way we get this is by having that discussion with Members, in agreement with Members about the amount of money and where it is going to be spent. We could always spend more, without a doubt, given the list of needs. We will have the discussion on the feedback and the final requests and recommendations from committee, and I'm sure with the goodwill and good faith of all parties, we'll come to an agreement as we have done for 17 years that I've been here, and I anticipate we'll continue to do. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Thank you. Any further general comments? If not, is the committee agreed that we should move to consideration of the Department of Human Resources?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Groenewegen): Agreed. Thank you, Minister Miltenberger. Thank you, Mr. Aumond. The Sergeant-at-Arms will escort you out of the Chamber. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): Alright, committee. We have finished general comments on the budget. We will move on to departments. Does committee agree that we will review the Department of Human Resources?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): I'd like to ask the Minister responsible for Human Resources if he has any opening remarks.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Yes, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am pleased to present the Department of Human Resources' main estimates for the fiscal year 2012-13.

For 2012-13 the department is proposing an operations expenditures budget of \$42.796 million. This reflects an increase of \$375,000 from last year's main estimates, or slightly less than 1 percent. Of this amount, \$9.692 million or 22.6 percent of the total budget is allocated in the form of direct supports to employees, including dental benefits, medical travel assistance, recognition awards and the Employee Family Assistance Program. As a shared service provider, another \$2.394 million or 5.6 percent of the total budget is allocated in the form of direct supports to departments, boards and agencies for intern and summer student programs under the Maximizing Northern Employment Initiative.

Through its mandate to provide leadership and direction in all areas of human resource management, the Department of Human Resources works with departments, boards and agencies to ensure the public service is managed as a corporate resource in a way that promotes stability, retention and maximum effectiveness. 20/20, the NWT Public Service Strategic Plan, describes the long-term strategic goals and key initiatives necessary to guide the development of the public service and make the GNWT an employer of choice. In turn, this supports the interests of the government and the vision of Believing in People and Building on the Strengths of Northerners. A key role for Human Resources is in seeking to build the capacity of Northerners in order to sustain a strong future for our territory.

For example, the department has a key role to play in ensuring GNWT's interests in devolution are

realized, including welcoming affected federal employees into the GNWT, ensuring fairness and equity for all impacted employees including existing GNWT staff, and developing a northern workforce. The department is assessing strategies for public service employment opportunities across the Northwest Territories and is working to support creative approaches to government organizational design that can implement this. As well, the department works to support a thriving public service with terms of employment that balance respect for our staff with prudent financial fiscal management and the ongoing delivery of quality programs and services.

Guided by the initial 20/20 three-year action plan, investment in the public service has created a positive foundation of human resource management practices and services through strategic program development, business process improvements, enhancements to the HR PeopleSoft systems and improved partnerships with client departments, agencies and the unions. A new four-year action plan is currently under development and will build on the successes of the first three years.

As Members are aware, the department led our government's efforts, in partnership with employees' bargaining representatives, to successfully negotiate collective agreements that will provide our employees and the GNWT with certainty and stability for the next four years. Pending ratification, the department's immediate priority is to implement the new terms and conditions of employment negotiated through collective bargaining. As agreed to with the Union of Northern Workers, this includes the creation of an interim whistleblower process for employees who feel compelled to come forward with allegations of wrongdoing within the GNWT. Once this is in place, I will work with the Members of this House to establish legislation that offers public service disclosure protection for all GNWT employees.

Our continuous improvement approach with clients and stakeholders to enhance services will continue in 2012-13. The department will focus on implementing streamlined processes around core business to better serve individual employees and client departments. Service partnership agreements are under development to affirm the respective roles and responsibilities between Human Resources and our client departments. Improved clarity around service delivery will benefit employees, managers and departments, which in turn will enhance client service. Service Partnership Agreements will be piloted in 2012-13 with the health and social services system.

