

Legislative Assembly of Nunavut

Speaker

Hon. Tony Akoak
(Gjoa Haven)

Hon. David Akeeagok
(Quttiktuq)

Minister of Justice; Minister for Labour; Minister responsible for the Human Rights Tribunal; Minister of Economic Development and Transportation; Minister responsible for Nunavut Business Credit Corporation; Minister responsible for Nunavut Development Corporation; Minister responsible for Mines; Minister responsible for Trade; Minister responsible for Mines

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok
(Iqaluit-Niaqunnguu)

Premier; Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs; Minister of Culture and Heritage; Minister of Indigenous Affairs; Minister responsible for Immigration; Minister responsible for the Utility Rates Review Council; Minister responsible for Seniors; Minister of Languages

Bobby Anavilok
(Kugluktuk)

Janet Brewster
(Iqaluit-Sinaa)

Hon. Pamela Gross
(Cambridge Bay)
Deputy Premier; Minister of Education; Minister of Human Resources; Minister Responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission

George Hickes
(Iqaluit-Tasiluk)

Deputy Speaker; Chair of the Committee of the Whole

Hon. David Joanasié
(South Baffin)

Government House Leader; Minister of Community and Government Services; Minister of Environment; Minister of Energy

Joelie Kaernerik
(Amittuq)

Mary Killiktee
(Uqqummiut)

Hon. Lorne Kusugak
(Rankin Inlet South)

Minister of Finance; Minister responsible for the Nunavut Housing Corporation; Minister responsible for Liquor and Cannabis Commission; Minister responsible for Liquor and Cannabis Board

Adam Lightstone
(Iqaluit-Manirajak)

Hon. John Main
(Arviat North-Whale Cove)

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

Solomon Malliki
(Aivilik)

Deputy Chair, Committee of the Whole

Hon. Margaret Nakashuk
(Pangnirtung)

Minister of Family Services; Minister responsible for the Status of Women; Minister responsible for Homelessness; Minister Responsible for Poverty Reduction; Minister responsible for Nunavut Arctic College

Karen Nutarak
(Tununiq)

Daniel Qavvik
(Hudson Bay)

Joanna Quassa
(Aggu)

Inagayuk Quqqiaq
(Netsilik)

Alexander Sammurtok
(Rankin Inlet North-Chesterfield Inlet)

Joe Savikataaq
(Arviat South)

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Table of Contents

Opening Prayer.....	1
Ministers' Statements	1
Members' Statements	6
Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery.....	12
Oral Questions.....	13
Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery.....	29
Reports of Standing and Special Committee on Bills and Other Matters	36
Tabling of Documents	36
First Reading of Bills	37
Second Reading of Bills.....	38
Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery.....	41
Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters	42
Report of the Committee of the Whole	72
Orders of the Day	72

A.

Daily References

Tuesday, February 25, 2025 1

B.

Ministers' Statements

525 – 6(2): Ilaġiitsiarniq Strategic Action Plan (Nakashuk) 1
526 – 6(2): Partnership with Northern Counselling and Therapeutic Services (Main) 2
527 – 6(2): 2025 Planning Baffin Island Caribou Abundance Survey (Joanasie) 3
528 – 6(2): Accredited Human Resources Certificate Program (Gross) 4
529 – 6(2): Keeping Connected to Communities (Nakashuk) 5
530 – 6(2): Airline Acquisition (Akeeagok D) 6

C.

Members' Statements

722 – 6(2): Capital Plans for the Smaller Communities (Kaernek) 6
723 – 6(2): Teaching Staff at Naujaat School (Malliki) 7
724 – 6(2): Revoke Elon Musk (Lightstone) 8
725 – 6(2): Special Constable Recognition (Simailak) 8
726 – 6(2): Traditional Instruction (Killiktee) 9
727 – 6(2): Inuinnaqtun Dialect (Anavilok) 10
728 – 6(2): Government Budget (Akeeagok D) 10
729 – 6(2): Birthday Greetings (Nakashuk) 12

D.

Oral Questions

1094 – 6(2): Airline Industry (Brewster).....	13
1095 – 6(2): Departmental Positions (Nutarak)	15
1096 – 6(2): Workplace Injuries (Hickes)	17
1097 – 6(2): Building Codes Up to Standards (Kaerner).....	18
1098 – 6(2): Inuinnaqtun Dialect (Anavilok).....	20
1099 – 6(2): Natsilingmeot Dialect Revitalization (Quqqiaq)	22
1100 – 6(2): Retail Sector (Killiktee).....	25
1101 – 6(2): Granular Management (Sammurtok)	27
1102 – 6(2): PY Discrepancies (Savikataaq).....	29
1103 – 6(2): Teaching Staff at Naujaat School (Malliki)	31
1104 – 6(2): Departmental Positions (Quassa).....	33

E.

Tabling of Documents

352 – 6(2): 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Legislative Assembly.....	36
353 – 6(2): Report on the Payment of Indemnities Allowances, Expenses and Benefits to the Members of the Sixth Legislative Assembly For the Period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024.....	36
354 – 6(2): 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Nunavut.....	36
355 – 6(2): 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Nunavut.....	36
356 – 6(2): 2025-2028 Business Plan of the Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut	36
357 – 6(2): 2025-2028 Business Plan of the Office of the Representative For Children and Youth	36
358 – 6(2): Government of Nunavut’s Response to Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts Regarding the Report on the Review of the 2021-2022 Public Accounts of Nunavut	37

359 – 6(2): Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Framework 2023-2028 Progress Update Report	37
360 – 6(2): Minister’s 2023-2024 Report on Poverty Reduction	37

F.

Bills

Bill 73 – Planning Act – First Reading.....	37
Bill 57 – An Act to Amend the Workers’ Compensation Act – Second Reading	38
Bill 66 – Early Learning and Child Care Act – Second Reading	38
Bill 67 – An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act – Second Reading	39
Bill 68 – An Act to Amend the Tobacco Tax Act – Second Reading.....	39
Bill 69 – An Act Consequential to the Government Reorganization of 2025 – Second Reading	39
Bill 70 – Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2025-2026 – Second Reading	40
Bill 71 – Supplementary Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, No. 2, 2024-2025 – Second Reading	40
Bill 72 – Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 1, 2025-2026 – Second Reading	41
Bill 70 – Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2025-2026 – Consideration in Committee of the Whole	42

Iqaluit, Nunavut
Tuesday, February 25, 2025

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 Joanasie, Mr. Joeline Kaernerck, Ms. Mary Killiktee, Hon. Lorne Kusugak, Mr. Adam Lightstone, Hon. John Main, Mr. Solomon Malliki, Ms. Karen Nutarak, Hon. Margaret Nakashuk, Hon. Joanna Quassa, Mr. Inagayuk Quqqiaq, Mr. Alexander Sammurtok, Mr. Joe Savikataaq, Hon. Craig Simailak.

>>*House commenced at 13:30*

Item 1: Opening Prayer

Speaker (Hon. Tony Akoak) (interpretation): Before we start I would like to ask Mr. Anavilok to open the meeting with a prayer.

>>*Prayer*

Speaker's Statement

Speaker (interpretation): (no interpretation)

As members are aware, we had to end yesterday's proceedings due to technical issues. I can confirm to members that we gave first reading to the following bills: Bill 57, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, and 72. After that my microphone decided that it was time to go to sleep.

>>*Laughter*

Bill 73 remains on Orders of the Day for First Reading.

Item 2, Ministers' Statements. Hon. Minister of Family Services, Ms. Nakashuk.

Item 2: Ministers' Statements

Minister's Statement 525 – 6(2): Ilagiitsiarniq Strategic Action Plan

Ms. Nakashuk (interpretation): Thank you and good afternoon. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to report on the progress made by the Department of Family Services on the Family Wellness Ilagiitsiarniq Strategic Action Plan. My department is working with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada to address concerns identified in performance report on Nunavut's children and family services in May 2023. In response, the department

committed to develop a strategic action plan that addressed these concerns. That was tabled in the Fall Sitting of 2024.

Accompanying the strategic action plan was a comprehensive evaluation and monitoring action plan that ensures commitments made in the plan are implemented.

Following the tabling, officials created a deputy minister's advisory committee comprised of all levels of management, from regions and headquarters. The committee is leading the development of an implementation plan, focusing on comprehensive timelines, that I hope to present this summer.

Department officials continue to make improvements to data management, through enhanced electronic case management training for all front-line staff. The department has addressed capacity issues in communities through ongoing hiring of community social services workers. We are conducting facility reviews for all out-of-territory placements, and we have increased capacity for quality assurance, training, adoptions, and interprovincial team cooperation. Next steps also include change management training for our management team to assist in shifting our path forward toward improved service delivery and the well-being of staff.

Mr. Speaker, enacting systemic change is never easy, but thanks to the commitment of Family Services' staff, we are making progress in our plan to improve services for Nunavummiut.

Qujannamiik, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Minister's Statement, Hon. Minister responsible for the Qulliq Energy Corporation, Mr. Main.

Minister's Statement 526 – 6(2): Partnership with Northern Counselling and Therapeutic Services

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, colleagues, and people of Nunavut.

