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Iqaluit

Speaker: The Honourable Tony Akoak, MLA

Legislative Assembly of Nunavut

Speaker

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(Gjoa Haven)

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(Quttiktuq)

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Hon. P.J. Akeagok

(Iqaluit-Niaqunnguut)

Premier; Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for Indigenous Affairs

Bobby Anavilok

(Kugluktuk)

Janet Brewster

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(Cambridge Bay)

Deputy Premier; Minister of Culture and Heritage; Minister of Education; Minister of Languages; Minister responsible for Seniors

George Hickes

(Iqaluit-Tasiluk)

Deputy Speaker and Chair of the Committee of the Whole

Hon. David Joanasie

(South Baffin)

Government House Leader; Minister of Community and Government Services; Minister responsible for the Utility Rates Review Council

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Mary Killiktee

(Uqqummiut)

Hon. Lorne Kusugak

(Rankin Inlet South)

Minister of Finance, Chair of the Financial Management Board; Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation

Adam Lightstone

(Iqaluit-Manirajak)

Hon. John Main

(Arviat North-Whale Cove)

Minister of Health; Minister responsible for the Qulliq Energy Corporation; Minister responsible for Suicide Prevention

Solomon Malliki

(Aivilik)

Deputy Chair, Committee of the Whole

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(Pangnirtung)

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Karen Nutarak

(Tununiq)

Hon. Daniel Qavvik

(Hudson Bay)

Minister of Environment; Minister of Energy; Minister responsible for Nunavut Arctic College

Joanna Quassa

(Aggu)

Inagayuk Quqqiaq

(Netsilik)

Alexander Sammurtok

(Rankin Inlet North-Chesterfield Inlet)

Joe Savikataaq

(Arviat South)

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Iqaluit, Nunavut
Monday, February 26, 2024

Members Present:

Hon. David Akeeagok, Hon. P.J. Akeeagok, Hon. Tony Akoak, Mr. Bobby Anavilok, Ms. Janet Brewster, Hon. Pamela Gross, Mr. George Hickes, Hon. David Joanasié, Mr. Joëlie Kaernerck, Ms. Mary Killiktee, Hon. Lorne Kusugak, Mr. Adam Lightstone, Mr. Solomon Malliki, Hon. John Main, Hon. Margaret Nakashuk, Ms. Karen Nutarak, Hon. Daniel Qavvik, Ms. Joanna Quassa, Mr. Inagayuk Quqqiaq, Mr. Alexander Sammurtok, Mr. Joe Savikataaq, Mr. Craig Simailak.

>> *House commenced at 13:31*

Item 1: Opening Prayer

Speaker (Hon. Tony Akoak) (interpretation): Good day. Before we proceed, Ms. Killiktee, can you say the opening prayer, please.

>> *Prayer*

Speaker (interpretation): Thank you. I am grateful that all members are now in attendance.

First of all, I would like to thank our interpreters and translators. I am very thankful for the interpreters and translators in Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, and English. I thank them very much.

>> *Applause*

When we're working very hard, it's good that they make a way for us to make the people of Nunavut and the Legislative Assembly understand because they are being helped. We thank all of you for being

interpreter/translators and helping us to understand. Thank you.

>> *Applause*

(interpretation ends) Item 2. Budget Address. Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Item 2: Budget Address**Minister's Statement 363 – 6(2):
Budget Address**

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Nunavummiut, and my colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be here today before you and all Members of the Legislative Assembly to introduce the Government of Nunavut's budget for 2024-25. This is my third budget speech as the Minister of Finance in Nunavut's Sixth Legislative Assembly.

When I reflect on the progress we have made since we first laid out our plan for funding *Katujjiluta*, I feel both proud and humbled. There is no doubt that the Government of Nunavut is making significant strides towards the goals of our mandate and that the investments we propose today will keep our momentum going, but we have so far only scratched the surface of our potential and there is still much more to do.

We have benefitted from the fiscal prudence of governments in years past which maintained our stability through turbulent times and put us in a strong position to respond to the complexities and opportunities of the future.

(interpretation ends) Our path to prosperity was carved out long ago by our ancestors, who continue to share their skills for adaptation and innovation through the memory of successive generations.

Working for the common good, respecting the environment and other people, maintaining balance, and planning for the future: these are values and practices that have helped us build vibrant communities in remote places amidst harsh conditions, and our budget was developed with them in mind.

Today I am pleased to once again present a fiscal plan that supports the ambitious goals and common priorities outlined by the Members of this Legislative Assembly and the leadership of Nunavut's Inuit organizations in Cambridge Bay shortly after the last territorial election.

(interpretation) We came together then with fresh energy and a renewed commitment to work together in unity to build enduring partnerships and achieve tangible outcomes. Through connection and collaboration, leaders at all levels and across all communities can be bridge-builders who create a brighter future for Nunavummiut and enhance the citizenship of all Canadians.

(interpretation ends) Nunavut's constrained fiscal capacity requires partnerships to leverage our resources and advance an agenda of community wellness and sustainable growth. In this way, our territory is strengthened by positive and productive relationships with the Government of Canada.

Our cabinet works hard to ensure that Nunavut stays top of mind for their federal counterparts so that their policies and programs better reflect the realities of the north. While we appreciate Canada's nation-building investments in our territory, the Government of Nunavut's fiscal situation demonstrates the challenge we face in reducing the infrastructure and service disparities between our territory and the rest of Canada.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: When I presented the 2023-24 main estimates, we forecasted an operating deficit of about \$8 million. We are forecasting a deficit again this year as a result of lower federal transfers and higher departmental spending.

As we work to implement devolution, a significant milestone that changes the governance and decision-making in Nunavut, we will continue to fund the initiatives that enable us to exercise our independence.

>> *Applause*

2024-25 Projected Revenue

For 2024-25, our government projects revenues of about \$3.23 billion. After \$314 million from revolving funds, we have about \$2.92 billion left for planning.

Of this amount, \$2.1 billion will be transferred to Nunavut by Canada through the Territorial Financing Formula, the largest federal transfer we receive.

About \$128 million is expected from other federal transfers and approximately \$427 million will be received through specific third party funding agreements.

In addition, we expect to collect about \$251 million from our own-source revenues, including \$171 million in taxes, \$21 million in staff housing rent, and \$59 million from various other sources.

2024-25 Projected Expenditures

On the expenditure side, the Government of Nunavut will seek authority to appropriate \$2.13 billion for its operations in 2024-25, which is in addition to the \$355.8 million for capital approved last October.

We have also set aside a contingency of \$100 million to support unexpected costs in an increasingly volatile macro-economic environment. If we spend this contingency, we will end the year with a modest deficit of \$21 million, an amount equal to about 0.7 percent of our projected revenues.

(interpretation) Mr. Speaker, this fiscal approach allows government to catch up to and address our historical infrastructure deficit by making significant capital investments in our communities. Today's operating budget will help us advance the infrastructure priorities we laid out in our capital estimates last fall, where we outlined over \$355 million in new spending, including \$157 million for community infrastructure and over \$82 million for housing.

(interpretation ends) We recognize that increasing our capital investments puts

pressure on other budgets for operations and maintenance. For the territory, this means an increase of \$4.5 million to keep up with rising maintenance costs of government assets and an additional \$1.5 million for insurance.

We will also invest \$900,000 to ensure the Department of Community and Government Services has the resources to meet the growing demand for inspection of buildings and new construction projects.

>> *Applause*

We will provide an additional \$3.6 million to local governments to hire staff to deliver municipal programs and services. This funding will support new employment opportunities and enhance the capacity of hamlets to provide quality services to their residents.

Building up our infrastructure puts pressure on transportation routes as workers and visitors travel to and from communities. In this budget, we propose \$920,000 more to cover increased maintenance contract costs of airports and \$800,000 for operational support at our new marine ports in Pond Inlet and Iqaluit.

>> *Applause*

Communities are at the frontline of the changing climate in our arctic home. Our ecosystems are fragile, and our land, air, water, and wildlife need to be managed responsibly and sustainably so that we continue to draw comfort and strength from them for generations to come.

In 2024-25 we propose enhanced support for the environment through

increases of \$869,000 for the operation of Nunavut's parks and special places and \$500,000 to continue renewable energy support programs.

Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget, our first commitment is to the well-being of Nunavummiut, especially youth who are learning from the wisdom of their elders to become the future stewards of our land and culture.

Our government's response to last year's report by the Office of the Auditor General on child and family services was swift and unequivocal. We fully accept the contents of the performance audit and are deeply committed to change.

Today's proposed budget increase of \$15.6 million for the Department of Family Services reflects just the start of the work we are doing to develop a whole-of-government roadmap for improving family and community outcomes.

>> *Applause*

(interpretation) One of the first steps to strengthening Inunnguiniq includes ensuring that families can afford to eat. In Nunavut, too many households, especially those with children, live with food insecurity, and so our budget proposal includes \$2.2 million to help address this.

>> *Applause*

The budget for family services also includes \$3.1 million to fund 31 new positions and hire more workers to protect our children, which is our top priority.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): So that more of these workers reflect the communities they serve, we are also providing over \$1.1 million for Nunavut Arctic College to expand their social worker program.

(interpretation ends) For 2024-25, our largest investment is in health. Overall, we propose an increase of \$40.8 million for a variety of initiatives that support our communities to become places of health and healing. This includes \$6 million to operate the new Rankin Inlet Long-Term Care Facility, which will allow elders to age in dignity, closer to their families.

>> *Applause*

To honour the promise we made in *Katujjiluta* to our elders, our government committed about \$60 million in capital funding to build this facility which is almost complete.

To support access to service, funding for health also includes an increase of \$15 million for agency nursing contracts, \$14 million for paramedic support services, \$3 million for out-of-territory hospitals and physicians, and \$3 million to increase the rates paid to physicians.

We are also expanding security improvements by providing an additional \$3 million to ensure health centres are places of healing and positive connections in the community.

>> *Applause*

(interpretation) Our government strives for community safety and well-being. In

2024-25 we will provide \$1.4 million for additional RCMP officers to help keep our communities safe, \$1.2 million for collective agreement increases for RCMP members, and \$818,000 for the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program.

>> *Applause*

We will also provide \$310,000 for the Aaqqigiarvik Correctional Healing Centre to continue its focus on treatment and healing interventions based on Inuit cultural practices and values.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, ensuring that youth have the skills and confidence to pursue their dreams is a priority for us all, especially the teachers who support parents and families to bring out the best in our students.

In 2024-25 we are providing an increase of \$2.2 million to continue to implement the collective agreement with the Nunavut Teachers Association. We are also preparing to negotiate new collective agreements that will come into effect once the current ones expire later this year.

Education funding continues to support a variety of student services, including school-based mental health supports for all school communities, to foster the well-being and academic achievement of our children.

(interpretation) We are also investing \$2.6 million for increased busing costs to help students get to school safely and attend classes on time.

(interpretation ends) In 2024-25 we will invest \$619,000 in new funding to help

ensure sport participants, particularly our youth, have a positive sport experience. This funding will be used to help eliminate harassment, abuse, and discrimination in sport.

>> *Applause*

Mr. Speaker, expanding Nunavut's housing continuum is one of our most ambitious *Katujjiluta* goals.

In October 2022 I was proud to be in my hometown of Rankin Inlet along with Members of this House to announce our plan to build 3,000 new homes across the territory by 2030. Since then, the Nunavut Housing Corporation has been busy laying a foundation for housing transformation and partnerships that will help us collectively achieve the ambitious objectives we set out that day.

(interpretation) Through Igluliuqatigiingniq, our Nunavut 3000 Plan to build houses together, we are on the way to developing 1,000 new housing units by the end of 2025, a target that all Legislative Assembly members set together with Nunavut's Inuit leaders shortly after we were elected.

It is exciting to report on the successes and accomplishments we've had since then. In the first two years of the strategy, 541 new housing units were started or completed, and we anticipate around 200 more units by the end of 2024 supported by the investments we are making today.

>> *Applause*

(interpretation ends) In 2024-25 the Nunavut Housing Corporation will

require \$7.7 million for the increased public housing maintenance costs associated with the record 146 new public housing and 20 staff housing units to be built through our partnership with NCC Development Ltd. in 2024.

Including the 150 public housing units created through groundbreaking partnership last year, this means that in 2024 the NHC will be in construction in every community in Nunavut, a truly great achievement.

>> *Applause*

Too often, Nunavummiut are stuck in public or staff housing because there are no other options for them. This puts stress on families, especially elders and students, and hinders our community and economic development opportunities. This is why we will also provide an increase of \$7.5 million through the Department of Family Services to help address the complex needs of Nunavummiut who require safe and supported housing and \$1.9 million to enhance the budget for homeless shelter funding.

>> *Applause*

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to thank my staff and everyone who helped develop the budget I am proposing today. Since I have taken on this role, I have come to better appreciate how much time and effort it takes to develop the relatively short documents before you. As elected officials, we are fortunate to be supported by dedicated public servants who are passionate about their

communities and committed to making things better.

(interpretation) I would also like to thank the Members of this Assembly who work with our government in the spirit of consensus to advocate for their communities and all Nunavummiut. I thank you all.

>> *Applause*

(interpretation ends) In an increasingly polarized world spurred on by contentious politics, our territory can be a beacon of good governance for leaders from around the globe who are searching for ways of making life better for the people they serve.