The department has two major enhancement projects this fiscal year to make better and more

efficient use of HR PeopleSoft systems and to streamline work for employees and managers. Overseen by a project steering committee, the upgrade to comply with tax requirements and enhance user access is now underway and should be completed by this fall. In the latter part of the fiscal year, work will begin on the ePerformance project. This tool will enhance employee development and increase managers' ability to manage, by streamlining the manual performance evaluation process currently used in the GNWT.

Complementing our work to fix and maintain the foundation strategies for attraction to and retention in the public service have been a priority. Recruitment and marketing strategies are under development, including an inclusive public service recruitment strategy with initiatives aimed at increasing the representation of Aboriginal employees and employees with disabilities throughout the organization. The department will continue to modernize recruitment with the creation of a new careers website as well as utilizing social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Linked-In. The department recently launched a well-received Facebook page to engage with current and potential future employees across the NWT and elsewhere.

In 2012-13 the department will continue its work on strengthening the public service through diversity. The recently completed inclusive public service survey will soon provide us with reliable statistics about the number of GNWT employees with disabilities and how they are being accommodated at work. The department continues to deliver disabilities awareness training and will also start offering Aboriginal cultural awareness training this fiscal year to promote an inclusive workplace that embraces understanding and awareness between cultures.

As part of its work to increase public service capacity, Human Resources continues to partner with Municipal and Community Affairs to invest in the training and development of community and Aboriginal government staff. The GNWT supports the use of intergovernmental secondments to build public service capacity at all levels of government, and I have recently written to community and Aboriginal government leaders to reaffirm the GNWT's commitment to supporting secondment opportunities to share skills and experience.

In 2012-13 the department will continue to offer the Associate Director/Superintendent Program to strengthen Aboriginal representation in senior management. As well, work is currently underway to update the Leadership Development Program to build emerging, middle and senior management skills in the public service.

Mr. Chair, the Department of Human Resources expertise is also required for corporate

reorganization projects. The Financial Shared Services project as well as devolution creates a significant upfront workload for the department related to organizational design, job evaluation, labour relations and data management. The department is strategizing to ensure that seamless corporate support is provided to the stakeholders involved in these and any other reorganization initiatives.

The Department of Human Resources will use 20/20, the NWT Public Service Strategic Plan, and Believing in People and Building on the Strength of Northerners together as our compass as we navigate new directions, opportunities and issues. We will continually monitor our progress, maintain a continuous improvement mindset to serve clients and employees effectively, and build upon our successes to ensure that the GNWT remains an employer of choice.

That concludes my opening remarks and I would be pleased to answer any questions Members may have. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Bisaro): Thank you, Minister Abernethy. I would like to ask the Minister whether or not he would like to bring witnesses into the House.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Yes, please.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Bisaro): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Sergeant-at-Arms, would you escort the witnesses into the House. Thank you.

Minister Abernethy, could you introduce your witnesses to the House, please.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Yes, Madam Chair. With me today are Sheila Bassi-Kellet on my right, the deputy minister of Human Resources, and on my left, the director of human resource strategy and policy, Michelle Beard.

CHAIRPERSON (Mrs. Bisaro): Thank you. Committee, I now open the floor to general comments on the Department of Human Resources. Mr. Yakeleya.

MR. YAKELEYA: Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to say to the Minister comments to his staff and his department. I really wanted to express my appreciation for the Minister and staff coming to the Sahtu and visiting us in the Sahtu and coming to all of the communities. I know you split your tour with the Minister of Health and Social Services portions, but I appreciate the two Ministers making it into the Sahtu region and listening to the people and seeing things first-hand as to how we operate and how we deal with things and what some of the challenges are that we have in our smaller communities with the Government of the Northwest Territories.

One thing I would like to say to the Minister is that I appreciated your consistent message of the government's Secondment Program policy, and

some of the leaders were hearing for the first time how we could get involved with the secondment of GNWT employees or we lend you our employees for training because of funding. It is very challenging in terms of can we pay them enough. So that was good for me to talk to the chiefs after and say, well, you didn't really quite understand it or maybe because they were so busy they didn't really get to know it. It is something that you consistently said to the people in the Sahtu communities about this program. I think once you say it enough and keep saying it, that it is starting to stick. I do want to say that to the Minister. I appreciate him coming to the Sahtu.