Mr. Speaker, the Qulliq Energy Corporation's talented employees are the single most important part of how we provide reliable power for Nunavummiut. We know our employees need supports of different types in order to succeed. Qulliq Energy Corporation recognizes that mental health supports are crucial to our employees' overall well-being, and should always be available.

(interpretation ends) Every Qulliq Energy Corporation employee deserves a safe space to share their challenges and seek help when needed.

I am pleased to announce a significant new initiative that reinforces QEC's commitment to safety and well-being. Our Human Resources team has partnered with Northern Counselling and Therapeutic Services to make comprehensive counselling, and mental health supports available for our employees and their families. Northern Counselling and Therapeutic Services was founded in 2011 by a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous clinicians with the goal of providing clinically and culturally evidence-based, cost-effective, and impactful mental health services.

Uqaqti, through this new partnership with Northern Counselling and Therapeutic Services, we are proactively supporting the well-being of our teams – not only to help them thrive professionally in the workplace, but also to empower them on a personal level as well.

I want to express my deep gratitude to QEC's Human Resources team for their dedication to making this partnership a reality. I encourage all of our employees to take full advantage of the valuable services available through Northern Counselling and Therapeutic Services.

QEC is fully committed to upholding all health and safety standards as we work toward a better and more resilient future for ourselves, our families, and our communities.

Matna, Uqaqti.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Minister's Statement. Hon. Minister of Environment, Mr. Joanasie.

Minister's Statement 527 – 6(2): 2025 Planning Baffin Island Caribou Abundance Survey

Hon. Davie Joanasie (interpretation): Mr. Speaker, and I am very pleased that the electronics are all together.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide an update on a research program that the Department of Environment is leading to monitor the recovery of Baffin Island caribou. An abundance survey of South Baffin Island was completed in March 2024. We are now planning an additional survey of the Central and North Baffin Island area, which will be undertaken in March 2025. These two surveys combined will collect information on the distribution of caribou across Baffin Island and will lead to an updated abundance estimate of Baffin Island.

This caribou herd experienced a steep decline in numbers in 2014, and in response to the population decline, a Total Allowable Harvest was put in place in 2015. We have since worked with our co-management partners to increase this harvest. For the current 2024-2025 harvest season, harvesters are allowed to take up to 90 females from the Total Allowable Harvest of 450.

Similar to the previous survey, the upcoming 2025 survey will include spotters selected by the hunters and trappers organizations from North and Central Baffin communities. I would like to thank these hunters and trappers organizations for their participation, continued support, and input of local knowledge which is key when we design aerial surveys.

Mr. Speaker, we are currently analyzing the 2024 data and will prioritize analysis of the 2025 results after the Central and North Baffin survey is completed, to ensure we can share the full survey results in a timely manner.

Mr. Speaker, it is through our commitment to the guiding principle of Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq—respecting and caring for the land, animals and our environment – and with the support of our harvesters and co-management partners that we will ensure that Baffin Island caribou have the best chance at recovery.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Minister's Statement. Hon. Minister for Human Resources, Ms. Gross.

Minister's Statement 528 – 6(2): Accredited Human Resources Certificate Program

Hon. Pamela Gross: *Quana*, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I'm excited to share news about our Accredited Human Resource Certificate Program, launched by the Department of Human Resources in November 2024.

Designed specifically for Inuit participants, this program allows graduates to earn a post-secondary certificate in Human Resources and a Chartered Professional in Human Resources designation, which is recognized as the national standard for human resource professionals.

Mr. Speaker, this two-year program mixes in-class learning, online courses, self-directed study, seminars, and even a study tour. It's hands-on and designed to fit our learners' active schedules.

We now have 24 Nunavut Inuit participants enrolled in the program, set to graduate in January 2026. Upon completion of the program, this Inuit-only cohort will gain valuable human resources skills in recruitment and employee relations; compensation and benefits; health, safety, and wellness; as well as employment and Nunavut-specific labour laws.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of what the Accredited Human Resource Certificate Program represents, and it is more than an educational opportunity; it is a proactive step in offering career-broadening and advancement opportunities to our Inuit employees, strengthening human resources capacity within our Department of Human Resources and across all our government.

Quana, Mr. Speaker.

>> *Applause*

Speaker: Minister's Statement. Hon. Minister responsible for Nunavut Arctic College, Ms. Nakashuk.

Minister's Statement 529 – 6(2): Keeping Connected to Communities

Hon. Margaret Nakashuk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in late January, Aurora College in the Northwest Territories announced it will close its network of community learning centres on June 30, 2025.

(interpretation ends) Aurora College cited low enrolment and completion rates and an ineffective delivery model as factors that influenced this decision. I appreciate this decision was not made lightly, and my thoughts go out to the staff, students, and communities impacted by this decision.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister responsible for Nunavut Arctic College, I am aware there are real challenges in supporting community learning, including the state of the facilities, human resources challenges, and securing additional funding. And yet, amid these challenges, I assure members that the College is working to maintain its connection to communities.

Ongoing funding from the Government of Nunavut and third-party contributions has allowed the College to expand, diversify, and deliver more programs across the territory in community learning centres. Investments in the CANARIE network have resulted in dedicated, faster internet, which enables us to develop programs with diverse delivery models. The Personal Support Worker Program and the revised Nunavut Teacher

Education Program represent the College's willingness to change and update its learning models.

The College has also continued to make significant efforts to fill key positions necessary for program development and delivery.

Mr. Speaker, while not all facilities are functioning to their maximum potential, College facilities provide hope and opportunity to our learners as we continue to try something new, to change, to innovate.

(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Minister's Statement 530 – 6(2): Airline Acquisition

Hon. David Akeeagok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Government of Nunavut is aware of the announced binding purchase agreement for the acquisition of Canadian North by Exchange Income Corporation.

Air transportation is essential to Nunavut, connecting our communities and supporting vital services, and it is our only highway.

We have been assured that there will be no impact on service for Nunavummiut. We look forward to engaging with Exchange Income Corporation and Canadian North throughout this transition to ensure air services remain reliable, accessible, and sustainable.

We remain committed to working with all stakeholders and regulators as this process moves forward.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to monitor developments and provide updates as more information becomes available. This transaction requires federal regulatory approval, and our government will actively provide input as needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Item 3, Members' Statements. Member for Amittuq, Mr. Kaerner.

Item 3: Members' Statements

Member's Statement 722 – 6(2): Capital Plans for the Smaller Communities

Mr. Kaernek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation) Good afternoon, Amittummiut and Nunavummiut.

Mr. Speaker, I rise again Arnaqjuaq school in Hall Beach with Hall Beach population increasing from people moving into the community.

My comment here, let me first make it clear that the capital plans for Nunavut communities, for the smaller communities in particular, I always stated what further we can do for the benefit of the smaller communities. And our government has its mandate that our future and education is foremost in Nunavut.

The educators in Hall Beach struggle daily and I thank them for their work, although they continually state that their schools are just too small. In the review the government made on full-day education for kindergarten students, Sanirajak is part of that program. And the school in Hall Beach is just too small. And hear me out. And for the high school students have issues. Although many don't want to quit high school, many quit high school, which is unfortunate. When we have students at elementary level and high school level in one building, it's a problem.

What can the government do further in view of developing our future and have our school size building increased, or to build a new school? The school I'm referring to was built in the 1960s. My question will be what plans are there to expand or build a new school in Hall Beach. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Member's Statement. Member for Aivilik, Mr. Malliki.

Member's Statement 723 – 6(2): Teaching Staff at Naujaat School

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to my constituents and colleagues here.

I did mention before that language of instruction is very important in Nunavut. More than once students have approached me that they want to quit their school for the fact that their schooling don't really have directors and what subject matters are taught when they're dealing with just one subject matter and to see how advanced the students are, the report cards are never completed. And more and more students are dissatisfied. Not just in our communities. One individual approached me from another constituency, in fact.

Schools are important and we need a proper curriculum established. I urge the Department of Education, our government, to this end. And in fact one student told me, and this is coming from a high school student related to me. Hearing this, I was very uncomfortable. You want to see the best education for our youth and we need a good education being provided in our schools in Nunavut.

For these reasons I'll be asking the Minister of Education at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Member's Statement. Member for Iqaluit-Manirajak, Mr. Lightstone.

Member's Statement 724 – 6(2): Revoke Elon Musk

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to inform my colleagues and my fellow Nunavummiut that on Thursday, February 20, a petition sponsored by MP Charlie Angus was posted to the House of Commons website. The petition is calling for the Prime Minister to revoke Elon Musk's citizenship and passport, and states:

“Whereas Elon Musk has engaged in activities that go against the national interest of Canada; he has now become a member of a foreign government that is attempting to erase Canadian sovereignty;” and that “the attempts of Elon Musk to attack Canadian sovereignty must be addressed.”

Mr. Speaker, Elon Musk continues to borrow Trump's language and refers to our prime minister as governor. This is not only disrespectful, but an insult to all Canadians.

As such, I have joined one of the quarter-million Canadians who have signed this petition.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to reiterate that over the last five days alone almost 250,000 Canadians have signed onto this petition calling on our prime minister to revoke Elon Musk's citizenship.