Katujjihluta is a call to action for all of us to channel our collective energy into transformational change and continuous improvement, and with this budget, our government is demonstrating its commitment to leading the way. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Item 3. Ministers' Statements. Item 4. Members' Statements. Member for Kugluktuk, Mr. Anavilok. Oh, sorry. Member for Baker Lake, Mr. Simailak.

Item 4: Members' Statements

Member's Statement 486 – 6(2): Baker Lake Participants at Polar Bear Cup

Mr. Simailak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good day to my fellow MLAs, and to the people of Baker Lake, I hope you have a good day.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to apologize at this time for my hoarse voice. Last night we were watching our youth play hockey and some of us showed our support through the TV screen. I even pretended to shoot the puck and raising my voice.

>> *Laughter*

I would like to apologize for my voice not sounding too great.

I think my fellow residents of Baker Lake wanted to win the Polar Bear Cup, which is an annual event attended by our youth. When the youth whom I supported when they were children played hockey, I was very proud of these very capable individuals and it's great to see.

I would like to mention some of the names, Mr. Speaker. First of all, Ken Paungrat, who is nicknamed Brown Lightning, is a great player in Baker Lake; Jon Ryan Kingunkotok, Kyle Mullins, Anton Nakoolak, Edwin Putumiraqtuq, whom we call Hit, Ricky Putumiraqtuq, Alvin Pudnak, Dominic Noah, Jerome Kreealak, Mackenzie Putumiraqtuq (Tupiq), Carlos Simailak, my nephew, Preston Makayak, Malla Curley, and Christian Attungala, who began to train as a referee in 2020; and the coaches Terrance McLean and Vincent Taipana.

Mr. Speaker, these individuals are very skilled and I am very proud of them, along with their families and fellow residents. I believe my time is up. I again thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Members' Statements.
Member for Aivilik, Mr. Malliki.

**Member's Statement 487 – 6(2):
Constituents at Polar Bear Cup**

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to express my pride to the residents of Coral Harbour who were able to go play hockey, even though they don't have a functioning arena. I hope that the hockey arena will open in the near future.

I would also like to express my pride in the residents of Naujaat who placed third in the Polar Bear Cup tournament in Rankin Inlet.

I would also like to congratulate the residents of Netsilik, who often don't go there, who went there to play in the tournament. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Members' Statements.
Member for Rankin Inlet North-Chesterfield Inlet, Mr. Sammurtok.

**Member's Statement 488 – 6(2):
Rankin Inlet Polar Bear Cup**

Mr. Sammurtok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good day to the people of Chesterfield Inlet and Rankin Inlet and Nunavummiut.

I also watched the Polar Bear Cup hockey tournament in Rankin Inlet. First of all, I would like to congratulate two Rankin Inlet teams who played hockey, Rankin Rocks and Rankin Inlet Blizzard. I believe that's what they were called.

The people of Arviat, Whale Cove, Baker Lake, Naujaat, Coral Harbour, and for the first time ever, the people of Netsilik participated in the tournament. I am very proud of them.

I would like to congratulate Rankin Inlet's hockey team for winning the Polar Bear Cup. Second place went to Baker Lake, placing third was Naujaat, and fourth place went to Team Nattilik. I was very proud to watch them play in the tournament for the first time.

Furthermore, I am very happy that it was my grandson's first tournament, Eli, and he scored a goal and he was named the most valuable player. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Members' Statements.
Member for Netsilik, Mr. Quqqiaq.

Member's Statement 489 – 6(2): Team Nattilik at Polar Bear Cup

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge Team Nattilik, who participated in the Polar Bear Plate hockey tournament over the weekend in Rankin Inlet, and they are Tony Ittunga, Jake Qirngnuq, Darius Aleekke, Jarome Apsaktaun, Blake Anaittuq, Rhett Anaittuq, Todd Anaittuq, Jonathan Eetoolook, John Kayasark, Donny Mannilaq, Mitchell Mannilaq, Chad Nartok, Juelie Paulosie, Gerald Qagutaq, and Clayton Eetoolook, and head coach Jesse Apsaktaun, assistant coaches Johnny Tulorialik and Richard Kakkianun.

Mr. Speaker, Team Nattilik came in fourth place. I want to thank Rankin

Inlet for hosting the Polar Bear Plate hockey tournament and I wanted to acknowledge the volunteers, fundraisers, funders of Team Nattilik which are the communities that I represent in this House, Taloyoak and Kugaaruk.

Also, I want to thank Jesse Apsaktaun, Kelsey Apsaktaun, and Sam Clarence Alookey for all they have done for Team Nattilik to participate at their first appearance at the Polar Bear Plate 2024.

Mr. Speaker, I thank David Ningeongan, the Inuktitut commentator who made it exciting commentating in Inuktitut. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Members' Statements.
Member for Aggu, Ms. Quassa.

**Member's Statement 490 – 6(2):
Recognizing Joyce Attagutluk,
Jean Michel Attagutluk, and
Natalia Arnatsiaq**

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I want to say right now is good day and the boys were making a lot of noise last night when they were watching the hockey games.

>> *Laughter*

However, I would like to proudly announce that there are three women who welcome people into their homes. They have a sewing circle going on in their houses and the women who initiated this project without any financial support started this are Joyce Attagutluk, Jean Michel Attagutluk, and Natalia Arnatsiaq.

I wish we could see more projects like this starting in the other communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Oral Questions. Item 4. Sorry; my apologies. Item 4. Members' Statements. Item 5. Returns to Oral Questions. Item 6. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Item 7. Oral Questions.

Before we start, all the members want to ask questions and all the members want to answer questions, so please make your preambles short and get to the point. Thank you.

Member for Uqqummiut, Ms. Killiktee.

Item 7: Oral Questions

Question 713 – 6(2): New Housing Construction

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank you for the reminder to keep my preamble short. It's great to be welcomed here and I am very glad to see all of you.

My questions are for the Minister responsible for the Housing Corporation.

I have spoken many times about the need for new housing in the communities of Qikiqtarjuaq and Clyde River.

(interpretation ends) *Uqaqtittijii*, the Nunavut 3000 Plan indicates that Qikiqtarjuaq has been identified to receive a total of 25 new units over the life of the plan. These include 20 new

public housing units and 5 affordable housing units.

In January 2024 the Nunavut Housing Corporation announced that six new units will begin construction in Qikiqtarjuaq in the fall of 2024. Mr. Speaker, this is good news for the community I represent.

Can the minister clarify how this allocation was determined?
(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad to see you in the House. For both of those communities, we had set aside a number of houses to be built and we had to decide how many houses would be built by looking at the number of people on the waiting list and if we can build a six-plex in Qikiqtarjuaq. That's how we determined the numbers, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You probably used the number of people on the waiting list or simply came up with a number, but I'll proceed with my question.

(interpretation ends) The Nunavut 3000 Plan indicates that Clyde River has been identified to receive a total of 85 new units over the life of the plan. These include 15 new public housing units, 50 new affordable housing units, and 20 new market housing units.

Uqaqtii, in January of this year, the Nunavut Housing Corporation announced that eight new units will begin construction in Clyde River during the fall of 2024. Mr. Speaker, this was also good news for the community I represent. Can the minister clarify if these units will be public housing units, affordable housing units, or market housing units? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, as I indicated earlier, we look at the number of people that apply for units; we don't just pull out a number from the air, Mr. Speaker.

The units that will be built in Clyde River will be owned by the housing association. An eight-plex unit that will be built in Clyde River will be managed by the local housing association. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very glad that new units will be built in my constituency communities.

(interpretation ends) The Nunavut Housing Corporation's announcement of January indicated that it has signed the 2024 annual allocation and purchase agreement with NCC Development.

Can the minister confirm that the land lots for the new housing units have been

selected in both communities?
(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, in collaboration with the municipal governments and the Department of Community and Government Services, we have selected and started building the lots in all Nunavut communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Tununiq, Ms. Nutarak.

Question 714 – 6(2): Pond Inlet Airport

Ms. Nutarak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation ends) My questions are for the Minister of Economic Development and Transportation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to first take this opportunity to alert the minister to concerns that I have frequently observed regarding Pond Inlet's airport.

As the minister is aware from his previous trips to Pond Inlet, the airstrip is surrounded by the community. The fencing around the airport is not in good condition, which is resulting in situations where animals, people, and vehicles are endangering themselves and others by crossing the airstrip and being in unsafe areas.

Will the minister commit to having officials from the Nunavut Airports Division work with the municipality to

address these issues and improve the security of the airport and the perimeters? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Economic Development and Transportation, Mr. David Akeeagok.

Hon. David Akeeagok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the member for that question. Yes, of course we will have to work with the department to rectify the problem and we would like to start getting initiated as soon as possible. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Ms. Nutarak.

Ms. Nutarak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, minister. I look forward to having nice fences around the airport.

>> *Laughter*

As the minister will recall, he recently tabled his department's updated 20-year airport capital needs assessment. The report identifies a number of issues with the airport, including the need for a major overlay of the taxiway and apron. Can the minister confirm when this work will begin? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Economic Development and Transportation, Mr. David Akeeagok.

Hon. David Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A lot of our airports are in that similar situation and what my department does is that we apply through the Airports Capital Assistance Program to the federal Transport Canada. It's a program that helps overlay airstrips and

that's something I can definitely look into how far Pond Inlet is. Basically, we're receiving one airport work per year coming from Transport Canada. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Ms. Nutarak.

Ms. Nutarak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and minister. As the minister will recall, his department's first 20-year airport infrastructure needs assessment recommended that a "feasibility study be undertaken to determine the cost and benefits of constructing a new High Arctic hub airport at Pond Inlet for civil and military purposes."

Mr. Speaker, there is increasing focus on the need for significant enhancements to arctic security to address emerging threats from Russia and China.

The need to develop sources of critical minerals to power a decarbonized future is very important.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that the minister does not have a hundred million dollars in his back pocket to immediately pay for the development of a new hub airport at Pond Inlet.

Can the minister confirm what discussions he has had with the federal Minister of Transport and National Defence to identify national airport infrastructure investments in Pond Inlet and the other communities of the region? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Economic Development and Transportation, Mr. David Akeeagok.

Hon. David Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I share my member colleague's concern, especially on arctic security.

Along with the Premier and a few others of my colleagues, every opportunity that we meet with any of the federal ministers, including the Prime Minister, do we raise that we do need arctic security and that we do need infrastructure to be built. We have been emphasizing that it be built in our communities because those are the eyes and ears of our nation and that they need to invest into our communities for major infrastructure, whether it's for a deep sea port or an airstrip that the military can use, but it should be available for commercial and for the public.

That's what we have been advocating and I will continue to advocate. I thank the member for raising it in the House because that will further enhance our support in terms of justifying that the Arctic needs a lot of investment, especially coming from the Canadian government. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Iqaluit-Sinaa, Ms. Brewster.

Question 715 – 6(2): 2024 Budget

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are for the Minister of Finance and they concern the budget that he just introduced.

I will take this opportunity to formally congratulate the Minister of Finance on having delivered his third Budget Address; one more to go. I do like the tie clip that you're wearing today as well.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister is well aware, the government's current collective agreement with the Nunavut Employees Union expires just a few months from now on September 30.

The minister did mention the Nunavut Teachers Association collective agreement. However, I would just like to note that as the minister will recall, it took a significantly long time to negotiate the last collective agreement, and I hope that the next collective agreement will be signed and ratified prior to the end of the upcoming 2024-25 fiscal year.

Can the minister clarify the extent to which the contingencies that are built into his budget's fiscal framework take into account the signing of a new collective agreement prior to the end of the upcoming 2024-25 fiscal year?
Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a contact person if you're interested in getting this beautiful tie clip.

Mr. Speaker, our workers, our staff are constantly trying to stay ahead of the curve in terms of union negotiations and collective agreements. Mr. Speaker, we work with those other departments within the Government of Nunavut to address those to some extent. Our budget addresses some of those concerns.

Until we see what kind of agreement that we do come up with and have signed, there may or may not have to be changes

or additions on that particular line item, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister is aware, approximately one-third of the government's operations and maintenance budget is allocated for employee compensation and benefits, and that's roughly about \$700 million.

According to the government's most recently released quarterly employment report, approximately one-third of the government's positions are currently vacant, and that's roughly 2,000 positions.

Can the minister indicate approximately how much the government expects to lapse in unspent salary dollars by the end of the 2023-24 fiscal year as a consequence of the persistently high vacancy rate? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Because a position is vacant doesn't necessarily mean that it's not being filled. We do have vacant positions, but we do have a lot of casual staff on payroll, and for me to hazard a guess into exactly how much of this would be lapsed, if any, is premature at this time as that work is yet to come.

When we start going through those items at the end of this fiscal year, I'll have a much better idea at that time to find out exactly how much we have spent on those vacant positions as they would have to be filled by casual positions and

so forth, Mr. Speaker. When that information becomes available, it would be a much better time for me to share with my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, minister, for that response. I recognize, actually, that though vacancies may seem like it's possible to lapse funding, it's actually possible that it might cost even more to fill those vacancies in the meantime.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister will recall, the Legislative Assembly passed the new *Liquor Tax Act* in 2022 and although the legislation received assent on November 8, 2022, it has not yet been brought into force.