I do want to say that with the Human Resources, the Minister is embarking on a new trail on how do we put together a plan that respects the different diverse cultures in the Northwest Territories, that the government senior bureaucracy, deputy ministers, associated assistant deputy ministers, directors have the opportunity to understand and to learn about the people that they are serving. In Tlicho, in the valley, Sahtu, Gwich'in, that they get to understand the culture and understand their way of life and that we have that exchange. I look at that partly as a learning mission and also a reconciliation of bosses, if you call it that. However, the government is on the right track. We are doing this. I appreciate your struggles and moving this policy forward.

Sometimes we don't always have willing partners and sometimes it is a challenge, so I admire your strength and your commitment to keep this vision. Really you are serving the people in the community and in fact paying our bills, because we are here to represent them. With that, I wanted to say to the Minister.

I am also looking forward to where the government will now start moving some of these positions in the earlier orders of the day that we talked about decentralization of Human Resources, and one of the biggest ones is the post-devolution negotiations to a final agreement. How do we move some of those much needed positions into our regions and our smaller communities? If we did a cost-analysis of those, the smaller communities and regions sometimes will not always win. In a similar type of analogy, if we did a cost analysis of all the schools and arenas we put in our communities, you will see if that makes sense, but we do it anyhow. Hopefully you take that type of view and position when we look at positions in the small communities if you're looking at a cost analysis. Because if you do that, Yellowknife will always... Our larger centres always win. It's cheaper, it costs more and we can stretch our dollar more. But if we start moving the positions into our communities in such a way where we start building arenas and schools, then we will be okay. If we can strengthen the communities and regions, we will also strengthen Yellowknife and Yellowknife

will strengthen us. You will see it when you start seeing our people not coming to larger centres. Right now they're coming to Yellowknife or Hay River or Inuvik. They're coming here. What do we have to offer these 20 graduates we have one year, or 10 grads?

There's only so much that can be offered in our community or in the region. There are many factors and we need to support each other, especially when we have the devolution on file and there are discussions on the post-management of devolution. There are discussion papers out there. They are talking about it. They are talking about how we're going to move these positions from Ottawa. It's not a secret to us. They are talking about it in ENR, in Human Resources, it's happening right now as we're sitting here. I don't know what you have planned right now for the Sahtu. No one is telling me anything. All I know is that after I looked at the whole budget book, the main estimates, that Yellowknife is getting a lot of added positions in the various departments. You times that by X amount of thousands of dollars, they're getting a boost in the economy. Let's not kid ourselves. I mean, it's all about economics sometimes and these positions are added here and added there and so forth. You're going to get extra hundreds of thousands of dollars. Hence you guys need a new school in Yellowknife; you need more houses in Yellowknife. Why don't we have that in our regions, in our communities?

That's why I ask the government to look not only at the economic feasibility analysis of these positions, look at what it means for us in our regions. So I've come to the conclusion, Mr. Minister, that you have a task ahead of you, and I believe you're up to it and I believe your staff are up to it, to look at the financial fiscal restraints of our government. It does make all logical sense to have these positions come to Yellowknife if we want to pay for an ITI program or Aboriginal field program or a treatment program who have those reasons why.

So I'm hoping that the government will increase its Aboriginal hire in senior management, that there will be some strong candidates for leadership programs. I've seen the summer student list and we're not doing too badly in that. I really appreciate this government's stance on getting our people to work. I've, again, asked the Minister that when you look at the overall budget in here, you look at the positions, you see too many of the positions going into Yellowknife. If you add them up in the departments, there's not too much going into the regions.

I guess I'll have to continue my messaging through the departments of what I saw. I know the Ministers give justifiable answers to my questions and I question the post-devolution position. We need to help each other out here, otherwise it's going to be

us against... I really don't want that. That's how it's rolling out in the paper, and other kind of ways, but that's what is laying down in front of us. Too much is going to Yellowknife. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Next on my list I have Mr. Dolynny.