Mr. Speaker, I know that many Nunavummiut were celebrating the Canadian hockey team's win over the Americans just not too long ago, but I would like to ask that if any of my colleagues or any other Nunavummiut hold my sentiment, please go to the House of Commons website and sign the electronic petition. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>Applause

Speaker: Member's Statement. Member for Baker Lake, Mr. Simailak.

Member's Statement 725 – 6(2): Special Constable Recognition

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, all. People of Baker Lake, good afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, there was a special memorial plaque unveiled for Special Constable Andrew Ooyoumut in Baker Lake, back on December 1, 2024, 70 years after he died while on

patrol at the Kikatavyuk River, just a few miles south of what is now Baker Lake. Very valuable duties performed by Ooyoumut while he was on active duty. Some of the duties he performed during his service included guiding, collecting vital statistics, checking the living conditions of the people of the area, picking up and delivering food to people who were starving, attending to people's injuries, administering polio immunizations, interpreting, and checking infringements of the game law.

Mr. Speaker, he was the first Inuit Special Constable to die in the line of duty in what is now Nunavut.

Following the unveiling ceremony, a meal was held at the Nunamiut Lodge, which brought together 30 people which included then-mayor Kevin Iksiktaaryuk, Special Constable Ooyoumut's family, relatives of special constables (indiscernible), five Royal Canadian Mounted Police members dressed in red serge, and myself.

Lovely speeches were given by Sally Webster (ph), Ooyoumut's eldest daughter, and Deborah Webster (ph), Ooyoumut's granddaughter.

The commanding officer of 'V' Division Chief Superintendent Andrew Blackadar flew in from Iqaluit for the event and discussed the importance of having special constables to help regular members survive in the north. He also lauded Ooyoumut and other special constables exemplify the Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit principle Pijitsirniq, serving and providing for family and/or community.

Let us not forget the contributions of Special Constable Andrew Ooyoumut, and all those who serve, who have served, and assisted the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the past and today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

>Applause

Speaker: Member's Statement. Member for Uqqummiut, Ms. Killiktee.

Member's Statement 726 – 6(2): Traditional Instruction

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to mention what I think needs to be heard, that we are very proud in our community what we struggle to fight for, that a new building where scientists will be able to come to our community to do their research from all around the world. We always fought for this.

Recently they had a community tour and also the building was toured and it will have an opening ceremony when I come back to our community.

We've seen a lot of benefits of the facility for our schools, for our students, and with outsiders coming in to do research and we will be able to have Inuit staff working in the building, for those who study the terrestrial animals, and so forth.

The building that will now be open has made already for the University of Laval team whom I invited to the community, and what programs they may avail in our community in the research building.

A brand new research centre will now be available and already attracting people from elsewhere coming in.

Just to let everyone know that's available. And also, the building will also be used for sampling what hunters harvest, and so forth. This is something we visioned in our community, and it has been part of our preparation and the fact that we always required a proper facility towards this. I don't know if you are smiling onto that Mr. Speaker, but...

Speaker: Member's Statement. Member for Kugluktuk, Mr. Anavilok.

Member's Statement 727 – 6(2): Inuinnaqtun Dialect

Mr. Anavilok (interpretation): (no interpretation).

(interpretation) The dialect in the Kitikmeot is in danger of disappearing, and Inuit want to help the situation to try and revitalize the dialect and the local education authorities help with the efforts in the schools. (no interpretation)

>Applause

Speaker: Member's Statement. Member for Quttiktuq, Mr. David Akeeagok.

Member's Statement 728 – 6(2): Government Budget

Hon. David Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday my colleague Minister Kusugak announced the government budget, and stated that \$3 billion would be the budget. I will support that budget until it's passed.

My constituents in Quttiktuq have been asking me how does it affect us, the budget. They were asking, what is the money for. When we're talking about very complicated things, sometimes the communities don't understand what we're talking about or how useful it will be to themselves, so they ask me questions like that, about different government operations.

I would like to try and explain that all the schools need to be kept open and all the maintenance and operations have to be paid for. All the teachers salaries have to be paid for and all of the curriculum material has to be paid for. And young people who want to advance themselves and who want to take part in recreation, they're able to. And if they want to go to higher sports programs, they are made available in such games as the Arctic Winter Games or Canada Games.

The funding that we approve in the House has been used to build houses, and is also able to support volunteers for sports events.

Health centres are kept open with the budget, and people going to the hospital, if they need help at home or something, and if they need help from our nurses, they get helped at home or at the health centre and if it's too serious they get medevacked out of the community to get more help. So all that is paid for out of the budget.

I would like to have unanimous consent to conclude my statement. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Member is seeking unanimous consent to conclude his statement. Are there any nays? There are none. Please proceed, Mr. David Akeeagok.

Hon. David Akeeagok (interpretation): Thank you to my colleagues and thank you, Mr. Speaker. For people when they have to go to the hospital and they need help, they get taken care of by hospitals wherever they need to be sent, either in Iqaluit or in Ottawa. And if they need more help, then they're made available through funding provided by the Nunavut government. So the people are helped a lot.

And our elders, we want them to age comfortably in their home, and through housing, we provide them with elder housing where families can get together with the elders in their own homes.

We always have to keep paying for these different programs such as fuel and water and other things that always need to be paid for. Those are some of the things that the budget pays for.

People requesting assistance get assistance, but if they want to go out on their own business, like there are just a few businesses around, but if they want help to start a business, then the Nunavut government is available to help them do that, and they have different programs for those things.

So I wanted to tell a little bit about what the budget is used for in the House that will have to be approved in the House. And it will be used for the operations and maintenance of the government and I will support it when it comes to the vote.

And my constituents, I want them to understand everything the same way as I understand it. There are many details, though. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Member for Pangnirtung, Ms. Nakashuk.

Member's Statement 729 – 6(2): Birthday Greetings

Hon. Margaret Nakashuk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to make a statement. It's bad weather in Pangnirtung right now, and there's no school. We have a bunch of birthdays, Hazel Kilabuk (ph) and we call her Atuapik (ph), Precious Mom. Have a good day. She's now eight years old. And I've missed all her birthdays so far. I hope you have a good day, my little mother. Thank you.

Speaker: Item 4, Returns to Oral Questions. Item 5, Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. I will go first.

>> *Laughter*

Item 5: Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Speaker: I want to recognize to the house someone who is no stranger to this House, Mr. Steve Mapsalak.

> *Applause*

Speaker: He can also be better known as MapsaLeaf. He is a Maple Leafs fan.

The other person I want to recognize is from my community. He's a well known hunter and provides food for people in the community, and also a parole officer from my community. His name is Sam Kumongak (ph).

> *Applause*

Speaker: Welcome to your House. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Member for Aivilik, Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize a person from Naujaat, who has done a lot for the people of Naujaat, and he's no stranger to the House. He helps me in different ways. He used to work for me, but due to health reasons he had to resign. I would like to ask Steve Mapsalak. He has helped the community a great deal and has helped improve it. And I would like to welcome his partner as well. Thank you.

Speaker: Welcome to your Assembly. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Member for Rankin Inlet South, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know the person already got recognized, but I would like to recognize Steve Mutsala. I want to welcome him. His precious wife is staying at home now. I hope he gets home soon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to welcome him.

Speaker: Welcome to your Assembly. Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Item 6, Oral Questions. Before we proceed, do I need to remind members? No?

Some Members: No.

Speaker: Good.

>>*Laughter*

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

Item 6: Oral Questions

Oral Question 1094 – 6(2): Airline Industry

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Economic Development and Transportation, and they concern yesterday's bombshell announcement regarding the sale of Canadian North to the Exchange Income Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, as the minister will recall, I asked him a number of questions during our recent Fall Sitting regarding the federal Competition Bureau's announcement that it would be undertaking a market study of the competition in the Canadian airline industry, and at that time there was no hint whatsoever that Canadian North was on the verge of being sold to a southern-based entity.

For the record, was the Government of Nunavut consulted in any way prior to yesterday's announcement of the sale? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Akeegok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as the government is the biggest customer, we were provided an update as of yesterday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The official announcement of the sale indicated that closing of the transaction is subject to obtaining required regulatory approvals and other customary closing conditions, and is expected to occur later this year.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Exchange Income Corporation already owns Calm Air, which focuses on service to Kivalliq communities, and I'm concerned that the proposed sale will entrench its monopoly position with potentially significant ramifications for such issues as the amount our government pays for medical and duty travel.

Mr. Speaker, in a statement today, the minister assured this House that the Government of Nunavut will actively provide input as needed to federal regulators. And for the record, other than the concerns I just mentioned, can the minister provide additional examples of areas of concern that the Government of Nunavut will highlight and address on behalf of Nunavummiut. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, our airlines are private companies that we rely on and depend on, and are vital services and there's a number of areas that I can list numerous of what areas that need to be covered, but it's something that when the regulatory process starts, it's something that I will actively provide. We've done that when there was a merger between Canadian North and First Air, which monopolized this region, and Kitikmeot and Kivalliq have already been.

This is one of the results that have indicated in the past that we have a very small air market population in Nunavut. That's the reality. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just remind minister and his officials that I did table a number of submissions to the Competition Bureau of Canada concerning the airline competition in October 2024, and I hope they do review those again.