As the minister is aware, section 48 of the statute allows him to make regulations "respecting the rate of tax payable on liquor, which may be between 5% and 25%."

Mr. Speaker, can the minister confirm, from a revenue perspective, when the legislation will be brought into force and can he clarify how much, from a revenue perspective, is projected to be raised under the *Liquor Act* during the upcoming 2024-25 fiscal year? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I hope that was clear. I jotted some notes down and strayed a little bit from my written question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish I could bring the new Act into force immediately, but unfortunately because of different restraints and that we are still reviewing the new *Tax Act*, it will be hard to do in the near future. We have staff constraints or restraints; we just don't have staff in our department at this time. We're hoping that we will be able to do something in the life of this Assembly, but it's going to be very hard to do that in terms of bringing that into order at this time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Amittuq, Mr. Kaernerck.

Question 716 – 6(2): Operating Deficit

Mr. Kaernerck: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, colleagues, and Amitturmiut. Mr. Speaker, I have a question to the finance minister in regard to the Budget Address too.

As the minister has just stated, for the 2023-24 main estimates, they are forecasting an operating deficit of about \$8 million. My first question would be: how much is the department's forecasting deficit again for the fiscal year? Are there numbers that are determined in this since \$2.92 billion is left for planning? Does the finance minister have numbers of how much the government will be in deficit for the next fiscal year? Are there numbers that are in the books too? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I'm sorry, Mr.

Speaker, but I'm having trouble understanding the exact question of where it's going. When I presented the '23-24 deficit, I estimated about an \$8 million deficit and in this one, I forecast a modest \$21 million deficit, which is about 0.7 percent of our budget, Mr. Speaker. I hope that's the question he was asking. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Kaernerck.

Mr. Kaernerck (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, my main question was regarding my fellow residents of Amittuq, especially Sanirajak, and the fact that they have not seen any new capital projects. That's why I asked if there are any funds remaining from this that could be used for planning for capital projects.

That's why I was asking the minister the question on how much we would be in deficit for next year and I wanted to get clarification. Will this budget that you forecasted for this coming fiscal year be enough for the entire territory of Nunavut? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The funding for this coming year is for the main estimates of the government. It's not for capital infrastructure, but this is to be used for the maintenance of our capital infrastructure and we believe that we will have \$21 million in deficit for the upcoming fiscal year and \$100 million has been set aside for contingency funding because we need to have that contingency funding. I believe that the

funding that we have been requesting to the House is going to be adequate and I'm very pleased that starting tomorrow, we will be reviewing the main estimates, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Netsilik, Mr. Quqqiaq.

Question 717 – 6(2): New Housing Construction

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister is well aware, the communities of Taloyoak and Kugaaruk are both in need of new housing.

Mr. Speaker, the Nunavut 3000 Plan indicates that Taloyoak has been identified to receive a total of 65 new units over the life of the plan. These include 60 new public housing units and 5 affordable housing units.

In April 2023 the Nunavut Housing Corporation announced that 20 new units would begin construction in Taloyoak in the fall of 2023. Mr. Speaker, can the minister provide an update today on the status of these new units? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There will be 20 units that will be built in 2023 in Taloyoak and they have started construction. It would be interesting to

see the completed housing units and the community of Taloyoak will be making the decision as to who will access those new units, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My fellow residents of Taloyoak are looking forward to receiving new housing units, so we hope to see them constructed.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, the Nunavut 3000 Plan indicates that Kugaaruk has been identified to receive a total of 35 new units over the life of the plan. These include 10 new public housing units and 20 new affordable housing units.

Mr. Speaker, in January of this year, the Nunavut Housing Corporation announced that eight new units will begin construction in Kugaaruk during the fall of 2024. Mr. Speaker, can the minister clarify if these eight units will be constructed as a single multiplex building or if they will be built as two four-plex buildings? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The building being constructed in Kugaaruk will be a single multiplex building with eight units, with six units for the local housing authority and two units for government staff housing. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The community of Kugaaruk is expecting units and they are in need of housing.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, the Nunavut Housing Corporation's announcement of January indicated that it had signed the 2024 annual allocation and purchase agreement with NCC Development.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister clarify the extent to which the agreement includes minimum requirements for Inuit training, apprenticeship, and employment for the new construction projects? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The construction company that the housing corporation has signed an agreement with is the Nunavut Construction Corporation, which is an Inuit-owned entity. When we met with them, they decided that they would like to see more Inuit employees. Even before they started construction of the units last year, they started training the people who would like to help construct the units because Inuit don't just need to be labourers.

We are working work with the Nunavut Construction Corporation to retain Inuit so that they can get certification to be carpenters, electricians, and so on, as long as there is time to get certification.

They will look for Inuit who qualify to work in Nunavut. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Iqaluit-Tasiluk, Mr. Hickes.

Question 718 – 6(2): Children in Residential Care

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to direct my question today to the Minister responsible for Family Services.

Mr. Speaker, my first question is a question I have asked many times in the House already, but I do have a little tail end of it that I would like to get a little bit more detail on.

How many children are in residential care inside and outside of Nunavut and out of those, how many are under public guardianship? Thank you, Mr. Speaker

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Family Services, Ms. Nakashuk.

Hon. Margaret Nakashuk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the member for asking that question. (interpretation ends) At this current time, we have 84 children and youth in out-of-territory placements, 65 are residing in contract placements and 18 in medical foster care. Also, we have 108 adults in residential care placements out of territory, but these are the adult ones, and there are 49 adults under the *Guardianship and Trusteeship Act*. (interpretation) Thank you.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Hickes.

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the Office of the Auditor General's report and the televised hearing that we had last fall, prior to that, there was a letter that was sent from the Office of the Auditor General to the department highlighting the dire concern that they had. I believe that letter was sent in December 2022. When that letter was received by the department, how many immediate site visits were conducted? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Family Services, Ms. Nakashuk.

Hon. Margaret Nakashuk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the member for that follow-up question. (interpretation ends) In terms of site visits, we do have our client liaison officers that do site visits frequently in the outlying cities; Ottawa, Edmonton, and Winnipeg. In terms of the other areas, we've had social workers go into homes or group homes to do site visits that don't have the client liaison officers.

I can't have a number with me at this time. I could certainly get back to the member on the numbers, but it would be kind of difficult to get. Like I said, some of these site visits could be within the territory where social workers are going in to visit families as well. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Hickes.

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe this question will allow the minister to elaborate or at least to commit to getting some further details.

In October 2023 the minister was quoted as saying that the best interests of families and children are being served with "immediate and sustainable steps."

What oversight and how is that oversight accomplished for residential care clients of the Department of Family Services? I would like to get a clearer idea, in territory and out of territory, of how many site visits are Family Services officials expected to do and how many have they completed. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Family Services, Ms. Nakashuk.

Hon. Margaret Nakashuk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank you for that follow-up question. (interpretation ends) Like I stated, with the number of clients in care that we have with the Department of Family Services, it's really hard to get the numbers with the site visits that we get in the territory as well as out of territory, but I could certainly provide more answers to the member when I can. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Arviat South, Mr. Savikataaq.

Question 719 – 6(2): Petroleum Products Stabilization Fund

Mr. Savikataaq (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I say "good day" to the people of Arviat.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue with the Minister of Community and Government Services over the PPD.

Mr. Speaker, the last time we had exchange here, the minister stated that there was a 50 percent vacancy rate as of November 2023, I believe, and that might be part of the problem why the stabilization fund is \$24.7 million in the negative.

I would just like to ask the minister first about the collectables. What are the collectables of the PPD at? What is owed to the Petroleum Products Division from customers? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasié.

Hon. David Joanasié: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The accounts receivable for the Petroleum Products Division, as of January 2024, came to about \$83.6 million. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The price of fuel and the price of gasoline affects all Nunavummiut and it affects the price of everything in Nunavut, as everything is flown in, shipped in, petroleum products are used for hunters to go hunting, for heating their houses, or for transportation in the community.

Since the collectables is at \$83.6 million, if all those collectables were paid, would the stabilization fund be in the positive? Right now, it's in the negative of \$24.7 million. If all the collectables were collected, the \$83.6 million, would the stabilization fund be above then? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasié.

Hon. David Joanasié: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's kind of a hypothetical question there. We would be in a different situation, I believe, if the receivable was at zero, but this is the current situation now and we're trying to work with the balance and the stabilization fund. We are trying to make sure that the prices of fuel remain at the lowest they can be and we will continue on that path. Thank you.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't believe that I was asking a hypothetical question. The collectable is a fact; the minister stated that it's at \$83.6 million collectable. Mr. Speaker, the minister stated in the last exchange that the stabilization fund is \$24.7 million in the minus. Those are both facts and they're not hypothetical. It's a fact. It's a fact that the Petroleum Products Division's stabilization fund is \$24.7 million in the hole. Their credit card is \$24.7 million in the hole. Plus, it's a fact that the minister stated that collectables from the Petroleum Products Division is at \$83.6 million. It's a fact. It's not hypothetical. I don't take it that it's a hypothetical question.

Of course, we would be in a different situation if all the money that was owed was collected. Maybe if all that money was collected, we would not have needed a price increase.

Mr. Speaker, we know that on April 1, the federal carbon tax will kick in and the price of petroleum products in

Nunavut will go up again. I'll ask the minister: other than the April 1 date of gasoline and diesel going up again, is the government anticipating any more fuel price increases or changes between now and the 2024 resupply? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasié.

Hon. David Joanasié: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to clarify myself on the stabilization fund balance that I shared previously. It is at minus \$24,719,000, but it was as of the end of the fiscal year 2023. Of course, the Petroleum Products Division operates and those are based on the consolidated audited financial statements.

Mr. Speaker, we are trying to catch up to speed on this. However, to the question on if we are looking at doing an additional price increase, we will have to consider all options, but right now, we just made one last increase in early 2024 and we will have to consider all options moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Baker Lake, Mr. Simailak.

Question 720 – 6(2): Status of Elder Strategy

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to direct my questions to the Premier and Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, the government's *Katujjiluta* mandate puts elders at the

forefront with "Aging with Dignity" as the first of its five key priority areas.

Can the Premier provide an overview of what activities and initiatives to support the "Aging with Dignity" priority have been completed since the *Katujjiluta* mandate was adopted by this government? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Pauloosie Akeegok.

Hon. P.J. Akeegok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my colleague for that question. We have been extremely busy. I am very proud that we have been embarking on a comprehensive elder care strategy that is rooted with elders, of the elders that have their lived experience and the challenges that they have seen.

As I have mentioned here in the House, we're right near the completion of that comprehensive strategy. It did require us to be able to engage deeply with the elders from every community and that work will entail the next steps of the concrete improvements that they would like to see. I very much look forward to the continued support of my member colleague across.

Further, Mr. Speaker, we have worked on opening the long-term care centre in Rankin Inlet as a concrete step where we are working extremely hard to ensure that we repatriate the elders that are and have been shipped south with the lack of services that are there.

We are moving on many files, but really, those two key ones are ones where I am feeling those are the two concrete

examples that I could bring among many other ones that we have been working on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 7, 2023 I had asked the Minister responsible for Seniors about communities accessing vans or other transportation for their elders. In her response, the minister indicated that she was waiting for the elders strategy to come out before making any commitments in this area.

I'm getting very concerned that a number of initiatives that may have provided support and comfort to Nunavut elders for the past two years are not being delivered because we are still waiting for the elders strategy to come out.

Mr. Speaker, can the Premier explain why these important initiatives that could support elders in aging with dignity are not proceeding? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I thank my colleague for asking that question. I couldn't stress enough the importance of the urgency, and again, I am so thankful for the elders who participated in the comprehensive elder care [strategy], and it is very difficult to know that even some of those members have since passed.

I think we all understand the severity and the weight that we're collectively in, and as such, we are moving with the advancements of that strategy. I have indicated that I am really excited to table that and I am hoping that we will be able to table that in this Assembly, in this sitting, while we're still here.

Through that, we will outline the clear steps and clear investments that we need to make to address what we heard from the elders. It has to be strategic and it has to have that urgency to it. As such, once I table that, I very much look forward to getting the support to ensure that we see the investments where we need to.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the Premier is actually aiming to table it during this winter sitting, which ends next week Thursday. Next week Thursday is our last day here in this House for this winter sitting.

Mr. Speaker, in November 2023 the Premier stated that he anticipated the elders strategy being ready by December. We are now at the end of February and nearly two and a half years into the term of this Assembly and we have yet to see the government's elders strategy. As you know, once strategies are in place, then they can be implemented.

I'm growing increasingly concerned that we are going to reach the end of our term with very little concrete progress on helping our elders to age with dignity in their homes and in their communities.

Mr. Speaker, I might add that this *Katujiluta* mandate has a few priorities going. The Nunavut 3000 is already up and running. They're building houses now in multiple communities, yet we don't see an elder care strategy. That comes from a few meetings here in Iqaluit, Clyde River, Pond Inlet, Ottawa, Rankin Inlet, Cambridge Bay, Winnipeg, and I believe Edmonton. That's just a few communities where they gathered with elders to get information.

I'm wondering: will the Premier commit to tabling the elders strategy before the end of this winter sitting? Can I get assurance for that? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Pauloosie Akeegok.