MR. DOLYNNY: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to welcome the Minister and the delegation, and congratulate the Minister on a very obviously complex couple of months in his honeymoon period. He's done very, very well in ratifying a lot of our workers out there and I congratulate them and their team.

In terms of general comments before we get into the department, again, earmarking a little bit what was said by the Member for Sahtu, but I'll try to put my spin on it as well.

Again, depending on how you look at it, cost of living might be the variable here, but we're seeing an obviously net migration out of the Territories here and we've had that happen for a number of years now. I guess whether or not this is due to the complexity of the public service jobs themselves, whether we're seeing more retirees, we know that's a factor that we've built into the program. But there is an apparent, a very obvious, apparent statement that one can see very, very easily, is that the NWT's labour market cannot meet the demand to fill the GNWT positions. So this is a critical element in terms of strategy, I'm sure, for your department, one in which I know was addressed in your opening comments to a certain degree. But really looking at the full mandate in terms of dealing with that, it seems to be lacking some specifics in nature. I would probably like to see some comments regarding that.

So what is the department doing to ratify that situation? What is it doing in its communities? What is it doing to prepare Northerners for public service jobs specifically? Where are these schools? Where are these programs? Where are they going to be delivered and how are we going to lure and attract these people from the communities, especially Aboriginal involvement from the communities to seek public sector employment? I think these are very, very key comments and I believe, again, somewhat touched on in the opening address, very little touched into this budget. So I think this is a global position statement, but I believe the Members here deserve to know and I think the people of the Northwest Territories are keenly listening to what's in store for them in public service jobs.

Last on my list of opening comments, and again touched on, is obviously post-devolution, hopefully a successful post-devolution environment. It mentioned a decentralization of jobs into the rural and remote communities. Again, we continuously ask these questions in committee structure. Again,

we get a variable myriad of responses: it's being worked on, it's in the works. But we know that there is a plan, we know that there's something that is being discussed behind in departments and the membership here would love to hear what those ideas are so we can debate them in the House so we can be a fully able participant in the final draft that will be shared with Northwest Territories residents and not an afterthought. I think this is something that needs to come forth sooner than later. We know how many jobs potentially are created and we're hearing again from the smaller and remote communities. They need to prepare and plan, they need to plan housing, they need to plan business and office space for these jobs. So there's lots that has to happen behind the scenes other than just saying so many jobs are going here.

I'll leave it there, Madam Chair, but again, those are my opening comments for this department. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): Thank you, Mr. Dolynny. I did forget to mention to the Minister we're going to go through all general comments and have you respond at the end. Thank you very much. Mr. Bromley.

MR. BROMLEY: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a few brief comments here. First of all, I'm very happy to see this department has been very fiscally responsible and I know that they're making decisions when they do that and I appreciate that. I acknowledge that there's a lot of work coming up with respect to devolution and challenges to work within budgets. I think our budgets are going to be pretty slight for when that comes up. That's going to take some planning to be effective and so on.

A new four-year plan underway, under development, I'm wondering if there's been a report on the success or failures and where we could do better, based on the first three years. Is there such a report? Maybe I missed it and I'd like to see it be critical, a critical look.

I just want to mention, too, the 20-20 Brilliant Plan, whatever it was, had an element of greening the workplace. That's important. It's important for retention, employee retention these days because most young people are very environmentally aware citizens. That's an important aspect of the job place. Unfortunately I only saw the Green Teams ever develop in one department. I will be asking the Minister questions on that as we get into detail and looking forward to how we can do better on that front.

I really appreciate the Minister's commitments in the terms of the interim whistleblower process and I look forward to working with the Minister to establish legislation to that effect. I also am keenly interested in effective and partnership work with MACA that the department is committed to in an ongoing way on capacity building of our public

service and particularly in communities. I just wanted to point out that as an interest and I think a fundamental aspect of being a successful public service in the Northwest Territories and I'll leave it at that. Mahsi.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): Thank you, Mr. Bromley. Are there any further general comments? Mr. Hawkins.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we report progress.