Mr. Speaker, I found it very interesting and very telling that yesterday's announcement indicated that the acquisition excludes the Montreal to Kuujuaq route, which will be maintained by the Makivvik Corporation. It's my understanding that Air Inuit will be taking over this service.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that Makivvik wants to be responsive to its voting beneficiaries in Nunavik. It's a matter of public record that Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated's board of directors has recently approved the investment of millions of dollars to support the Indigenous-led purchase of Northwestel, as well as supporting co-ownership investment into the Government of Nunavut's fibre project. Is the minister aware if Nunavut

Tungavik and/or the regional Inuit organizations had the opportunity to consider acquiring Canadian North? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Oral Question 1095 – 6(2): Departmental Positions

Ms. Nutarak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, today my questions are for the Minister of Environment. I want to follow up on the issue with that I raised with the minister's predecessor during the Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly.

As the minister is aware, the Department of Environment has a total of seven positions located in the community of Pond Inlet. (interpretation ends) Seven positions. The government's most recent quarterly employment report indicates that four of these positions are filled and three are vacant. Since that time, in my understanding, one has become vacant.

Can the minister confirm which of his department's positions in Pond Inlet are currently vacant. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Environment, Mr. Joanasié.

Hon. David Joanasié (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the questions in regards to this issue, in regards to the filling of the positions. I can say that the Department of Environment since December 31, 2024 there were 64 positions that were, and there were 54.5 positions vacant. And there are different positions.

And as well for Pond Inlet, I will have to get back to you on exactly what status it is on, if the employment opportunity have been announced. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Ms. Nutarak.

Ms. Nutarak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister, as well. I know that I work very hard to make sure that these positions can be filled by Inuit IN Pond Inlet.

(interpretation ends) When I last raised this issue during the Fall Sitting, the minister's predecessor stated one of the main barriers to filling the department's position in Pond Inlet is lack of staff housing. At that time he indicated that his department has been

working with the Nunavut Housing Corporation to address the situation. Can the new Minister provide an update today on the status of his work. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Environment, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Minister, as well. These positions that are vacant that need to be filled, I will repeat again that some casuals, some are filled with casuals. And the Nunavut Housing Corporation, if they have any staff housing, we do apply for staff housing through the staff housing allocation committee.

As well, in regards to the Department of Environment I'm not exactly sure if Nunavut Housing Corporation had allotted staff housing to Environment, but once I get that information I will relay that information to my colleague. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Ms. Nutarak.

Ms. Nutarak (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(interpretation ends) As the minister is aware, the Department of Environment has announced that it is working to develop a new wildlife guardian training program, the stated purpose of which is to, "promote and provide employment opportunities within this field for Nunavummiut."

We do have a lot of environmental technology program graduates in Pond Inlet. Can the minister clarify how many positions under this program are planned to be located in Pond Inlet. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Environment, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie (interpretation): I thank the member, Mr. Speaker, for her question in regards to the wildlife guardian training program. I have looked into this to get clarification. In some communities, for example, all the communities need conservation officers. In some communities positions are vacant in some communities and sometimes the wildlife guardian training program has been utilized in the past in some communities. This has been successful in some communities.

Once the community requests to have the training program, we are willing to work with the community. If there's a request coming from any one of the communities, they can inform the Department of Environment if they request to have a wildlife guardian training program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Oral Question 1096 – 6(2): Workplace Injuries

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker I would like to direct my question today to the Minister responsible for Workers' Safety Compensation Commission.

Mr. Speaker, on November 21, 2024, a few months back, media coverage stated that the Nunavut Northwest Territories has the highest rates of workplace injuries out of all provinces and territories in Canada. Mr. Speaker, on November 22, the very next day, further media coverage suggested that may not be the case, and Nunavut Northwest Territories numbers are actually ranked sixth.

Can the minister update which is accurate and clarify what is the per capita rate of workplace injuries for Nunavut and Northwest Territories. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister responsible for Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. In terms of the per capita workplace injuries, Nunavut was the first. We have been the first over the NWT, per capita. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Hickes.

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I totally don't understand that response. Nunavut Northwest Territories share the Workers' Safety Compensation Commission, but I will take it from that that the Minister is stating that the first article was correct and that Nunavut Northwest Territories are the worst in Canada for workplace injuries.

Mr. Speaker, one of the roles of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission is to help employers prevent workplace injuries. Can the minister describe how Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission staff work with employers to reduce and hopefully eliminate workplace injuries. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The WSCC has a total of 188 positions. There are 47 of those in Nunavut and 141 of them in the Northwest Territories. Our Nunavut office has four Inuit beneficiaries working in the positions, and we do work within six divisions to work across all the different levels of legal, compliance, performance, and corporate services to support workers across the territories, if there are – we have an outreach program that works directly with employers. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Mr. Hickes.

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, the question I had asked is what the commission is doing to help employers prevent workplace injuries, but I'll move on.

In the media coverage mentioned earlier, a representative of the Nunavut Employees' Union suggested that a high number of Government of Nunavut job vacancies is contributing to higher numbers of workplace injuries. Can the minister describe how the commission is working with Government of Nunavut departments, especially Department of Human Resources, to identify and strengthen workplace codes before injuries occur. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question.

So the Workers' Safety and Compensation is actively working with the Department of Human Resources. We also have a legislative proposal for the new pension system, and we're working to ensure that we have a modern and sustainable approach to compensation that reflects the impact of permanent medical impairment on a claimant for long-term ability to earn a living to support their families. So we're working to strengthen all different sectors, but through the Nunavut Workers' Safety and Compensation division. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Oral Question 1097 – 6(2): Building Codes Up to Standards

Mr. Kaernek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker as stated in my member statement regarding the schooling in Sanirajak, Arnaqjuaq school, under the building code assessment, during the fall session I have asked the Minister of Education if the school is up to standard. I would like to have a clarification on if, for instance, Mr. Speaker, there's a kitchen that is turned into a classroom.

I would like to first ask the minister, under the building code assessment, is the Arnaqjuaq school up to standard when it comes to this building code. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for that question. The condition of the school is at 61 percent, which is, in our standards, good condition. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Kaerner.

Mr. Kaerner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That was nice and sweet. Mr. Speaker, the kindergartens up in the Arnaqjuaq school are taking turns once in the morning and once in the afternoon due to overcrowd kindergarten classrooms. I would like to get clarification for the record. How many are required in the classroom for one teacher? I'm sure there's a policy. If the minister can clarify how many can that one teacher have as students in one classroom, when it come to this building code assessment? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you to the member for that question. Nunavut has very good standards for our student-educator ratio, and we have a great, very few students in our classrooms, compared to the teachers, as compared to down south. And I believe our ratio is 13 to 8. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Mr. Kaerner.

Mr. Kaerner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I have stated that. Now, when the full-day kindergarten start throughout Nunavut-wide, the elementary school in the community of Sanirajak will see more of a burnout and we will see more substitute teachers that are taking over as permanent teachers.

But now, Mr. Speaker, in saying that, again during our Fall Session I have invited the Minister of Education to go see herself, firsthand experience of how the teachers are doing and how the students are doing. I'm sure she had other obligations due to, by then.

So will the minister again visit? Well, since the minister couldn't visit, will the minister now visit both communities I represent, Sanirajak and part of Igloolik? Can the minister give me a proper date of when she will be available to come see both schools in Igloolik and Sanirajak. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you to the member for inviting me to the community. I had committed to going to the community and that still stands, to

go and visit Sanirajak. I am planning to go in March, and I have been working with the MLA to talk about going there after we're completed the winter session, Mr. Speaker.

And I just wanted to correct my last statement. When I said 13 to 8, I could see it in my head. It was 13.8 students to one teacher. So I just correct myself on that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral questions. Member for Kugluktuk, Mr. Anavilok.

Oral Question 1098 – 6(2): Inuinnaqtun Dialect

Mr. Anavilok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (No interpretation)

(interpretation ends) I want to ask these questions in English so the young people that lost their language, to hear, so there's good information here on questions.

Mr. Speaker, during the Legislative Assembly's sitting on March 10, 2023 the minister's predecessor indicated "we are proposing shifting the focus of Inuinnaqtun translation to prioritize areas that are either likely to improve revitalization or directly support access to service."

I understand the shift of focus means that there is an emphasis on new resources to support those learning Inuinnaqtun. Can the Minister provide a substantive update today on the status of this work. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Languages, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to thank the member who uses his Inuinnaqtun dialect in the House. We have to make sure that there's a recognition of the language.

The previous minister indicated how we can help improve the usage of the Inuinnaqtun language, and we have set aside funds to improve the programs and services for the Inuinnaqtun language.

We are going to keep going forward with this, and we're also looking at filling the positions in Kugluktuk, because that's where producing the new resources. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Anavilok.

Mr. Anavilok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your response.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada recently published *Languages in Nunavut* study, based on statistics from the calendar year 2021. This study was conducted in collaboration with the Government of Nunavut's Department of Culture and Heritage.

Mr. Speaker, this study highlights the knowledge and use of the official languages in Nunavut. The study indicates that “there are notable differences between Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun. Inuinnaqtun has a lower number of speakers. Fewer people with Inuinnaqtun as a mother tongue speak the language at home and intergenerational transmission of the language is lower than that of English or Inuktitut. Half of people with Inuinnaqtun as a mother tongue are aged 55 years old and over, signalling potential challenges for the sustained use of the language.”