Hon. P.J. Akeegok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I intend to, as I indicated, and I would like to take the opportunity and thank the regular members of Mary Killiktee as well as Joanna Quassa, who I was very fortunate to be able to consult and to work with on that strategy. I am working really hard to ensure that we have that opportunity to be able to hear the voices that we heard from the elders, but also do a comprehensive review within the government to ensure that we see the success of the implementation of this comprehensive strategy.

We have to get it right. We can't just rush something of this magnitude and it did require some time, but as many of the elders have said, they have shared much of the concerns many times and that their patience is wearing thin, and I wear that heavy as such and I'm very much looking forward to seeing concrete

investments to address the comprehensive elder care strategy moving forward. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Rankin Inlet North-Chesterfield Inlet, Mr. Sammurtok.

Question 721 – 6(2): Chesterfield Inlet Power Plant

Mr. Sammurtok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation ends) My questions are for the Minister responsible for the Qulliq Energy Corporation, which I should have asked this question on Friday.

As the minister will recall, he recently wrote a letter to me concerning the Qulliq Energy Corporation's application for approval to replace one of the three generators at the Chesterfield Inlet plant. I appreciate the minister's efforts to keep me informed about this work. Can the minister clarify the next steps in the approval process for this project? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister responsible for the Qulliq Energy Corporation, Mr. Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the member for that question on this issue. Yes, the corporation had committed to replacing one of the three generators with a new one at the power plant for Chesterfield Inlet. They wrote me a letter requesting for a replacement and I have forwarded it to the Utility Rates Review Council. They are currently conducting a review for the request and they will decide during the review to

give their direction. Once I hear back from the Utility Rates Review Council, we will know if we can do a replacement in the coming months. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister is aware, Chesterfield Inlet's current power plant is almost 50 years old. That's almost half a century.

The corporation's recent application indicates that:

"The Qulliq Energy Corporation received a major project permit in June of 2022 to replace the power plant in Chesterfield Inlet. Subsequent to receiving that major permit, the Qulliq Energy Corporation determined it would not replace the power plant in Chesterfield Inlet and, as a result, an engine replacement is necessary."

For the record, can the minister confirm if the decision to cancel the new power plant was approved by the corporation's board of directors, the minister, or the cabinet? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Qulliq Energy Corporation, Mr. Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also thank the member for his question regarding this issue. Yes, they do need to replace the generation in Chesterfield Inlet and we are aware of that. It has been noted that the generators at the plant are now too old. The plant requires a replacement because it is too old.

They had an issue with this project because the costs kept rising at the corporation level. I can use the generator in Kugluktuk as an example. The cost kept increasing. The current situation was the issue where the Arctic Energy Fund was not enough. Within the Arctic Energy Fund, the available budget was \$175 million. The projects that were planned to go ahead in Kugaaruk and Chesterfield Inlet will go ahead in the future. However, they had to delay the projects because of the lack of funds.

I hope that my response is understandable. The corporation will replace the generators, but before we can secure funding and until the federal funding becomes more available, we are hoping that the new generators will be built. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the record, can the minister clearly explain why the Chesterfield Inlet power plant replacement project has been cancelled and can he indicate if the corporation will try again to apply for federal funding to undertake the project? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Qulliq Energy Corporation, Mr. Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation ends) Yes, we fully, (interpretation) I mean, (interpretation ends) the Qulliq Energy Corporation fully intends to move the project forward for a new power plant in Chesterfield Inlet in the future, subject to availability of funding.

Mr. Speaker, similar to the work in Kugaaruk, replacing one of the generator sets in Chesterfield Inlet is intended to buy us additional time while we secure funding and work on planning for a new plant in Chesterfield Inlet.

Mr. Speaker, specifically in Chesterfield Inlet, we are trying to replace the G-1 Detroit Diesel Series Generator which has approximately 60,000 operating hours on it. Putting a new generator set into Chesterfield Inlet, if approved, will help us to burn less fuel and it will be more reliable. It will buy us additional time while we work on replacing the plant in the longer term. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Aivilik, Mr. Malliki.

Question 722 – 6(2): Violent Incident Database

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask questions to the Minister of Education regarding some of her responses to my questions about the (interpretation ends) violent incident database.

(interpretation) Once a student's incident report is entered into the database, does the student's name stay in the system forever? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: *Quana*, Mr. Speaker. *Quana* to the member for the question. Sorry, there were some translation issues. If he can please repeat the question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Mr. Malliki, please repeat your question.

Mr. Malliki: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation) My question was: once a student has an incident and the report is entered, does the student's name stay on the database for the rest of their school years? (interpretation ends) Are they entered to the database for the rest of their school years? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. In terms of the violent incident reporting database, we do gather information. However, we don't keep confidential or privacy information reported in that database pertaining to, I think, what the nature of the question is. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question was not answered. We would like to get answers to questions that we are asking to the ministers. However, when we are not given answers, more questions arise. I am not sure if I have any more confidence with the minister regarding the actual work she does.

Mr. Speaker, in all of Canada where there are incidents and the programs are in place, the students' names appear where the students are victims of violent incidents or where there are programs for violent incidents in school. Perhaps

the minister can state who benefits from this. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. There are a number of different supports. Working with our Department of Justice, there are supports that we can task to specific schools or communities if we do have specific incidents where we do need to require support for the students.

We also have mental health supports that we work with our schools. We have 34 new positions with mental health supports directly in our schools to work on any issues, if there are any that arise. In terms of the mental health supports, we have all communities that have those supports virtually or in person. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister mentioned about the regions in Nunavut where the different regions utilize more of the violent incident reports being entered into the database. Can the minister indicate which regions utilize more of the database, such as Kivalliq, Kitikmeot, or Baffin? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. Yes, we do have our

regional school operations that are working with our school leaders to implement the database. As I did indicate, we do have some regions that are utilizing the database more, but we're working to ensure that they're all using it equally as we're just learning this database.

We did notice that the Kitikmeot was reporting a higher number of incidents because they are putting the information in there and utilizing the system the way that it's intended to, and we hope that all the regions will all use it as a database to collect information and we will have accurate information when it is inputted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Iqaluit-Manirajak, Mr. Lightstone.

Question 723 – 6(2): Contracted Positions in Education

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions today are also for the Minister of Education regarding the department's procurement practices.

Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to closely scrutinize the government's contracting and procurement activity reports which were tabled during our previous sitting. I noticed that the Department of Education's contract included regional superintendent positions and upon further research, I note that the same individuals were contracted in the previous year as well as a number of other senior regional positions.

I would like to ask: can the minister inform this House when the department began the practice of contracting out the

superintendent positions and if these positions are still being contracted out? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. The Department of Education does use contracted services as we do have limited capacity in various divisions. With the superintendent position, we do have one contracted position at the moment that we're utilizing, but in terms of the year that we started using contract services for that position, I'll commit to getting back to the member on that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Moving on to my next line of questioning, other positions that were contracted out by the Department of Education include the manager of human resources and technical and administrative IT services. I would like to ask: are these positions still being contracted out? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. In terms of the particulars of the two positions that the member requested, I'll get back to the member with the details of that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the minister for that commitment.

Mr. Speaker, one similarity that these contracts share, aside being government positions, is the fact that they were all sole-sourced.

Mr. Speaker, under the Government of Nunavut's procurement regulations, it states that sole sourcing contracts are allowed where a contract authority such as the Department of Education believes on reasonable grounds that one of the following is applicable:

- “the goods, services or construction are urgently required” and are in the public's best interest;
- “only one party is available” of providing these services; and lastly,
- architectural and engineering contracts that do not exceed \$25,000.

Out of these three criteria, how did the department determine that these contracts would be eligible to be sole sourced? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. In terms of determining what positions get sole sourced, the variance, there are differences depending on the position, but I can say that we do have positions that are very hard to fill as there are a lot of number of years of

service. I can say that for the superintendent specifically, that position is a very detailed position that a person would have to have a lot of number of services in the Department of Education. On that basis, we do hire people with a lot of years of experience who know education in Nunavut and can fill that role on an interim basis as a stopgap measure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Iqaluit-Tasiluk, Mr. Hickes.

Question 724 – 6(2): Petroleum Products Stabilization Fund

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask my next question to the Minister responsible for Community and Government Services, specifically with regard to the Petroleum Products Division.

Mr. Speaker, it was mentioned earlier that the collectables under the Petroleum Products Division is almost \$84 million. How much of that amount is considered non-recoverable or delinquent? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wouldn't have the details on that, though I can look into that and bring it forward to my colleagues. Thank you.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Hickes.

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I'm sure most members are aware, the variance reports and the projections

of the Petroleum Products Division takes the accounting measure of collectables into consideration when they're establishing fuel pricing.

Mr. Speaker, I'm a little unclear as to what the impact is on the stabilization fund because those accounting practices would have been taking place already. I'm going get down to maybe a simplistic question for the minister: what is the purpose of the stabilization fund and how is it intended to work? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question. Mr. Speaker, the stabilization fund, since the Petroleum Products Division operates on a cost recovery basis but it does operate as though it's a business, so any money it makes goes into the stabilization fund. If there is no money made, it means that the stabilization fund would take the hit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Hickes.

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just three years ago in March 2021, the stabilization fund limit was increased from \$10 million to \$20 million. As we look at some of the statements that were made earlier and the numbers that were made earlier, how did it come to this point that the stabilization fund limit has been exceeded, which in all likelihood necessitates a significant increase in fuel rates?

Mr. Speaker, the fund recovery is supposed to be tracked continuously to

maintain appropriate fuel rates. When we look at those limits being exceeded, it has an immediate impact or a legal impact on fuel rates. Can the minister explain how it got to this point? Thank you.

Speaker: Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can't point to one exact factor that has played a part in this, but as you will recall, many Nunavummiut, in the year 2022, we experienced some challenges and difficulties around delivering fuel and there were some communities that faced shortages and even outages.

Mr. Speaker, my department and the Petroleum Products Division are trying to turn things around after that experience. Looking forward, we are taking a close look at reviewing the structure of the Petroleum Products Division and how it can better serve not just our government but all communities, including how the price of fuel is being set and when it's set and those kinds of things. I look forward to bringing updates to this House and for Nunavummiut to learn more about what's going on. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary... . My apologies.

>> *Laughter*

My apologies. Oral Questions. Member for Arviat South, Mr. Savikataaq.

Question 725 – 6(2): Vacant Positions in Petroleum Products Division

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue where Mr. Hickes left off.

Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the community and government services minister and it's still pertaining to the PPD.

We had a large discussion here and as the minister stated earlier and I stated earlier, there is a roughly 50 percent vacancy in the Petroleum Products Division in Rankin Inlet. How many of these vacant positions are managers and up? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have to look at the finer details on this, but just in terms of the vacancies, my department is trying to work out on how there are human resource capacity challenges, not just specifically with the Petroleum Products Division. If they need additional support through contracts, as was mentioned through an exchange between Mr. Lightstone and Minister Gross, we do have that option. I don't know if there have been any casuals that have been hired since November, but since then, there were none. We do try to hire casuals as well to cover off any challenges and vacancies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your first supplementary, Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The buck stops at the top and the minister can't even tell the House how many managers or directors are vacant in a division that has 35 employees. I think we should be able to get that kind of answer of how many vacancies in managers if the minister was more attentive to that section of CGS.

Mr. Speaker, the comment about they can contract out, we heard contracting out from the Department of Education and I know there are a lot more departments that contract. We don't want the government to be called the "Government of Contractors and Consultants." We want these vacant positions filled and we want them filled with bodies that are working in the communities.

I'll ask the minister: from the managers and up, are there any employees that are working either at home or out of province? Are there any management and up positions that the work is being done by a GN employee that is not working in the office in Rankin Inlet on a Monday to Friday basis? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are and of course through the Department of Human Resources, there are new human resource policies at play that departments can utilize.

For the Petroleum Products Division specifically, I do not entirely have the work arrangements that may have been set up, but as far as I know, I don't

believe there are any managers or otherwise that are working outside of Rankin Inlet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Your second and final supplementary, Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's another response that the minister is not sure of what's going on in the Petroleum Products Division in Rankin Inlet.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the minister has to put more of his staff and his energy and efforts into the Petroleum Products Division. It's almost \$84 million of collectables. There's \$24.7 million in the hole in their credit card that's supposed to stabilize the funds.

My question will be: will the minister commit to providing the House here the number of managers and up positions that are vacant or the work is being done by someone not residing in Rankin Inlet, not working in the office in Rankin Inlet, like working at home or working out of territory? Will the minister commit to that and give it to this House before the end of this sitting? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the member pressing on this and we do want to fill those vacancies and have those positions working for the purpose of these positions, whether it's the PPD or CGS as a whole. There are many different positions and opportunities.

With what the member asks, I will commit to looking at what we can provide and again, the Petroleum Products Division, we are having a very close review on how the structure is set and the operationalization of that division and specific to how it serves the public and Nunavummiut. With that, I expect and I commit to bringing back progress in this area, and I hope that members will continue to ask their questions and keep at it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Members, the time allotted for question period is now over. 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. Responses to Petitions. Item 14. Reports of Standing and Special Committees on Bills and Other Matters. Item 15. Tabling of Documents. Member for Pond Inlet, Ms. Nakashuk. Sorry.

>> *Laughter*

My apologies today. Ms. Karen.