---Defeated

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): We are at general comments. Are there any other general comments? Is committee agreed there are no further general comments?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Agreed.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): Okay. We will move on. Before we move on I will allow the Minister to respond to general comments. Mr. Abernethy.

HON. GLEN ABERNETHY: Thank you, Madam Chair. First off I'd like to just talk about visits to the Sahtu. I had an opportunity to get into the Sahtu. I've made a commitment that I'm going to get into every community in the Northwest Territories to meet with residents throughout the Northwest Territories. I firmly believe that it's important for all of us as Ministers to get out and meet the people who ultimately benefit from the services and programs that we provide by the Government of the Northwest Territories. In doing so I have also committed to taking staff with me because I also think that in addition to just having the politicians get out, it's really, really important for the senior bureaucrats to get out and meet the clients as well. It will give them a better perspective and I think it will help strengthen the public service as a whole.

One of the things that I have been pumping and pushing as I have been going to the communities is the secondment policy that we have here in the Government of the Northwest Territories. We do acknowledge that it's going to be difficult. We haven't had any uptake. We are going to be trying to get secondments with community organizations and Aboriginal governments which have radically different pay structures and benefit structures, so there's going to be a little bit of work to be done as these organizations come forward. Recently I sent a letter to every Aboriginal community government organization outlining the secondment policy and asking them to consider it and to work with us on that. I do believe it is an important program and as I get to the rest of the communities in the Northwest Territories, I will absolutely be continuing to highlight this program as an opportunity to work together with Aboriginal and community governments.

Mr. Yakeleya did reference the Cultural Awareness Training Program. I was asked some questions on that earlier this week and we are in the process of developing that training. We have gone out for RFP. We want to develop a program that can be tailored to suit different areas throughout the Northwest Territories but have enough standard aspects that it can be delivered with some consistency, recognizing the differences in the different regions. We do hope to have our piloting of that done in the fall and make any tweaks that are necessary and then make it available for all GNWT staff who are hired today and tomorrow.

There has been a lot of talk about moving positions outside of Yellowknife and making sure that some of the devolution positions that come to the Northwest Territories do not stay in Yellowknife. This was actually a mandate of the 17th Legislative Assembly, exactly what we're talking about. The Premier has been asked questions and others have been asked questions and we have committed to working on this. There is a committee of deputies under the responsibility of the Executive who are actually digging in and doing the research, that you and other Members have been talking about, such as figuring out where the houses are, figuring out where the spaces are, figuring out what jobs can go out. This isn't just devolution jobs that are being talked about, this is existing jobs. We have to ask questions of ourselves and all of us. Is it divisions? Is it individual positions? How are we really going to determine which ones go out? They're having that debate and as that debate moves on, and that discussion moves on I know that colleagues and Members will be included in that discussion. Your input is valuable and it will be heard.

You've indicated that you want to see an increase in Aboriginal hire at the senior levels. We agree absolutely and we do have the Superintendent to Director Program that is being utilized. All the training positions that we have are filled in that program. As people transition out and move into senior management, we will be continuing to fill those positions. We'd like to see those positions full all the time. When one person moves on, we'd like to backfill it immediately with another person. We'd like to keep that moving.

You also mentioned summer students. Summer students are important. We've been having conversations in Cabinet about the importance of hiring as many summer students as we can. I've committed to you and all the other Members of the House that I will provide you with weekly updates on the status of the summer student hires and I'll continue to do that. Cabinet is agreed to work in the best interest of the government by hiring as many students as we can. The individual hires are departmental responsibilities but we are working as HR to help facilitate those hires.

Member Dolynny talked about the labour market and some of the challenges and asked what are some of the things that we are doing to encourage people to come to the GNWT. We have a great Interim Program. We are utilizing summer students. We do have the Senior Management Superintendent/Director Program as well as other management-type training opportunities within the Government of the Northwest Territories. There are some challenges. It can't just be internal. We have to look outside. A lot of jobs in the Government of the Northwest Territories are legislated. They have certain legislative requirements. To that end, we need to continue to work with Education, Culture and Employment to help enhance the number of individuals that are coming to us with law degrees, and engineering degrees, and nursing degrees, and doctors and social workers; the legislated type professions. We will continue, and we are continuing, to work with Education, Culture and Employment to identify the types of professionals that we need here in the Northwest Territories, in particular in the Government of the Northwest Territories. Those conversations will absolutely continue.