(interpretation) Mr. Speaker, our language Inuinnaqtun (no interpretation) in their homes in the schools, in our communities and elsewhere. We know that the young people, they work at the stores. Keep encouraging them. Keep encouraging them to speak our language.

(interpretation ends) Can the minister explain how his department works in collaboration with the Department of Education to promote the use of Inuinnaqtun dialect in western Canada schools. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Languages, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is very (technical interruption)

(interpretation) The importance of Inuinnaqtun is something that you don't want to lose, and for that reason we've been promoting the use. Right at this time we are working and we have been working with the Department of Education what further programs we can provide in Inuinnaqtun on top, perhaps provide further funding in view of the language. And we anticipate and will seek support for funding from this House and to strengthen Inuktitut. This is something we are pushing towards, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Mr. Anavilok.

Mr. Anavilok: Mr. Speaker, Uqausivut 2.0 was tabled on the Legislative Assembly on June 14, 2018. The document outlines a five-year strategy that identifies a number of priorities and outcomes regarding language of work, language services, and language revitalization.

Mr. Speaker, one of those identified outcomes, “language revitalization”, with an emphasis on communities most affected by language loss.

Mr. Speaker, Uqausivut 2.0 also indicates that one of its strategic priorities is “develop regional language plans that align with the Government of Nunavut’s language planning process for each region, incorporating input from regional focus group consultations to ensure grassroots participation and local regional relevance.”

Can the minister provide a substantive update today on the status of the western Kitikmeot region language plan. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Languages, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank my colleague for his question.

While Uqausivut 2.0 remains the strategic direction our government, our formal implementation plan, and we are really commitment to do ensuring that we continue to address the four identified areas as I noted, that’s something that our government is committed to reviewing and bring forward.

In that work, the Inuinnaqtun is identified as one key area and I look forward to updating the member on specific key ones as those strategies progress. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Oral Question 1099 – 6(2): Natsilingmeot Dialect Revitalization

Mr. Quqqiaq (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, my questions are for the new Minister of Languages, and they concern the revitalization of the Natsilingmeot dialect. I’ll speak in English.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, as you are well aware, the Natsilingmeot dialect is spoken in the eastern part of the Kitikmeot region in the communities of Gjoa Haven, Taloyoak, and Kugaaruk. Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents in both Taloyoak and Kugaaruk continue to voice their concerns regarding the use of Natsilingmeot dialect. One of those constituents is respected elder David Nanuq from Taloyoak, who recently advocated for Inuktitut language preservation during a recent radio interview.

Mr. Nanook also raised the issue of English being spoken more than Natsilingmiotitut in our communities, especially amongst our youth.

Mr. Speaker, David and his wife Rhoda Nanook often travel through the Kitikmeot region to teach Inuktitut and cultural skills. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize them both for their very important work.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister clarify how his department works in collaboration with the Department of Education to promote the use of Natsilingmeot dialect in Kitikmeot schools. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of languages, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my colleague's strong advocacy around Natsilingmeot and his advocacy to see the language become stronger. I had the privilege of visiting both his communities and I know how strong Natsilingmeot dialect.

To the member's question, we provide the necessary resources to the Department of Education as they are working on their curriculum. It is not specific to a dialect but it is specific to Inuktitut, which is Inuinnaqtun and Inuktitut. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker on behalf of all my constituents, I will continue to be a strong advocate for the promotion, preservation and revitalization of the Natsilingmeot dialect.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe if our knowledge of our language is strong, our connection to our culture will continue to stay strong for many generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, the department's Uqausivut 2.0 strategy is a five-year implementation plan that outlines four primary outcomes. One of those identified outcomes is language revitalization, with an emphasis on communities most affected by language loss.

Mr. Speaker, Uqausivut 2.0 also indicates that one of its strategic priorities is to "develop regional language plans that align with the Government of Nunavut's language promise for each region, incorporating input from regional focus group consultations to ensure grassroots participation and local regional relevance."

Mr. Speaker, can the minister provide a substantive update today on the status of the Netsilik regional language plan. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Languages, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I want to thank my colleague for that question. I don't have that level of detail specifically to the Netsilik dialect, so I can commit to getting back to the member to ensure that I provide them with a proper response to the level that he's seeking. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Inuktitut language incentive policy indicates that the *Inuit Language Protection Act* ensures that the Government of Nunavut identifies and implements measures to increase the use of the Inuktitut language as a working language of Nunavut and ensures that services are provided in the Inuktitut language.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Nunavut's Inuktitut language incentive policy formally recognizes five distinct dialects of the Inuit language, including Natsilingmeot.

Mr. Speaker, I have raised this issue many times in the House. I would like to take this opportunity to ask the new Minister of Languages for his position on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, can the minister commit to issuing a callout for a Natsilingmeot-speaking translator with hopes that the Government of Nunavut's public service announcements can be available in the Natsilingmeot dialect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Languages, Mr. Pauloosie Akeegok.

Hon. P.J. Akeegok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again I want to thank my colleague for his question.

At this point in time the department cannot commit specifically to hiring someone with a specific dialect. Mr. Speaker, I do note that I really encourage Nunavummiut to continue to go to the Nunavut Arctic College. There's a program there in terms of the interpreter-translator program, which I know I've had many conversations with the member to encourage that.

There are different grants and contributions available for providing Natsilingmeot specifically to the community, in particular, to Taloyoak or Kugaaruk, I am aware there have been submissions that are being reviewed in terms of the ability for the community or municipality to provide translation services specifically in Netsilik, to the community. And as such, currently we are exploring different ways to bring interpreter-translators through utilizing the different policies that we have, specifically the Nunavut-wide work.

I'm working very closely with the Department of Human Resources to see if we could not look at filling the 12 vacant positions right now in the division of what we could do to potentially bring employment opportunities right into the community. So I'm exploring all the opportunities right now. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Uqqummiut, Ms. Killiktee.

Oral Question 1100 – 6(2): Retail Sector

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time my question concerns communities that have a single store and this is for the Minister of Economic Development and Transportation.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Iqaluit-Sinaa asked important question to the minister during our recent Fall Sitting about the competition of the airline industry. I will focus today on competition of retail industry.

Mr. Speaker, as a general rule, monopolies result in higher prices for consumers, and competition lowers prices for consumers. My question for the minister is this: Does the Government of Nunavut support more competition or less competition? (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the retailer sector, I would encourage more, more competition in the communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think it will be great to represent both communities, and we have community radios for your reminder. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(interpretation ends) As the member for Uqqummiut, I represent both Qikiqtarjuaq and Clyde River. The residents of Qikiqtarjuaq benefit from having choice of two major retailers in town. However, the residents of Clyde River only have one option. Mr. Speaker, I have seen with my own eyes that the prices for many goods are generally lower in the community that has more than one retail option. The elected leadership and the residents of Clyde River would very much like to see Arctic Co-operatives under a new, Arctic Co-operatives open a new store in the community, which would provide competition to the existing retailer.

The Department of Economic Development and Transportation has a number of programs to provide grants and contributions to businesses, so by saying that, can the minister indicate if his department would be open to providing support to allow a new retail operation to open in the community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Akeegok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the retail industry is a private industry and I would encourage anybody that wants to venture into a private business into any community, if Clyde River would like to see another retailer, such as Arctic Co-Ops Limited, Arctic Co-Ops Limited is a locally driven organization where people gather and make decisions in terms of how to make the co-op. The Arctic Co-Ops Limited has a good program, from my knowledge, in how to become a co-op. I would encourage residents from Clyde River, if they want to get into the business of the co-op, is to contact the Arctic Co-Ops Limited in terms of how to set up a store in the local communities. They have done that throughout the north and they are very well established throughout. And it is something that it has to come from the community itself, when it comes to the co-op through setting up the co-op. For any other businesses that are major retailers, they make a business decision whether to open a store in which communities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Encouraging is one thing, but I would like to see support here. We are very much different in each community. And often what becomes obstacle is a comfort zone some communities have.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, the minister's department recently made a submission to the federal Competition Bureau, concerning competition to the airline sector. Can the minister indicate if his department is considering asking the bureau to undertake a review of competition in the retail sector in Nunavut and in any other northern territories.

(interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Akeegok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the retail store is not as regulated as the airlines, so for competition bureaus and that, it's up to the retailers to do it.

It's something that we really should promote. I promote that, in terms of increasing more businesses to the communities, whether it's on the retailers or the tourism. I will continue to promote that, and as such we provide various fundings, as you may know, including to the hamlet, which is our economic development officers. And those are very good resources that how can you attract retailers into our communities. Those are one of the good sources of resource that we try and utilize, with the support of our regional offices and our headquarters in terms of to make a community attractive into having a retail business go into the community.

I will commit to my member to make more, (interpretation) perhaps to restate, to have these announced on local radios and have the community visits.