>> *Laughter*

Item 15: Tabling of Documents

Tabled Document 235 – 6(2): Correspondence from the Minister of Justice Concerning Public Safety in Pond Inlet

Ms. Nutarak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation ends) I wish to table today recent correspondence from the Minister of Justice concerning public safety in Pond Inlet.

The letter addresses my correspondence to the minister regarding a rise of alcohol-related incidents and a request for more Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers in Pond Inlet. I applaud the minister and his department for taking proactive steps and allocating an additional Royal Canadian Mounted Police offer in Pond Inlet.

I encourage all members to review the correspondence with care. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Tabling of Documents. Item 16. Notices of Motions. Item 17. Notices of Motions for First Reading of Bills. Item 18. Motions. Item 19. First Reading of... . Motions. I recognize the Member for Aivilik, Mr. Malliki.

Item 18: Motions

Motion 029 – 6(2): Extended Sitting Hours and Days

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(interpretation ends) I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for South Baffin, that the Speaker be authorized to set such sitting hours and days as the Speaker deems fit to assist with the business before the House during this present sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried.

Item 19. First Reading of Bills. I recognize the Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Item 19: First Reading of Bills

Bill 37 – Appropriation (Operations & Maintenance) Act, 2024-2025 – First Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 37, *Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2024-2025*, be now read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the motion.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried.

Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Bill 38 – Supplementary Appropriation (Operations & Maintenance) Act, No. 2, 2023-2024 – First Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 38, *Supplementary Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, No. 2, 2023-2024*, be now read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the motion.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried.

First Reading of Bills. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Bill 39 – Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 4, 2023-2024 – First Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 39, *Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 4, 2023-2024*, be now read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the motion.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried.

Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Bill 40 – Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 1, 2024-2025 – First Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move again, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 40, *Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 1, 2024-2025*, be now read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the motion.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried.

Item 20. Second Reading of Bills. I recognize the Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Item 20: Second Reading of Bills

Bill 37 – Appropriation (Operations & Maintenance) Act, 2024-2025 – Second Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 37, *Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2024-2025*, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill authorizes the Government of Nunavut to make operations and maintenance expenditures for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried and Bill 37 is referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Second Reading of Bills. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Bill 38 – Supplementary Appropriation (Operations & Maintenance) Act, No. 2, 2023-2024 – Second Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 38, *Supplementary Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, No.*

2, 2023-2024, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill makes supplementary appropriations to defray the operations and maintenance expenses of the Government of Nunavut for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried and Bill 38 is referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Second Reading of Bills. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Bill 39 – Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 4, 2023-2024 – Second Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 39, *Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 4, 2023-2024*, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill makes supplementary appropriations to defray the capital expenditures of the Government of Nunavut for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried and Bill 39 is referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Second Reading of Bills. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

**Bill 40 – Supplementary
Appropriation (Capital) Act, No.
1, 2024-2025 – Second Reading**

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have completed my sit-up numbers for fitness today.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 40, *Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 1, 2024-2025*, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this bill makes supplementary appropriations to defray the capital expenditures of the Government of Nunavut for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2025. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order. To the principle of the bill.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried and Bill 40 is referred to the Committee of the Whole.

Item 21. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters. Bills 37, 38, 39, and 40 with Mr. Hickes in the Chair.

Before we proceed with the Committee of the Whole, we will take a 20-minute break.

Sergeant-at-Arms.

>> *House recessed at 15:28 and
Committee resumed at 15:53*

**Item 21: Consideration in Committee
of the Whole of Bills and Other
Matters**

Chairman (Mr. Hickes): Thank you. I would like to call the committee meeting to order. In Committee of the Whole, we have the following items to deal with: Bills 37, 38, 39, and 40. What is the wish of the committee? Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We wish to commence with the review of the 2024-25 operations and maintenance main estimates of the Department of Health. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Are committee members in agreement that we deal first with Bill 37?

Some Members: Agreed.

**Bill 37 – Appropriation (Operations &
Maintenance) Act, 2024-2025 –
Health – Consideration in
Committee**

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main, do you have any officials that you would like to appear before the committee? Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I do. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Do committee members agree to let the minister's officials appear before you?

Some Members: Agreed.

Chairman: Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses in.

Thank you. For the record, Minister Main, can you please introduce your officials and proceed with your opening comments.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon. Accompanying me here are Deputy Minister Megan Hunt and Executive Director of Corporate Services Greg Babstock, (interpretation ends) Executive Director of Corporate Services.

(interpretation) Thank you, members and Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I am pleased to present the Department of Health's proposed operations and maintenance budget for the upcoming fiscal year, 2024-25.

The Department of Health proposes a Vote 1 budget of \$520.2 million, which is an increase of \$50.7 million from the year prior.

Community health centres continue to experience increased demand for services as the population of Nunavut grows and as health care service delivery responsibilities continue to diversify. Because of this, it is necessary to strengthen operational capacity in health centres across the territory to help optimize these expanding health care delivery obligations, to better understand the economics of health care delivery within remote arctic communities, and to recognize the budgetary expectations in the provision of these essential services.

The focus of this budget proposal is to make efforts to address these budget pressures by putting a priority on several core cost drivers within the Health Care Service Delivery Branch and by increasing supports for the talented and dedicated health care professionals practising in Nunavut.

Health is proposing an incremental 'ask' of \$40.8 million in fiscal year 2024-25 to finance multiple initiatives to support increasing care delivery obligations as well as to best meet ever-growing client clinical needs in-territory. These required budget amounts include an 'ask' of \$14 million for the continuation of the highly successful paramedic support services program and a further \$15 million is being requested to support agency nursing activities across the territory.

In place within the current 2023-24 fiscal year and extending into the coming fiscal year, Health obtained net resources of \$7.3 million in support of the critical health staffing measures program that is aimed at improving the recruitment and retention of nursing and other clinical professionals within Nunavut, keeping us better aligned with the increasingly aggressive actions undertaken by other jurisdictions in Canada.

In addition to our actions around nursing recruitment and retention, Nunavut has taken further steps to ensure that the rate of remuneration for our valued physicians is competitive nationally with an addition of \$3 million to our physician services budget.

There is also an additional \$2.4 million within our compensation and benefits

budgets across the territory in response to the new collective agreement between the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Employees Union.

A further \$3 million has been proposed for the out-of-territory hospitals and physicians budget to fund our requirements for reciprocal billing as Nunavut health clients travel out of territory for services. The department is also requesting an additional \$3 million to deliver enhanced security services within communities, ensuring that our health facilities are safe for both Nunavut clients and health care teams.

The ongoing implementation of the Health Information Unit remains a high departmental priority, requiring an additional \$750,000 in '24-25 to supplement the \$350,000 obtained within the prior '23-24 budget cycle.

Long-term care for Nunavut elders remains a central priority for this government and for the Department of Health. As we move towards the long-awaited opening of the new Rankin Inlet Long-term Care Facility, with first occupancy expected in the summer of 2024, an additional \$6 million in operating dollars has been requested for '24-25 in addition to the \$1.2 million approved for the current '23-24 fiscal year in support of this initiative.

I would now like to update members on a matter primary to Health's budgetary response in 2024-25, namely, the ongoing negotiations with Indigenous Services Canada on a new contribution agreement for the delivery of Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) programming within Nunavut.

While Health and Indigenous Services Canada have made some progress, the most recent NIHB financing proposal unfortunately does not address our stated need for 100 percent recovery of medical transportation air expenses nor the 10 percent required to cover departmental administrative charges. It is unfortunate that Indigenous Services Canada has yet to acknowledge their fiduciary responsibility to Nunavut Inuit for the Non-Insured Health Benefits to which they are entitled. This new proposal and Health's response to it is to be presented for the consideration of the Executive Council at the earliest available opportunity.

Within our negotiations, there are several elements of NIHB that are in dispute and that have negative impacts on health and Government of Nunavut operational budgets annually.

First, the administration of air transportation expenses has been subject to a fixed co-payment value since the onset of the territory. Currently that co-payment is \$715, a grossly inadequate amount compared to the actual cost of medical travel required by Nunavut Inuit. Health's position is that Indigenous Services Canada, in establishing a fixed ceiling for this line item, transfers an unacceptable amount of variable risk to the Government of Nunavut. Uptake of client medical services is variable in consumption and is uncontrollable fiscally within the bounds of client and physician clinical needs. This means the Government of Nunavut assumes any expense beyond the fixed \$715 co-payment to ensure essential health care is delivered and not limited by available budget. This has led to the Government of Nunavut

subsidizing the NIHB program by millions of dollars annually for many years and has had significant impacts on program operations and contributed significantly to health budget deficits.

Indigenous Services Canada has offset a portion of this medical travel expense since fiscal year 2020-21 by supplementing the NIHB contribution agreement with a second contribution agreement. While providing a high degree of relief, these supplementary arrangements have not provided 100 percent relief from eligible medical travel expenses. The NIHB program deficit is then left to the Government of Nunavut to assume and takes away dollar for dollar from the capacity for Health to develop, enhance, and deliver territorial health care services for Nunavummiut.

Administration of the NIHB program also remains an issue. The current NIHB contribution agreement includes a cash flow of \$3.7 million, or 2.5 percent, of the now \$150 million program. Again, this falls short of the cost incurred by the Government of Nunavut to administer the program and far below our requirement of a 10 percent administration charge.

Health has maintained our working relationship with Indigenous Services Canada, even in the absence of an NIHB contribution agreement this year, to ensure that the health care services that Nunavummiut expect and deserve continue without interruption. Health has commenced work to map out transitioning the NIHB program back to Indigenous Services Canada if required. Through this work and through our ongoing negotiations, Nunavut will

cease subsidizing the Non-Insured Health Benefits program in the years to come. Members will be kept informed of future developments in our delivery of NIHB programs and the relationship with Indigenous Services Canada.

I would like to take a moment to thank the Standing Committee on Social Wellness for their careful consideration of Health's proposed budget last month. Committee members continue to raise questions and concerns that help the department further focus and respond to emerging needs across the territory.

In closing, the priority for the Department of Health in the coming year and beyond is to foster the well-being of Nunavummiut and support healthy and vibrant communities. I would like to recognize the incredible staff we have within the Department of Health and thank them for their hard work. While managing multiple systemic, industrial and economic constraints, Health and its dedicated staff teams across Nunavut are innovative, creative, and pioneering in support of our mandate to provide the best possible care to Nunavut residents. We aim to build a governance-driven, integrated and collaborative health care system based on Inuit societal values and responsive to Nunavut health care needs.

(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak today and I am pleased to answer any questions from the committee. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Does the chair of the standing committee have opening comments? Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Members of the Standing Committee on Social Wellness have reviewed the 2024-25 Main Estimates and Business Plan of the Department of Health.

The Department of Health is requesting just over \$520 million for 2024-25, which is a 10 percent increase from the amount requested last year and almost \$41 million more than the revised main estimates for 2023-24.

The standing committee recognizes the department's need to ensure the ongoing delivery of health care services across the territory while addressing critical staffing issues. The committee supports the continuation of paramedic and agency nursing contracts to keep health centres open and operational, while encouraging the department in its ongoing efforts to recruit full-time nursing staff to work in our communities. Members have agreed to Health's additional funding initiatives to support nurses and other health professionals to stay and continue working in Nunavut, especially given the shortage of health care workers across the nation and the cross-jurisdictional competition to engage their services and expertise. Members encourage the department to also consider initiatives to recruit and support international health care workers as this has proved successful in the past.

The standing committee notes that rising costs for physician services and hospital services both within and outside of the territory will also be accounted for in the proposed budget for 2024-25.

Mr. Chairman, the federal government's Non-Insured Health Benefits program, which covers various health care costs, including medical travel, dental benefits, vision care, and certain drugs for Inuit, Metis and First Nations in Canada, provides an important financial component to health care delivery in Nunavut.

During the minister's appearance before the standing committee to discuss the Department of Health's draft budget, members were given to understand that departmental officials had been facing some difficulty in negotiating a new Non-Insured Health Benefits contribution agreement with the federal government for the upcoming fiscal year and beyond.

The standing committee is aware that Nunavut has historically shouldered significant costs that were not paid for under the federal government's implementation of the Non-Insured Health Benefits program. It has been further noted that the federal Inuit Child First Initiative, while providing such much needed supports as additional escorts for medical travel clients, has also resulted in additional costs and administrative work that the Department of Health has accommodated within its current budget.

Committee members fully support Nunavut's Minister of Health and his officials in their efforts to ensure that Indigenous Services honours Canada's fiduciary responsibilities with respect to providing fully comprehensive Non-Insured Health Benefits for Nunavut Inuit. The committee further encourages the Government of Nunavut to finalize its first bilateral agreement with the

federal government for health care funding in addition to funds provided through the Canada Health Transfer Agreement. Our territory's health system faces a number of unique challenges, including rising needs in the areas of mental health, staffing, infrastructure, and supports for health service delivery.

The standing committee notes that Health is requesting additional funds to provide for enhanced security services at health facilities across the territory. The committee supports the department in its efforts to ensure a secure and safe environment for staff and clients alike.

Mr. Chairman, Rankin Inlet's new long-term care facility is anticipated to welcome its first cohort of resident elders in the fall of 2024. Members look forward to details on the operational plan for the facility and information on how services will be delivered for different levels of client need.