One thing that we're trying to do a little bit different and I mentioned it in my statement – is we are looking at using other sources of media to help highlight the jobs that we have and the opportunities that exist. To that end we are using Facebook and we are using Linked-In and other sources that exist as they become available. We need to be flexible. We know that. Using newspaper ads is not proving to be as effective as it once did.

With respect to devolution positions, that's the same discussion that's being had at the executive level with the deputies trying to figure out what are some of the next steps best shared with us in Cabinet, and we'll be working with committee, obviously.

Mr. Bromley talked about the four-year plan and asked what's been done in the first three years. We have an annual report every year that sort of gives us the highlights of what's been accomplished and we'll share those with you. They will continue to come on an annual basis, sort of outlining what progress has happened in each of the years. If those haven't made it to you, I'll make sure that they make it to the Member and to the rest of the colleagues and Government Ops as well.

Greening the workplace. I'll get more information to you on that. Hopefully when you ask questions we'll be ready to go into a little bit more detail on that.

We will and we are continuing to work with MACA on community development, developing professionals in the different communities.

I think I've covered everything. I'm happy to move to detail and answer specific questions.

CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Bisaro): Thank you, Mr. Abernethy. Are we agreed to move to detail? Mr. Hawkins.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that we report progress.

---Carried

I will now rise and report progress.

Report of Committee of the Whole

MR. SPEAKER: Could I have the report of Committee of the Whole, please? Ms. Bisaro.

MS. BISARO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your committee has been considering Tabled Document 3-17(3), Northwest Territories Main Estimates 2012-2013, and would like to report progress and that the report of Committee of the Whole be concurred with.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Can I have a seconder? Minister Lafferty. He's pretty quick today.

Colleagues, I have brief comments before we adjourn for the weekend.

The 15th Legislative Assembly unanimously adopted a motion on October 20, 2005, to formally observe May 26th as the National Day of Healing and Reconciliation throughout the Northwest Territories.

With that motion, the 15th Assembly declared that each year May 26th would be observed as a way of supporting our communities, our families and all individuals who continue to endure the impacts of the residential school system.

Members are only too aware of the pain caused by the residential school system often affecting up to three generations. In spite of this legacy, the NWT continues to be a land of strong and resilient people. We as MLAs see that every day across our territory.

I encourage all NWT residents to take a moment tomorrow to celebrate that strength and resilience, to continue the positive, collective healing and reconciliation process that has been happening in the NWT.

As individuals, as families, as communities and as Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, acknowledging the healing reconciliation process will only make us stronger.

Colleagues, I want you guys to have a really good weekend and I'll see you back here on Monday. Mr. Clerk, orders of the day.

Orders of the Day

DEPUTY CLERK OF THE HOUSE (Mr. Schauerte): Orders of the day for Monday, May 28, 2012, at 1:30 p.m.:

1. Prayer
2. Ministers' Statements
3. Members' Statements
4. Returns to Oral Questions
5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
6. Acknowledgements
7. Oral Questions
8. Written Questions
9. Returns to Written Questions
10. Replies to Opening Address
11. Replies to Budget Address
12. Petitions
13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
14. Reports of Committees on the Review of Bills
15. Tabling of Documents
16. Notices of Motion
17. Notices of Motion for First Reading of Bills
18. Motions
 - Motion 1, Referral of Commissioner's Opening Address to Committee of the Whole
 - Motion 2, Setting of Sitting Hours by Speaker
19. First Reading of Bills
20. Second Reading of Bills
 - Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act
21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Tabled Document 3-17(3), Northwest Territories Main Estimates 2012-2013
22. Report of Committee of the Whole
23. Third Reading of Bills
24. Orders of the Day

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until Monday, May 28, 2012, at 1:30 p.m.

---ADJOURNMENT

The House adjourned at 1:58 p.m.