I would like to voice these along with my colleague how retailers can be attracted to the communities, and there are various ways we may be able to attract them. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Oral Question 1101 – 6(2): Granular Management

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

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, my questions are to the Minister of Community and Government Services. As the minister will recall, I have asked many questions during the current Legislative Assembly regarding the issue of granular management in the community of Chesterfield Inlet. It is my understanding that the Municipality of Chesterfield Inlet has submitted at least four proposals to the minister's department on its granular crushing equipment program.

Mr. Speaker, the municipality has made it clear that many important infrastructure projects in the community are at risk, unless it is successful in obtaining funding to acquire a large jaw rock crusher to replace the municipality's small and ageing cone crusher model.

Can the minister clearly explain why the municipality's proposals have not yet been approved. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Joanasié: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for continuing to press around one of the communities that he represents around granular needs. We know that many communities are preparing for either housing or construction projects, and with that we did introduce the granular program to support this.

We have a policy in place that has criteria that we look at. There are many communities with varying needs. However, I can say that my department, we did broaden the scope of the granular crushing equipment program policy to allow for purchase of granular material as an option, instead of purchasing granular equipment. This was in consultation with municipalities, is what we heard, that some communities may not need equipment, or they would rather purchase granular from a private entity. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Sammurtok.

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

(interpretation ends) I don't know how the community of Chesterfield Inlet would be able to pursue what your department is proposing, because it's all rock and hilly, but anyway.

Mr. Speaker, there's a number of potential infrastructure projects that would greatly benefit the community and the people of Chesterfield Inlet. These include runway extension to the completion of the recent construction of the new airport terminal building; new housing under the Nunavut 3000 program; a new power plant to replace the community's ageing facility; and new marine infrastructure to support harvesting opportunities in the proposed marine protected area. Mr. Speaker, none of these projects can succeed without an adequate supply of gravel.

Can the minister describe what other assistance his department can provide to the Municipality of Chesterfield Inlet to ensure that it has an adequate, secure, and long-term supply of gravel. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I encourage my colleague's hamlet, I believe they have submitted proposals before, but to continue submitting their applications for this.

This past October my department, they carried out a callout for 2025-2026 program proposals, and to date they had received a total of five applications and three was to acquire granular material and two for the procurement of equipment.

Of course these undergo a review with scoring and ranking of the applications, again based on criteria. And again I encourage the Chesterfield hamlet to work with community government officials around their past applications and hopefully that they will have an eventual successful application into the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Sammurtok.

Mr. Sammurtok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I recognize the current government reorganization process will impact a number of departments, but I do not want to see this issue fall through the cracks. Going forward can the minister confirm which department will be responsible for the administration of the granular crushing equipment program, and can he confirm the application currently under review by the present department will not be delayed due to the transfer of responsibilities. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. David Joanasié: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for bringing that question up, as we do want to ensure Nunavummiut and my colleagues are well aware around the changes that are upcoming.

As of April 1, the many programs and block funding or proposal-based applications that have gone through Community and Government Services will largely be handled through the new Department of Community Services but I will also state that my officials have worked tirelessly to ensure there will be a seamless transition around funding contributions, whether it's capital or O&M, sorry, operations and maintenance, to ensure that services that are made provided by our municipalities continue on a go-forward basis. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Item 5: Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Speaker: Before I go to the next name, I would like to recognize Paul Irgaut, NTI vice president, and Mr. Shewchuk (ph) to the House.

>Applause

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

Oral Question 1102 – 6(2): PY Discrepancies

Mr. Savikataaq (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good day to the people of Arviat (interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, before I go on to my questions, I would like to wish my son Joe Jr. Savikataaq in Arviat a very big happy birthday today. Enjoy your special day.

>Applause

Thank you. And also my wife's sister in Rankin Inlet, Martha Hickers. Happy birthday to Martha Hickers too.

>Applause

Mr. Speaker, I would like to question the Minister of Finance on some topics on his budget address. Mr. Speaker, on page 4 of his budget address, about halfway down the page there, "supporting elders to age in dignity":

"Mr. Speaker, the only exception to next year's staff freeze is for the new elders secretariat in the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs."

And down in the paragraph it states:

“In 2025-2026 EIA will receive 1 million and four new staff to complement two existing positions that will implement our elders and senior strategies announced last year.”

Mr. Speaker, there appears to be a staff freeze, according to the Budget Address.

But Mr. Speaker, on the 2025-2026 main estimates on page A-III-1, the total number of PYs in 2024-2025 was 5506.2 – I’m not sure why there is a .2 but there is a .2 – and for 2025-2026 total PYs is 5527.2, which in my math is an increase of 21 PYs.

Can we just get an explanation why there’s on the Budget Address it says there’s only four new PYs why in the main estimate there’s 21 new PYs. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With such a detailed question on that, I’ll have to check the records and my work to see why there’s a discrepancy there in that amount. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like the minister to report back to the House before the end of sitting, preferably within this week, why there’s a discrepancy only four PYs and the business plan is stating there are 21 new PYs. We as the members, we vote on a budget, and we want accurate, up-to-date information as best as can be, to make an informed decision.

Mr. Speaker, on the same page, page 4 of the Budget Address, it says:

“In 2025-2026 EIA will receive 1 million and four new staff to complement two existing positions that will implement our elders and seniors strategy this year.”

Mr. Speaker, also on the business plan on the main estimates 2025-2026, page B-1, the elders secretariat has four PYs for 2025, and in my math, four new staff plus two existing positions adds up to six. I need an explanation from the Minister of Finance, why there’s discrepancy again between the main estimates and the budget address. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I didn’t have the privilege of jumping between my budget address and the main estimates. I will have to take a

closer look at the differences that my colleague is pointing out. It could be that there's vote four and vote five funds involved. It could be that we're talking about different votes, different pockets of money in that. I'll ensure to check into the details of those particulars and gladly get back to my colleague definitely before this session is over, and hopefully and before we discuss them in detail in the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Mr. Savikataaq.

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the explanation on the two discrepancies that I brought up so far between the Budget Address and 2025-2026 main estimates.

On the same page, on page 4 on the very top, it says on the Budget Address:

“We direct departments to meet staffing needs through vacancy management instead of creating new positions. Today's budget increase of 33.5 million accounts for the significant salary increase to our public service announcements last May.”

I would like clarification if that \$33-and-a-half million is just because of the nine and 11 percent increase that public service got, or is it anticipating another large increase that the public service will get after negotiations are complete. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Finance Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleague for the question. I believe it's from what they got. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Oral Question 1103 – 6(2): Teaching Staff at Naujaat School

Mr. Malliki: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct my questions to Minister of Education.

Mr. Speaker, recent story in the media and ongoing rumours have raised concerns about recent resignations by the large number of teachers from Naujaat Tuugaalik high school. It seems that almost half of the teaching staff have left their post. I thought the minister might have taken the opportunity to address the situation.

Can the minister provide an update on recent outbreak of teachers resigning at Naujaat Tuugaalik high school. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you to the member for the question. The Tuugaalik high school has currently ten of 21 teaching positions filled, and there are enough teachers to maintain full-day programming.

The teachers, the staff that are left in December that the member is talking about, we had four NTA staff and I would like to say that three of four of those staff have now returned back to work. We had four DEA staff and two NEU staff that left the school in December, and we're actively working with Tuugaalik high school and we've recently hired a new superintendent for the region who is on force and actively dealing with the issue. We're communicating with the staff and the community daily and are committed to providing support to the students, staff, and the district education authority to ensure that ongoing workplace issues are addressed and that school programming continues. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, and I have seen myself since last October the students in junior high school, they go to school in the morning and then the high school students will go in the afternoon because of the lack of teachers.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, I do recognize that funding teachers positions for schools across Nunavut is ongoing challenge. Every year it seems there are many vacancies that needs to be filled. I appreciate the department's work to find substitute teachers to fill the gap. However, in this case, teachers were in teaching positions but suddenly decide to leave, in the middle of the school year.

It is my understanding that due to the lack of teaching staff, junior high school students have been attending school in the morning and senior high school in the afternoon. While it is good that the students can all attend schools, they are only getting half of the education program that they should be getting. Can the minister explain what specifics her department is taking to ensure that the students in Naujaat will not fall behind the studies. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for raising that. It's news to me about the students going half time in the morning and half time in the afternoon, so I'll be sure to definitely look into that with the department as we speak. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, there seems to be so much gap in front-line and the Minister's staff. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that there is difficult situations by the silence from the department has not helped. Rumours and gossip do not provide solutions. MLAs are worried if the teachers continue to resign, the student school will be shut down and the children the not have the opportunity to get their education. The community, the hamlet council, even Nunavut Teachers Association do not seem to have the full picture.

Will the minister commit to address these situation immediately and have clear and open discussions with the community about what has gone wrong and what is being done to fix the issue. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Education, Ms. Gross.

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the questioning regarding Tuugaalik high school. I can be assured, Mr. Speaker, that the school is back to full day and we thank the district education authority for their help to get us back there. I believe on maybe January 6 there was the return of classes, and the principal resigned at that time. And there was an acting principal that was established back on, and since then we have had the school return back to full day. We have also kept the Nunavut Teachers Association informed and we have daily calls and meetings between the school and the department. So in terms of talking to the community, we have the Kivalliq school operations executive director and superintendent who are set to visit Naujaat March 3 to 7 to support the staff and the acting principal and to ensure that the school programming is operating with limited interruption.