The standing committee encourages the department to continue working with Nunavut Arctic College to develop and deliver training programs that will enable Nunavummiut to fill positions providing care and services for elders across Nunavut. Members look forward to future updates on what role Health will play in providing additional community-based supports for elders as part of the Government of Nunavut's anticipated elders strategy which is being developed under the leadership of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs.

Mr. Chairman, the standing committee has noted that the Department of Health is proposing to increase budgets in a number of program and service areas,

including the department's Health Information Unit, which is projected to receive additional funding in 2024-25 for the management and analysis of health data and information. It is to be hoped that enhanced efforts in this area will support health promotion and protection efforts across the territory as well as informing policy and program delivery improvements. It is clear that Nunavut has been facing a number of ongoing and persistent health issues that must be addressed as a priority. Members look forward to the release of updated reports addressing the current status of cancer, chronic disease, communicable disease, maternal child health, and other indicators of the health of Nunavummiut.

Mr. Chairman, mental health care, addictions treatment, and related services continue to be in high demand across the territory. Members appreciate that a number of initiatives have been undertaken by the Inuusivut Mental Health and Addictions Division, many in collaboration with other departments and entities, to expand mental health services at the community level. It has been noted that several activities to implement Nunavut's new *Mental Health Act* have been initiated and members look forward to updates on developments in this area, especially at the community level.

The committee continues to encourage the department in its efforts to recruit and train more Inuit to work in the mental health field. Members look forward to the introduction of a new suicide prevention strategy and strongly support community-led initiatives which can have a meaningful impact on the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my opening remarks and I anticipate that individual members will also have questions and comments as we proceed. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. Before I go to questions, I'll give committee members an opportunity to provide general comments to the opening comments. Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, minister and your officials.

I have just a few comments that I wanted to make. Looking at the department's overall budget, this is the first time in Nunavut's history where a department's budget is now in excess of half a billion dollars. This is a very considerable sum and I'm not saying that these funds aren't necessary. I understand that health care delivery is costly, especially here in Nunavut.

Given the Department of Health's track record with continual supplementary appropriations, or the Department of Health coming forward to the Legislative Assembly seeking additional funds to dig the department out of the hole towards the end of the year, it is a continuous and ongoing concern. It is also a very similar concern that is faced in the Northwest Territories, where their public accounts committee has recommended a comprehensive review of their Department of Health's expenditures to identify cost drivers and ensure that there are plans in place to try to curb that exponential growth rate. That is something that I believe would be a beneficial exercise to conduct with our own budgets for the department.

For a number of years, another concern has been the use of agency nurses. Again, looking to the west in the Northwest Territories, they were able to provide their health care service delivery for a number of years without utilizing any agency nurses. It was only very recently that they reinitiated that practice to ensure that their health care facilities do not close. I believe that as the Northwest Territories was able to provide those essential services without agency nurses, I believe that there must be a way that our own health care team can be filled with full-time staff to prevent the excessive use of very costly agency nurses.

I know that the department has produced some health care recruitment and retention strategies in the past, but with the wide range of health care positions that we have across the territory beyond just the nurses, I believe that we need to do more to try to encourage our youth to lead them down that path to fill those much-needed health care professional positions in our hospitals and health centres.

Those are just a few comments that I wanted to make. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Lightstone. General comments to the opening comments. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In regard to the new Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy, I think the opening comments don't speak directly to funding the new strategy or the updated action plan. Minister Main, I did table the response letter that I received from you regarding my request for the

department and for the Government of Nunavut to consider declaring suicide a public health emergency.

I see on page H-7 of grants and contributions that there is not an increase in funding allocated towards the Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy. It is just about \$4.6 million, the same as last year. I'm not suggesting that it is always necessary to increase funding towards certain programming in order to ensure success in programming. I would like to hear an explanation about why, even with the development of an updated action plan, there isn't a need for more funding. That's given with the knowledge that the actual expenditures for that program were less than anticipated in 2022-23. We have been assured that the updated action plan, according to this letter, will come by spring of 2024.

I know that I'm not alone amongst our membership in the growing frustration about the delays in the tabling of and producing a number of promised action plans. I would like to hear from the minister a little bit about those delays as well regarding the updated suicide action plan and why it's anticipated that there won't be additional funding needed for that plan. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. We will now move to page H-4. Directorate. Amount being requested, \$71,326,000.

While members are going to that page, I'm just going to ask for clarification from the minister and his officials. The Non-Insured Health Benefits was quite a significant component of the opening comments from both the minister as well as from the standing committee chair.

Just to clarify, in 2020-21 and 2021-22, from my recollection in the last ten years, were the only times there were not budget shortfalls where appropriations were requested by the department. Since then, the decision, from what I understand, last year was to incorporate the \$78 million while the \$20 million that was ongoing and then the \$58 million from Indigenous Services Canada that were negotiated to supplement the Non-Insured Health Benefits Agreement until such time as a long-term agreement could be put in place was added to an actual budget process. Before, it went to the Department of Finance through general revenues and was utilized by the Department of Health for expenses, but if I recall correctly, last year the Department of Finance actually allocated those funds, not all, to the Department of Health.

I would like to get some clarification from the minister on the fiscal impact of the one-year-at-a-time ongoing agreement for the \$20 million that, from what I understand, was to be ongoing, but then the \$58 million that was negotiated previously was to be a year-by-year negotiation until, again, such time as a long-term agreement is done. Maybe if the minister could just explain the fiscal impact of that agreement being in place now and what agreement is there, and the anticipated impact, as the minister mentioned in his opening comments, if Indigenous Services Canada retakes responsibility for the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In terms of the deficit amounts that

we're looking at... Just for clarity, in terms of the current fiscal year, '23-24, we're currently in the middle of negotiating with Indigenous Services Canada and they have given us an offer that we haven't yet taken to cabinet or Executive Council for consideration, so I am unable to get into too much detail in terms of the updated offer.

Thanks; just verifying some figures. Sorry; just clarifying some numbers here. The offer that was on the table from NIHB in terms of the supplementary contribution agreement was \$70 million a year and that was the offer that was announced as part of the most recent federal budget. That still leaves us with a significant deficit in terms of the impact to the GN coffers. It would leave us with a roughly \$25 million net deficit at the end of the day. Even though the supplementary money does help, it's not enough and we continue to outgrow the constraints that are set on that program. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you, minister. Just to clarify again just for the committee members and people who are listening, the \$20 million was ongoing. Just to clarify, the \$70 million number that was just proposed would be replacing the \$58 million year-by-year agreement. I see the minister nodding his head, so I'll take that as a confirmation. I appreciate that information because I think that will help focus some of the questions that will be coming, I'm sure, on this topic.

The first name I have on my list is Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have some questions on

Non-Insured Health Benefits too and it's to do with the minister's opening comments.

“While Health and Indigenous Services Canada have made some progress, the most recent NIHB financing proposal unfortunately does not address our stated need for 100 percent recovery of medical transportation air expenses nor the 10 percent required to cover departmental administrative charges. It is unfortunate that Indigenous Services Canada has yet to acknowledge their fiduciary responsibility to Nunavut Inuit for the Non-Insured Health Benefits to which they are entitled.”

And then it says, “This new proposal and Health's response to it is to be presented for the consideration of the Executive Council at the earliest available opportunity.” Is this proposal going to be presented at the next cabinet meeting then? Thank you.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) It will be presented at the next available opportunity, so be it the next cabinet meeting, subject to being included on the agenda. I don't set the agenda for cabinet meetings. I'm just clarifying that. Thank you.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the minister's statement at the beginning of this sitting here, I'll go to what he said there. “In the months to come, we will continue to push Indigenous Services Canada to fully support its NIHB program. If we cannot

secure full and predictable funding allocations, I will be left with no choice but to recommend to my cabinet colleagues that we turn their program back to our federal partners to administer directly.”

I'll ask the minister then: at the cabinet meeting when this NIHB proposal is presented and the minister has stated that it's adequate, is this recommendation going to be at that meeting to turn the NIHB back to the federal government? Thank you.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In terms of the exact mechanics of the decision-making, I think I understand where the member is going with the question. I would see them as two separate decision items in terms of we have a revised offer from Indigenous Services Canada on the table which is an improvement from previous offers. However, the offer on the table is not a long-term solution or it's not one that provides a surety that we would be looking for.

In terms of the decision-making around handing back the program to Indigenous Services Canada, it is very much a possibility when we look at the months to come that that could be a decision that is made. However, this is still in the context of ongoing negotiations for the current fiscal year as well as the upcoming fiscal year. Basically what I'm trying to say is that there is room and time for positions to change on behalf of our federal partners, and I'm hopeful that we would not have to hand back the program if we could come to an

agreement around funding.
(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The minister has stated that this proposal does not still fully fund the NIHB. In the minister's statement, he said, "I will be left with no choice but to recommend to my cabinet colleagues that we turn their program back to our federal partners..." The latest proposal is going to be presented at the next cabinet meeting. Will the minister be recommending to accept the proposal or to turn it back to the federal counterparts when the minister presents the proposal to cabinet? Thank you.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) As I tried to explain, there will be separate decision items. In terms of the decision-making process around the offer of a contribution agreement, that would be one decision item, whether or not to accept the contribution agreement, and then there would be another decision-making process around the future of the program.

Maybe I can clarify it a bit by explaining that if we were to decide that we want to hand back the program tomorrow to Indigenous Services Canada, it's not a decision that could be implemented with the flick of a switch. It would need to be something that would be transitioned back in order to make sure that the essential health care services for Nunavut Inuit are not impacted. That's the type of decision that would be

entered into if the decision was made to hand back the program to Indigenous Services Canada.

When it comes to the contribution agreement, whether to accept the contribution agreement or not, it is a decision item that is much more actionable and can come into force almost immediately, as soon as agreements are signed.

I am trying to explain a bit for the member. I understand that he is connecting the two items and I appreciate that. I really appreciate the concern on this as well and the attention because it's a very unfortunate situation that we are in right now fiscally because of this program. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The minister has stated that there are two different items on the agenda there. The one that the minister spoke about in his opening comments, this new proposal and health's response to it, is to be presented for consideration of the Executive Council at the earliest available opportunity. Which proposal is the minister presenting to the Executive Council? Thank you.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) That would be the revised funding proposal for the contribution agreement for Non-Insured Health Benefits. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is this contribution agreement for just on a yearly basis or is it for long-term funding of the NIHB? Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. We might be straying into ongoing negotiations, but Minister Main.

Hon. John Main: We have been presented with an offer that is for two years, and I don't want to go into any more detail than that. Our desire from the outset has been to have a longer term arrangement in place, five years or more, which would give us the predictability when it comes to folks like the executive director here and the deputy minister, who need that predictability around setting budgets and allocating resources. The offer currently in front of us is for two years. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The reason I'm going on this is I support the minister's endeavour in terms of if it's costing the Nunavut government money for a federal program, then it's not right. The federal government has a whole lot more money than the Nunavut government, and the Nunavut government should not be subsidizing the Non-Insured Health Benefits and the Nunavut government has been subsidizing it for a very long time, since I have been elected. There might have been one or two years where we didn't have to put any supp. bills in.

Now that we know what's going before cabinet, the minister said that there were

two streams of funding. Can the minister explain on the other one that's above and beyond the contribution agreement? Thank you.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I believe the member is asking about the supplementary funding or supplementary contribution agreement, so that was a relatively new agreement which is intended to supplement the main contribution agreement under Non-Insured Health Benefits because the co-pay or the \$715 amount doesn't reflect the actual cost of travel. Under previous Ministers of Health of previous governments, the supplementary contribution agreement was set up to bring the total amount closer to meeting actual expenses. I hope that clarifies it. Thank you.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you. Just to go back to the minister's statement that it would have to be turned back unless it's fully funded, the minister has drawn a red line and it doesn't sound like it's this new proposal, but it's somewhere coming. When is the date where the minister will recommend that the program be given back to the feds? He has drawn a red line. When is that red line? Is it in three months, six months, next year, or the year after, or when is it? Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In terms of the decision-making around

handing the program back or continuing to administer it, there's also decision-making that could also be around handing certain pieces of the program back to the federal government and then keeping certain pieces within our department.

We're looking at having that decision made within this calendar year and so time is quite short. We're already in February. Roughly within the next 10 months or so, to have a clear path forward on where the program is going to end up, that's the plan that we have set out. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Within this calendar year of 2024, if the government is still subsidizing the Non-Insured Health Benefits, the minister will recommend that the program be given back to the federal government. I'm basing that on what his minister's statement says, "I will be left with no choice but to recommend to my cabinet colleagues that we turn their program back to our federal partners to administer directly." Just for clarity, if our government, the Nunavut government, is still subsidizing the program by the end of this calendar year, 2024, the minister is going to recommend that the program be given back to the federal government. Thank you.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would respond with what I offered just to the question previous is that a decision will be made within this

calendar year as to whether to recommend the program be handed back. There could be a number of different factors that tie into that. I don't want to commit to something that is overly prescriptive or narrow here, but in terms of the decision-making process around whether to continue administering the program or whether to hand it back or whether to retain certain pieces, that decision will be made within this calendar year and it will be made based on a number of different factors, including ongoing negotiations with Indigenous Services Canada. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This will just be a comment and then I'm done. It's just I don't know why the minister is not saying that the decision will be made before the end of 2024. I guess he is; I guess the minister is stating that because he says by the end of the calendar year, which is the calendar year ends at December 2024. The minister has drawn a red line and says, "I will be left with no choice but to recommend to my cabinet colleagues that we turn this program back to our federal partners so that they can administer it directly." If the minister makes that recommendation and it goes forward, I would fully support that.