And in terms of the talking to the school and the students and the teachers, we can ensure that that messaging comes forward from the district education authority and the Department of Education. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Oral Questions. Member for Aggu, Ms. Quassa.

Oral Question 1104 – 6(2): Departmental Positions

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct reply question to the Minister of Environment to the new Minister of Environment.

(interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on an issue that I raised with the minister's predecessor during last year's Spring and Fall Sittings of the Legislative Assembly. As the minister is aware, the government's most recent quarterly employment report indicates that the Department of Environment has a total of 14 positions located in

my community of Igloolik. Only four of those positions are filled and ten are vacant. This is a vacancy rate of over 70 percent.

Can the minister provide an update today on which positions are currently filled appeared which positions are currently vacant. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Hon. Minister of Environment, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for your questions, for asking those questions again. Mr. Speaker, the department I have figures in front of me on the vacant positions. December 31 it was 54 positions, and I can say some positions have been vacant for very, very long time so we'll have to decide on what to do with them. And at this time there are 38 positions. Since December 31 there were 38 positions that were going to be filled, according to my understanding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: First supplementary, Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, those vacant positions have been empty for a long time.

(interpretation ends) When I raised this issue during last year's Spring and Fall Sittings I suggested that government should consider transferring some of these long-standing vacant positions to another community, where there would be a greater chance of them being filled by qualified applicants. In return, new positions would be transferred to Igloolik and efforts would be made to ensure that they were the types of positions that could be reasonably filled with local applicants. For example, the Inuit Language Authority's positions could be a natural fit in the community.

When I raised this issue last year, the minister's predecessor indicated that he was willing to discuss this idea with the Minister of Culture and Heritage. Can the minister update me today on the results of these discussions. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Environment, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation ends) Mr. Speaker with the vacancy rates in different departments, we haven't undergone an exercise where for example trading person from one community to another, that I would believe would be better managed through the Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, but we did hear from an earlier exchange between our colleague from the member for Kugluktuk around trying to fill positions remotely who are using the Nunavut-wide work. So I think those opportunities are still yet to be explored, and we'll continue to see what we can do within our staffing for Environment in Igloolik and hopefully have these long-awaited vacancy rates filled once and for all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Second and final supplementary, Ms. Quassa.

Ms. Quassa (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I urge the minister to look for ways to make sure that these are filled. (interpretation ends) As the minister is aware, the Department of Environment has announced that it is working to develop a new wildlife guardian training program, the stated purpose of which is to “promote and provide employment opportunities within this field for Nunavummiut.”

Can the minister clarify how many positions under this program are planned to be located in Igloolik. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Minister of Environment, Mr. Joanasie.

Hon. David Joanasie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My department is committed to improving our capacity and reducing the vacancy rate. There are improvement efforts that are ongoing, with the focus on Inuit employment, and trying to make training initiatives more available to our existing staff, but also potential new staff.

For the guardianship, I can't say how many will be slated for Igloolik. We are looking at in a way if it makes sense and there's a candidate that might fit the role and there's onboarding and mentorship and to build on eventual filling in for example like the conservation officer position, we've had success rates in other communities where a guardian became a conservation officer. So we want to continue to see those. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Members be aware time allotted for question period is now over. Mr. Simailak.

Mr. Simailak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I seek unanimous consent to extend question period. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Member is seeking unanimous consent to further go ahead with question period. Are there any nays?

A Member: Nay.

Speaker: There is a nay. Item 7, Written Questions. Item 8, Returns to Written Questions. Item 9, Replies to Opening Address. Item 10, Replies to Budget Address. Item 11, Petitions. Item 12, Responses to Petitions. Item 13, Returns of Standing and Special Committees on Bills and Other Matters. Item 14, Tabling of Documents. Sorry, Item 13, Reports of Standing and Special Committees on Bills and Other Matters.

I recognize the Chair for the Standing Committee on Legislation, Mr. Savikataaq.

Item 13: Reports of Standing and Special Committee on Bills and Other Matters

Mr. Savikataaq: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that Bill 43, An Act to Amend the Nunavut Business Credit Corporation Act has been reviewed by the Standing Committee on Legislation and that the Bill as amended and reprinted is ready for consideration in Committee of the Whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Do members agree that Bill 43 as amended and reprinted has been reported back to the House?

Some Members: Agreed.

Speaker: It is agreed. Item 14, Tabling of Documents. Thank you.

Item 14: Tabling of Documents

Tabled Document 352 – 6(2): 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Legislative Assembly

Tabled Document 353 – 6(2): Report on the Payment of Indemnities Allowances, Expenses and Benefits to the Members of the Sixth Legislative Assembly for the Period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024

Tabled Document 354 – 6(2): 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Nunavut

Tabled Document 355 – 6(2): 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Nunavut

Tabled Document 356 – 6(2): 2025-2028 Business Plan of the Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut

Tabled Document 357 – 6(2): 2025-2028 Business Plan of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth

Speaker: I have six documents to table today. The first document is the 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Legislative Assembly. The second document is the Report on the Payment of Indemnities Allowances, Expenses and Benefits to the Members of the Sixth Legislative Assembly for the Period April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024. The third document is 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Nunavut. The fourth document is 2025-2026 Business Plan of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Nunavut. The fifth document is 2025-2028 Business Plan of the Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut. And the sixth

document is 2025-2028 Business Plan of the Office of the Representative For Children and Youth.

Speaker: Item 14, Tabling of Documents. Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Tabled Document 358 – 6(2): Government of Nunavut’s Response to Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts Regarding the Report on the Review of the 2021-2022 Public Accounts of Nunavut

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m pleased to table the Government of Nunavut’s Response to Standing Committee on Oversight of Government Operations and Public Accounts Regarding the Report on the Review of the 2021-2022 Public Accounts of Nunavut tabled in the Legislative Assembly on March 5, 2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Tabled Document 359 – 6(2): Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Framework 2023-2028 Progress Update Report

Tabled Document 360 – 6(2): Minister’s 2023-2024 Report on Poverty Reduction.

Hon. Margaret Nakashuk (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker (interpretation ends) I’m pleased to table two documents today, first Ilagiitsiarniq Family Wellness Strategic Framework 2023-2028 Progress Update Report, and the Minister’s 2023-2024 Report on Poverty Reduction. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Tabling of Documents. Item 15, Notices of Motions. Item 16, Notices of Motions for First Reading of Bills. Item 17, Motions. Item 18, First Reading of Bills. I recognize Minister of Community and Government Services, Mr. Joanasie.

Item 18: First Reading of Bills

Bill 73 – Planning Act – First Reading

Hon. David Joanasie (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move seconded by the Hon. Member for Pangnirtung that Bill 73, Planning Act be now read for the first time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried and Bill 73 has been read for the first time.

Item 19, Second Reading of Bills. Hon. Minister responsible for Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission, Ms. Gross.

Item 19: Second Reading of Bills

Bill 57 – An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act – Second Reading

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I MOVE, seconded by the Hon. Member for Iqaluit-Niaqunnguu, that Bill 57, *An Act to Amend the Workers' Compensation Act* be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill amends the *Workers' Compensation Act* to replace the pension system for permanent impairment with compensation based on loss of earning capacity, provide for a one-time non-economic loss benefit for a permanent impairment, redefine disability and impairment relative to the point of maximum medical recovery, make other necessary amendments as the consequence of these changes and modernize language.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Members: Question.

Speaker: All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried and Bill 57 is referred to the Standing Committee on legislation. Second Reading of Bills. Hon. Minister of Education Ms. Gross.

Bill 66 – Early Learning and Child Care Act – Second Reading

Hon. Pamela Gross: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I MOVE, seconded by the Hon. Member from Iqaluit-Niaqunnguu, that Bill 66, *Early Learning and Child Care Act* be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill provides for the regulation of early learning and child care centres and more broadly for the regulation and administration of the early learning and child care sector of Nunavut. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Members: Question.

Speaker: The question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried and Bill 66 is referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation. Second Reading of Bills. Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Bill 67 – An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act – Second Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq that Bill 67, *An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act* be read for the second time. Mr. Speaker, this Bill extends the eligibility of the Nunavut child benefit in respect of a child for six months after the child's death. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Members: Question.

Speaker: Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried and Bill 67 is referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation. Second Reading of Bills. Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

Bill 68 – An Act to Amend the Tobacco Tax Act – Second Reading

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move seconded by the Hon. Member for Kugluktuk, that Bill 68, *An Act to Amend the Tobacco Tax Act* be read for the second time. Mr. Speaker, this Bill will increase the tax rate per cigarette and per gram of smoke and non-smoke tobacco. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Members: Question.

Speaker: Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried and Bill 68 is referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation. Second Reading of Bills. Hon. Minister of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

**Bill 69 – An Act Consequential to the Government Reorganization of 2025 –
Second Reading**

Hon. P.J. Akeeagok: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I MOVE, seconded by the Hon. Member for Cambridge Bay, that Bill 69, *An Act Consequential to the Government Reorganization of 2025* be read for the second time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Bill amends several acts of consequential organization of 2025. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Members: Question.