If our government is still subsidizing the federal government, the Nunavut government is not here to subsidize a federal program. We're here to work with them and we want to work with them in a manner that health care is given to Nunavummiut as efficiently and as safely and as quickly as possible, but

we are not here to subsidize a federal program. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. It was just a comment. The next name I have on my list is Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome to the minister and his guests.

I would just like to continue the conversation about the Non-Insured Health Benefits program and if the minister could advise us about how many and which divisions are involved in administering programs and services related to Non-Insured Health Benefits. We know that the travel program is the main program that administers the majority of that fund. However, we also know that there are dental and other sorts of programs that are impacted. If the minister could tell us about that, I would appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I thank the member for the question. Yes, there are a number of different lines of business within the program, so we're talking, of course, medical travel. We're also talking boarding homes. We're also talking about optical services as well as dental services. There's a whole suite of different programs underneath that or lines underneath that program. Also involved are the health insurance folks that we have and it goes all the way, of course, into our finance and corporate services folks and then all the way up to the executive level. You will find the footprint of Non-Insured Health Benefits

throughout the department in many different levels that it impacts. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just for more clarity, are we talking about headquarters, regional operations, or community operations; if so, which and in how many? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I think it's all of the above in terms of that question because we have medical travel staff at the community level who are dealing with travel reservations that are funded under NIHB. We have regional medical travel staff as well as headquarters components, so it's right throughout the department. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Approximately how many employees are we talking about? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In terms of that specific number, I would have to get back to the member on that because there are some job positions where a component of their work might be dealing with Non-Insured Health Benefits and another component dealing with something not funded through Non-

Insured Health Benefits, but it's precisely looking at the mapping around which positions and which functions.

That's the work that we have set out for ourselves in terms of taking a serious and well-thought-out approach to looking at what it would mean to hand the program back to Indigenous Services Canada and have them deliver the services directly to Nunavut Inuit as they do in other parts of the country.

In terms of looking at which specific pieces or which specific positions would need to move, that's the work that we are currently undertaking. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster,

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, minister, for that response. Is it safe to say that the employees in question are a mixture of indeterminate, casual and term employees? To the minister's knowledge, how many of those employees have housing allocated with their positions and is that being taken into consideration? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In terms of the specific numbers, I don't have those, but the member is correct; it will be a number of different types of employment categories that would be included.

Some of our staff under Non-Insured Health Benefits programming are on contract, some are within the workforce

as indeterminate, but the mapping-out exercise would allow us to plan this out as well as to look at issues that could be created around employment, whether we would look at re-profiling existing staff, transferring existing staff, and working through that exercise is what we are committed to doing. (interpretation)
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that response, minister. Until then, the focus has been on the potential impact on health services. What we know is that in the last few months, we had the unprecedented action of having the deputy minister actually apologize to the Department of Health staff for the toxic work environment that many are working within. The reason I bring that up is because I know that when we hear things like there's a potential for a transfer of such a large program back to the federal government, what we know is that employees think about where they fit in and how that will impact them.

To that, I would like to hear, minister, what has been done to communicate to those employees who may potentially be impacted by this, and I'll quote Mr. Savikataaq who said that there was a red line drawn. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends)
There hasn't been any targeted communication in terms of the impacts to employees. We're at the early planning stage and part of our work around mapping out and handing back

the program would be engaging with staff and so that's work that we're committed to doing. It's unfortunate because we see value in keeping the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program within the department and keeping it integrated in terms of travel programs, for example. There are existing issues with medical travel that we're trying to address and trying to work through. It's hard to imagine how a program would improve if the delivery of that aspect were to go outside the department in terms of coordination.

If it weren't for these financial burdens which are being unfairly placed on us, we would gladly continue administering this program, but here we are and we are doing the work to prepare to hand the program back if need be. (interpretation)
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with all due respect, it is the employees that we count on every single day to keep these programs running and to provide excellent client services. When they are not included in this thought process, it contributes to that feeling of when the worker bees are out there doing the hard work every day and interacting, and I can tell you from my experience both with patient relations and with the travel programs, and specifically with medical travel, those medical travel workers are essentially frontline workers. They're not provided with security guards, they're not provided with help to address when a client is aggressing them. Often it's not in person; however, even over the telephone, it is extremely difficult.

When we don't pay attention to their needs and reassure them that they will still have a job tomorrow, then it's really concerning for me and it really does contribute to a toxic work environment when you are essentially instilling the fear that losing a job may be imminent.

I would like to get a commitment from the minister and team to work on an internal communications effort to reassure those employees and to let them know where they stand and let them know what say they have in this. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) The member makes some good points and we can certainly take into consideration some internal communications around this as things become more clear or certain.

As I mentioned in my response to Member Savikataaq, this isn't something that could happen overnight in terms of ensuring that any transition, if that's a decision that's taken, that the transition happens smoothly and with the least possible impact to Nunavummiut. That would be the process that we would want to be working through.

Although it's quite frustrating, being bogged down in these negotiations and not seeing them move forward as quickly as we would like, there are no rash decisions that are going to be made here. It's around putting the needs of Nunavummiut first. When you look at the amount of subsidy that we have offered the federal government on this program, this one program since the

creation of Nunavut, I can't imagine how many health centres that money could have built and that just happens to be an area where we are up against a brick wall.

I know it's capital, so it's Vote 1 and Vote 2, but I'm just trying to explain how we want to resolve this issue so that we're no longer subsidizing their program. It has been quite a long, drawn-out process and I would like to give the staff who are involved in dealing with this program sincere thanks for their patience in working on this. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, you just stated that the focus is on putting the needs of Nunavummiut first. I think, what we know is that in regard to Inuit employment, the highest levels of Inuit employment are among paraprofessionals. As we're discussing who would be impacted by a move like this, it would be paraprofessionals and people in administrative level positions, which is where the majority of our Inuit are employed.

What I would like is a commitment from the minister at the very least to ensure that those current employees that administer or support Non-Insured Health Benefits funding be deemed priority zero and become priority hires should that agreement dissolve. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Any transition of the program would be one that's properly mapped out and takes into consideration the needs of both Nunavummiut as well as staff members who could be impacted and any contractors as well. I can reassure the member that it wouldn't be just walk away from the function.

The medical travel system, as the member and all members know, is operating 365 days a year. It doesn't stop and medical needs don't stop. It's within that context that we have to carefully map out a potential transition back to Indigenous Services Canada in a way that would minimize the impact and so the services can continue happening if the subsidy comes to an end and things would change. I know that it's not necessarily easy both at the staff level as well as on the community level to go through this type of change, but we don't have a lot of options here.
(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to go another step further and I would like to have some reassurance that current employees who have housing related to those positions can be reassured that they wouldn't lose their housing in the event that there was a transition and while they are awaiting being on a priority hire list, these employees and their families, because a lot of employees have families, and we don't want to unhouse people. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I believe there are provisions in the collective agreement that would cover all of those types of scenarios and in those scenarios where employees are impacted by various changes, those provisions within the collective agreement would apply. I hope that answers it. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll have a review of that just to make sure, as I'm sure you will, minister.

I would just like to move on to the cost of supporting the Child First Initiative. I know that that program was handed over back to the federal government and it was in the process when I left travel programs. However, what I do know and understand is that families continue to travel en masse for medical travel with the support of that Child First Initiative. Is that cost being tracked? Is it measurable in terms of how many families have their medical travel, for example, extended because they have such a large contingency of family members flying that there are not enough seats on any given days when a person or a child might be cleared to fly home? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I thank the member for the question. We are definitely seeing impacts related to the Inuit Child First Initiative when it comes to medical travel, so we're seeing things as the member mentioned, you

know, larger family groups travelling together. In some cases, it's impacting capacity at boarding homes. In some cases, there are travel coordination issues where you will have a couple or two travellers booked through our medical travel, and then a number of other travellers booked through the Child First Initiative. There could be scheduling and coordination issues.

In terms of putting a dollar amount on those, we haven't been tracking those specifically. There is some extra administration related to the travel coordination piece and some issues around contract administrations with regard to the boarding homes. In terms of a dollar amount that is costing us around the Inuit Child First Initiative, we haven't been itemizing those expenses. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know from experience that administering that program and the time it takes for our travel teams to problem solve especially takes up a lot of time and it is possible to measure that time, I know from experience.

You mentioned boarding homes. Just for clarity, when families are travelling on that Child First Initiative funding program, is the cost of staying at the boarding homes being covered by the Child First Initiative or is Non-Insured Health Benefits travel program that's picking up that cost? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In the scenario where you have, depending on who is paying for the travel, the responsible party would cover the accommodations. If it's Child First Initiative travellers, the boarding home would bill Indigenous Services Canada directly under that program. It creates some extra work for the boarding home operators in terms of different payers or different places to send different invoices, so to speak. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, minister, for that response. Just going back to measuring the impact of delivering two programs at once and minister, you stated that that isn't being measured at the moment, is it possible to do the most basic measurement of how many medical travel clients that are administered by the travel program folks and the regional programs are also availing of the Child First Initiative medical travel program? Just as a basic, not necessarily the time it takes to administer or extra costs or anything, how often does it happen? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I can commit to going back and tasking staff with trying to pull out some data from our medical travel files.

In terms of the administration piece, it is going to be really difficult for us to track the costs there, but in terms of how much Child First Initiative travel is

happening paired with our own Non-Insured Health Benefits medical travel, I can commit to trying to pull out some data there. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster, as your time has been allotted, the next name I have on my list: Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also thank you for your presentation. I do have some questions concerning what is written here. (interpretation ends) You stated that your department plans to add... This might have been brought up earlier, but I want to bring that up again for me to have a better understanding. Your department plans to add four new PYs in 2024-25. What new positions are being added and how will health services delivery be improved? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) The four new positions that we're proposing to add are one pharmacist, two pharmacy technicians, and one environmental data entry clerk. In a nutshell, the pharmaceutical positions are intended to strengthen our in-territory operations when it comes to providing drugs.

As an example of what these additional positions will allow would be preparation of cancer treatment drugs here in the territory, which is something we have been doing more and more of. It is really exciting and great to see Nunavummiut able to access some cancer treatments here in territory. We

want to expand that. They're very specialized and they can be somewhat toxic drugs to deal with in terms of cancer treatment. These additional positions would allow us to bring some of that care closer to home.

In terms of the environmental data entry clerk, that's a position that is intended to strengthen our environmental health monitoring and reporting capacity.

In terms of health inspections and things like that, our new regulations are coming into force this spring around environmental health reporting. We're looking at things like publicly available health inspection reports, which will now be available online within this calendar year. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also thank you for that clarification. With the four new positions planned, if they haven't started already or soon will be in place this year, are those positions in Nunavut or are some of the positions in the south? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If our proposal is approved, two positions will be in Rankin Inlet and two in Iqaluit. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The ones not in Nunavut, are they on salary or on

contract? What would their positions or salaries be? For example, you have northern allowance as part of the package if you're working for the GN. How are these then arranged? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What we have done is the four positions that we are discussing here are positions in Nunavut, in the Arctic, and that is in our proposal, two in Rankin Inlet and two in Iqaluit. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also thank you for clarifying that. Now I want to ask a question on the proposed 2024-25 main estimates and how that is broken down here in the language. (interpretation ends) The department will expand its virtual care programs and services. What specific virtual care programs are currently being offered and what new programs are being considered? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I'll speak about the virtual care programs that are currently being offered and then I'll turn it over to my deputy to speak about kind of where things are going in terms of future expansion.

Right now, in terms of virtual care, it's really exciting for us because it's something that impacts or is available

right across Nunavut. All 25 communities have the kit, the equipment needed to access virtual care. The biggest virtual care program that we have is the virtual nurse practitioner program, which has been ongoing since 2021, and we're seeing increasing numbers of clients getting care through that program. People who have chronic health issues are able to access virtual care through that program.

We have also established a dedicated virtual care link between the Qikiqtani General Hospital and two facilities in Ottawa, one is the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and the other one is the Ottawa Hospital neurology team. These are innovations helping us to care for the most vulnerable at their most vulnerable time, in emergency care, so triaged, yes, thank you.

There is also a virtual cardiology clinic that has been deployed in all of Qikiqtaaluk, which has been an amazing initiative. We are exploring similar clinics for the Kivalliq and Kitikmeot. We also have virtual speech language pathology services that have been launched, as well as an allergist providing virtual triaging.

In terms of the "looking forward" piece and where we will be going with virtual care, I would like to turn it over to my deputy, Mr. Chairman, if you will allow. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt (interpretation): Thank you. (interpretation ends) Thank you to the member for the question. It might be helpful to provide some information about some of the new programs that

have been started over this last year. Minister Main talked about the cardiology clinic, but we also have the virtual obstetrics and gynecology clinic, the virtual fracture clinic, and areas that are now being prepared for are dermatology, ear, nose and throat clinics. That's really to be able to address many of the lengthy wait times that many Nunavummiut experience for specialized care and to be able to foster and maximize on the technology in the community and minimize medical travel. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Those are great to hear and it is something that Nunavummiut are pleased with no doubt. However, I asked a question for the fact that it seems to be growing in itself in that those who are continually going back to the local health centres where you have no physicians, they want to talk to a physician, and perhaps a room is made because the nurses cannot do any other diagnoses, they're just given painkillers like Tylenol or medication for bowel problems. They are just continually given those medications.

Now the person who is in a health situation wants to talk to a physician because of stress or worry over the issue. Virtual care, similar to face-to-face meeting, would that be included? With regard to the needs of the client, the client knows best about their body, but sometimes the specialists claim to have more knowledge of the patient's situation, even though we know our own bodies best. Usually after the diagnosis is done, they're told they have a terminal

illness and they don't have much time to live. Meanwhile, these undiagnosed illnesses continue to grow. Is the need to talk to a physician part of the consideration? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This discussion about using virtual care with physicians may be involved. The member's suggestion may and can be involved as Nunavummiut have the right to be seen by a physician or doctor. Anyone can insist to see another physician or nurse. Sometimes there are disagreements, which is okay. If it involves taking medication or there is an illness and there are disagreements, all Nunavummiut have the right to get a second opinion from another physician or speaking with a physician through virtual care, which could very much be a part of that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, I agree and that's why I would like to ask some more questions. (interpretation ends) What are some of the key challenges in expanding the department's virtual care program? (interpretation) I would like to get clarification on the challenges of expanding the department's virtual care program in 2024-25. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have some challenges because the Internet is very

slow and the connection goes out intermittently. What we are doing now is putting in Starlink in order to improve the system. I would like to thank the Department of Community and Government Services for helping us in this case. Those are some of the challenges that we have.

If you would allow me to add further, Mr. Chairman, (interpretation ends) one of the things that we have set out in our work plan, and it goes to the previous question around getting a second opinion or having a good understanding of health issues, is we want Nunavummiut to have more access to their own health information. That's why we're planning for a Nunavut patient portal which would allow residents better access to their own personal health information and their medical records. We're planning for initial implementation of that in the upcoming fiscal year in a phased rollout. That's exciting in terms of more access to your own information. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You indicated earlier that the people of Nunavut have to be placed as a priority. Sometimes it takes a long time to set up an appointment with a physician, and eventually some of the individuals fall through the cracks. Are you looking at making improvements to the scheduling of appointments with physicians, such as the use of virtual care? Do you believe that it will improve the system? There are a lot of things that I can say about the virtual care programs and services. There are many people who get

forgotten where follow-up appointments with physicians are not rescheduled when they miss their appointments, which is of a concern. Do you think the virtual care programs and services will improve the issues with setting up appointments? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll speak in English so that it is clearly understood.

(interpretation ends) In terms of increasing access to doctors for Nunavummiut, we are continuing to push that boundary year over year, looking at the number of clinic days worked by doctors in Nunavut. I'm pleased to say it is up, up, and up, so more service and more days for Nunavummiut. We have been pushing for more specialist clinics in communities, so if it's a specialist ear, nose and throat doctor, for example, pushing to have more of those clinics happen at the community level.

That's where, unfortunately, if we look at Qikiqtarjuaq, we end up with "Well, there's nowhere to put them because the health centre is older than I am." We run up against infrastructure stuff sometimes, but absolutely, we are trying to increase access to doctors and different specialists, and some of it's through virtual care. Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Next name I have on my list: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The first topic that I would like to ask questions about is the

Department of Health's plans to develop health privacy legislation. It has been identified as a priority within the Department of Health's business plans for a number of years, I believe, since 2017, and this most recent business plan indicates that the legislation will be introduced in the upcoming fiscal year, 2024-25. Would the minister be able to provide us with an update on the status of this draft legislation? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I thank the member for asking about this. It has been an identified need for a number of years.

In terms of the plans or the status of this legislation, we're at the consultation stage right now. Public consultations are expected to start online with a public survey and then we will be inviting external stakeholders to participate in consultations. We're also going to be doing some in-person community consultations where we will be visiting a number of communities across Nunavut.

Basically, when we're looking at the consultations around this legislation, they will be internal consultations within the department and then external consultations. We're really excited about this and we're looking forward to hearing all the input from Nunavummiut on this topic. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We've got about five sittings

remaining over the remainder of the life of this government. I'm really hoping that the Standing Committee on Legislation will not be swamped with a mass amount of legislation all at once towards the end. I'm assuming that the privacy legislation will be a bit lengthier and more complex than other pieces of legislation. I'm hoping that we will have some more time to review this.

Do you have an estimate, either optimistic or otherwise, as to when we can have this legislation introduced into the Assembly? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) It's difficult to say. We're at the consultation stage. Depending on how the consultations go, where we are directed to go through those consultations, following the consultations, we would be submitting a revised legislative proposal and go from there.

I have to give credit to the policy team at Health. They really do a tremendous job in many different areas. They keep me well informed and it's not because they're slacking that the legislation isn't in front of you today. They are also quite involved in implementing or working towards bringing into force the *Mental Health Act*, a major undertaking. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, minister. Looking

at the timeline, I know that the department will unlikely be able to introduce the legislation in the spring sitting or the fall sitting. I really hope that the legislation will be introduced next winter sitting to give us sufficient time to review this complex legislation.

I just want to move on to the next topic and that's out-of-territory care. During our OAG televised hearing over the Department of Family Services, it came to light that a number of children who age-out of care out of territory are then passed over to the Department of Health. Would you be able to provide an update on the number of Nunavummiut who have aged out of Department of Family Services' care out of territory and are now under the responsibility of the Department of Health? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Those individuals would be under the Department of Family Services. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for that clarification, minister. Just to rephrase the question, how many clients or Nunavummiut does the Department of Health have under their responsibility in out-of-territory long-term care, whether it's in mental health or other services that are required outside the territory? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In terms of seniors receiving care at Embassy West, there are now 70. That's under the long-term care aspect.

In terms of out-of-territory residential care related to mental health, those placements tend to be shorter term, so I don't have those numbers currently in front of me. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to move on to my next topic or line of questioning with regard to mental health and addiction services provided here in Iqaluit. It has come to light that over a 12-month period, in the calendar year 2023, there were 2,852 individuals put into RCMP detention or holding cells, the drunk tanks. It's unclear how many of those individuals are frequent visitors or detainees, but it's quite clear that a significant majority of those individuals that frequent the RCMP detention cells are suffering through their own challenges, mental health, addiction, homelessness, and so on and so forth, and they are in regular interaction with the RCMP.

The question I would like to pose is: how often are Department of Health officials visiting the RCMP detachment to engage with these individuals that frequent the RCMP holding cells and just notify them or inform them what services are available, and should one day they choose to make the decision to get on track and seek assistance with their problems, how to do so? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I would like to have my deputy respond to this one, if you will allow. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Please go ahead, Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt (interpretation): Thank you. (interpretation ends) Thank you to the member for the question. We have mental health staff that do go in to see individuals when they have been brought in, whether that's for an alcohol use disorder, substance use, and other things like that. That happens every day during the week and also on the weekend. They are really meant to go in and provide support to offer information referrals and opportunities for services if a Nunavummiuq member or resident has interest. Thank you.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ms. Hunt. I'm very happy to hear that. I'm a bit surprised because when I asked the same question to Justice, they seemed to be concerned that there was some sort of breach of privacy with allowing mental health workers or social workers to come in and speak with these individuals. I'm glad that mental health staff are visiting every day, and I hope that you will be able to track the number of referrals that does come out of this practice because these are the individuals that really need help the most, and it would be good just to have an idea of how many people are actually seeking help, so thank you very much for that.

I'll move on to my next line of questioning and it's in relation to agency nurses. I just read an article this morning about the situation in the NWT with regard to their agency nurses. They use agency nurses as a last resort and they had a total of seven agency nurses currently in their hospital and one of the health care centres. The question I would like to ask is: how many agency nurses do we currently have in all of our health care facilities across the territory? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) That question is almost impossible to answer in terms of right now as of this day. I guess we could answer it, but it's very hard to say exactly how many agency staff are working in Nunavut because they tend to work on shorter shifts. For example, if Sanikiluaq is facing a health centre closure, we need two nurses to keep the health centre open. Through our operations team, we might be able to secure two nurses to keep that health centre open and they would be there for a period of three weeks. The numbers fluctuate.

In terms of the budget that we are spending and looking at our actuals, in '21-22, there's \$19.5 million spent on nurse agency staffing; in '22-23 the actuals were \$25.3 million in terms of that line item. In terms of '23-24, I can't say with any precise accuracy, but we are forecasting \$24 million expenditure in this current fiscal year. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the newspaper article it was noted that the NWT is paying their agency nurses twice what they pay their full-time nurse staff and I think it was quoted at \$150 a day. The next question I would like to ask is: on average, what is the daily cost of an agency nurse currently? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) There's no doubt that these agency staff come at a premium to indeterminate staff or casual staff and that's why they are used as a last resort because we recognize that we shouldn't be choosing the most expensive option in terms of staffing. Depending on the position and depending on the specific agency, there would be a daily rate, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the entire daily rate is going to the staff member themselves. It would be the agency or the company that would take a cut and then a certain piece would go to the staff member.

I hope that's specific enough for the member. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I guess the next question that I would like to ask, during the peak vacation high-risk closure period, whether it's Christmas or summer months, what is the peak demand for agency nurses or paramedics? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you. (interpretation ends) In terms of the peak periods or the hardest times in terms of staffing, we're looking at the summer period as well as the Christmas holiday period. Those are the times when we would have the highest demand for agency nurses because we're looking or struggling in some cases to keep our health centres open.

We know that Nunavummiut are not happy when their health centres are on emergency services only. We know they don't want that. The staff and their teams have been pulling out all the stops and doing everything they can to keep our health centres open, functioning, and available for Nunavummiut and agencies have been a part of that.

In those actuals that I quoted, I am pleased that this year's forecast is actually lower than last year's and we're optimistic or hopeful that with our staffing measures, we're going to see agency costs keep coming down as we bring on more indeterminate and casual staff. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Mr. Lightstone.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Looking at the \$24 million in agency nurses and \$15 million for paramedics, it is a significant investment for short-term staffing. I would like to ask: what is the long-term plan to try to address that? As opposed to just filling every position, have you thought of creating our own little mini agency that we can send nurses out to communities to fill these positions or even better yet, hiring our own paramedic team and send them out to health care facilities? I think that would be cheaper than the \$14

million that's being requested. That's just my last question. What sort of long-term measures are being considered to try to address these considerable costs? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Our staffing measures are aimed specifically at strengthening and stabilizing our workforce in terms of health professionals. We are seeing some early encouraging results in terms of casual staff who might be looking to take an indeterminate position or in terms of job applications and job ads that are actually closing successfully which, trust me, given the past couple of years, when you see a job competitive process that actually closes and we have an indeterminate health professional hired in Nunavut, it's cause for celebration.

We're not through the woods yet. It's still really tough in terms of staffing, but reducing the use of agency nurses is going to be, hopefully, the effect of our staffing measures and as well as ongoing investments with Nunavut Arctic College in terms of training our own Nunavummiut into these careers. In the long term, more capacity, more full-time staff, and a more rewarding and flexible workplace environment from the Department of Health, those are the ingredients we're looking at. (interpretation) Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you. Next name I have on my list: Ms. Nutarak.

Ms. Nutarak: I would like to report progress.

Chairman: Thank you. There is a motion on the floor to report progress and it's not subject to debate. All those in favour. Motion carried. I will now rise to report progress to the Speaker.

My apologies. The witness may leave the witness table now.

Speaker: Item 22. Report of the Committee of the Whole. Mr. Hickes.

Item 22: Report of the Committee of the Whole

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been considering Bill 37 and would like to report progress. Mr. Speaker, I also move that the Report of the Committee of the Whole be agreed to. Thank you.

Speaker: There is a motion on the floor. Is there a seconder? Ms. Nutarak.

>> *Laughter*

To the motion.

An Hon. Member: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour. Opposed. The motion is carried.

Item 23. Third Reading of Bills. Item 24. *Orders of the Day*. Mr. Clerk.

Item 24: Orders of the Day

Clerk (Mr. Quirke): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a reminder that the Regular Members' Caucus meets at nine o'clock tomorrow in the Nanuq Boardroom.

Orders of the Day for February 27:

1. Prayer
 2. Ministers' Statements
 3. Members' Statements
 4. Returns to Oral Questions
 5. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery
 6. Oral Questions
 7. Written Questions
 8. Returns to Written Questions
 9. Replies to Opening Address
 10. Replies to Budget Address
 11. Petitions
 12. Responses to Petitions
 13. Reports of Standing and Special Committees on Bills and Other Matters
 14. Tabling of Documents
 15. Notices of Motions
 16. Notices of Motions for First Reading of Bills
 17. Motions
 18. First Reading of Bills
 19. Second Reading of Bills
 20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
 - Bill 37
 - Bill 38
 - Bill 39
 - Bill 40
 21. Report of the Committee of the Whole
 22. Third Reading of Bills
 23. Orders of the Day
- Thank you.
- >> *Applause*
- Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 27, at 1:30 p.m.
- Sergeant-at-Arms.
- >> *House adjourned at 17:49*