Speaker: The question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? The motion is carried and Bill 69 is referred to the Standing Committee on Legislation. Second Reading of Bills. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

**Bill 70 – Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2025-2026 –
Second Reading**

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I MOVE, seconded by the Hon. Member for Kugluktuk, that Bill 70, *Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2025-2026* be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill authorizes the Government of Nunavut to make operations and maintenance expenditures for the year ending March 31, 2026. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Some Members: Question.

Speaker: The question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried and Bill 70 is referred to the Committee of the Whole. Second Reading of Bills. Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

**Bill 71 – Supplementary Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act,
No. 2, 2024-2025 – Second Reading**

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I MOVE, seconded by the Hon. Member for Quttiktuq, that Bill 71, *Supplementary Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, No. 2, 2024-2025*, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill makes supplementary appropriations to defray the maintenance expenses 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.

Some Members: Question.

Speaker: Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried and Bill 71 is referred to the Committee of the Whole. Second Reading of Bills. Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Kusugak.

**Bill 72 – Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 1, 2025-2026 –
Second Reading**

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker. I move seconded by the Hon. Member for Kugluktuk, that Bill 72, *Supplementary Appropriation (Capital) Act, No. 1, 2025-2026*, be read for the second time. Mr. Speaker, this Bill makes supplementary appropriation to defray the expenditures for the Government of Nunavut for the fiscal year ending 2026. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The motion is in order to the principles of the bill. Question has been called. All those in favour? Opposed? Motion is carried and Bill 72 is referred to the Committee of the Whole. Before we go to item 20, Ms. Killiktee is requesting to go to item 5, recognition of visitors in the gallery. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker for giving me the opportunity to recognize some visitors. Thank you.

Speaker: Return to Item 5, Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery. Are there any nays? Please proceed, Ms. Killiktee.

Item 5: Recognition of Visitors in the Gallery

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to go back to item number 5. I would like to recognize and welcome Sharon Blake, who has been living in Iqaluit for a little over 13 years. We met at the First Air ticket counter when she was working there and I've known her ever since. I would like to welcome you to the House and thank you for your hospitality and welcoming me to Iqaluit. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Welcome to the Assembly. Mr. Kusugak.

Hon. Lorne Kusugak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Paul Irgaut to the Assembly. And unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, there's another Boston Bruins fan amongst us, Mr. Daniel Shewchuk, who was a colleague back in the Fourth Assembly, and we worked very hard together. I would like to welcome him to the Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

> *Applause*

Speaker: Welcome to your Assembly. Recognition of Visitors to the Gallery, Mr. Pauloosie Akeeagok.

Hon. P.J. Akeagok: Thank you very much for recognizing me. I would also like to welcome the visitors to the house and especially from Iqaluit-Niaqunngu. Mr. Irngaut I would like to thank you very much and especially Nunavut Tunngavik where there's a working relationship between the government and Nunavut Tunngavik and we hope it's an ongoing case. I would like to recognize everybody here, especially Mr. Paul Irngaut. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Back to Orders of the Day. Item 20, Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters, Bill 70, Bill 71, Bill 72, with Mr. Hickes in the chair. Before we proceed to Committee of the Whole we'll take a 20-minute break. Sergeant-at-Arms.

>>*House recessed from 15:46 to 16:11*

Item 20: Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters

Chairman: Good afternoon. I would like to call the committee meeting to order. In the Committee of the Whole we have the following matters to deal with: Bill 70, 71 and 72. What is the wish of the committee. Mr. Malliki?

Mr. Malliki: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We wish to commence with review of Bill 70, Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2025-2026 and supporting documents starting with Department of Health. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Are we in agreement we start with Bill 70?

Some Members: Agreed.

Chairman: I would like to ask Minister Main do you have my officials to appear before the committee? Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, thank you.

Speaker: Thank you. Does the committee agree to allow the minister's witnesses to appear before you?

Some Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses in. Thank you. For the record, Minister Main, please introduce officials and then proceed with your opening comments.

**Bill 70 – Appropriation (Operations and Maintenance) Act, 2025-2026 –
Consideration in Committee of the Whole**

Hon. John Main: Mr. Chair and Members, I am pleased to present to you today the 2025-26 Main Estimates for the Department of Health.

I would like to introduce my officials from Health. With me today, I have Megan Hunt, Deputy Minister; Rene Tanga, Acting Executive Director of Corporate Services; Dr. Ekua Agyemang, Acting Chief Public Health Officer; Jennifer Berry, Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations; Victoria Madsen, Assistant Deputy Minister, Inuusivut, Greg Babstock, Assistant Deputy Minister, Program and Standards; and Tracy MacDonald, Acting Chief Information Officer.

Health is proposing a Vote 1 budget of \$580.36 million for fiscal year 2025-26, which is an increase of \$60.07 million from fiscal year 2024-25. The increase requested is related to:

- GN-wide wage increases which came into effect in October 2024
- Contracted services for long-term care, paramedics and out of territory Mental Health and Addictions
- Out of territory hospital and physician services; and
- Duty travel, purchased services, and supplies.

Mr. Chair, the focus of this budget proposal is to address ongoing budgetary pressures resulting from increasing healthcare delivery obligations as well as to support the ever-growing client health care needs of Nunavummiut.

These required budget amounts include an ask of \$11.50 million to fund the Paramedic Support Services program. It continues to be a critical measure supporting our efforts to keep health centres staffed and ready, and to provide our hard-working health care professionals with support and respite.

A further \$12.80 million is being requested to support the increase of duty travel across the territory due to the casual and short-term employment of healthcare professionals and physicians to maintain service delivery levels in communities large and small.

Health is proposing an additional \$8.23 million into the compensation and benefits budget as part of the new wage increase for GN employees that started in October 2024. Health is beginning to see positive trending results in terms of nurse vacancy rates and community health centres closure days attributable to the introduction of our critical staffing measures initiative and the Bring a Friend Bring a Family Member Initiative. Nurse vacancy rates have been reduced from 53% in March 2023 to 47% in November 2024, and our casual staffing pool has increased significantly. Health centre closure days have been reduced by more than half since 2022 after the introduction of these staffing initiatives.

Long term care for Nunavut Elders remains a central priority for this government and for the Department of Health. We are proposing an addition of 6.12 million dollars in 2025-26 to support long-term care contract services for the new Rankin Inlet Long Term Care facility, Arviat and Iqaluit Elders Homes and for residents of Embassy West Senior Living in Ottawa.

A further \$13.70 million increase has been proposed for out of territory hospital and physician costs. This is in response to increased needs for treatment and clinical services as Nunavummiut travel out of territory to seek services not available in Nunavut.

The Department is also proposing an additional \$6.70 million to facilitate the continued provision of mental health and addiction treatment to high-risk clients with complex mental health issues, at out of territory specialized facilities. Nunavut continues to experience a prevalence of serious mental health disorders which have a profound impact on our families and communities. Although we are increasing in-territory mental health and addiction capacity, we do not currently have all the facilities and staff to support residents experiencing acute and complex mental health issues.

Health is requesting \$7.50 million for purchased services and supplies to support a growing suite of service delivery throughout the territory due to the continued population growth, the increase of cost of telecommunication, diagnostic testing and freight.

The implementation and ongoing support of an online registration and licensing system for health care practitioners in Nunavut is a high departmental priority, requiring an additional \$100,000 in 2025-26 to supplement the \$300,000 obtained within the prior 2024-25 budget cycle.

I want to take this opportunity to assure members that the Department is working with Indigenous Services Canada to have in place a new contribution agreement for the 2025-2026 fiscal year and beyond for the Non-Insured Health Benefits program. Our continued position is that the Government of Nunavut should never subsidize deficits from this federal program administered by Health on behalf of Indigenous Services Canada. Given our previous difficulties in coming to a mutually acceptable contribution agreement, Health is undertaking detailed work to map out our Non-Insured Health Benefit programming and our relationships with Indigenous Services Canada. This work is to support handing back the parts of the program to our Federal partners should funding gaps persist in critical areas like medical travel. I will share the outcome of our current negotiations with Members at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Chair, the environment in which Health operates to deliver healthcare services to Nunavummiut is characterized by steady population growth, inflation, growth and demand for healthcare services, staffing shortage and increased medical travel. Because of this, it is necessary to ensure the budgeting process results in appropriate resources for Nunavut's expanding healthcare delivery needs. In line with direction provided by

Members, Health continues to refine the budgeting process to bring forward business cases that accurately reflect budgetary needs to fulfill its mandate.

Members will notice some changes this year to how Health's components of the main estimates and business plan are presented. For years, Health's accounting structure has been misaligned with its organizational structure. This made it more difficult to report on spending and ensure accountability. We are pleased that the shift to the Government of Nunavut's new financial management system (Oracle Fusion Cloud) allowed an opportunity to reorganize and refresh our chart of accounts and accounting structure within the Health Department. This new structure is now set up to better reflect our operations and was implemented with support from the Department of Finance. In conclusion, the continuing priority for the Department of Health in the coming year and beyond is to promote and foster the well-being of all Nunavummiut and help to support healthy and vibrant communities.

This concludes my opening comments, and I am pleased to answer any questions from the Committee. *Matna.*

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

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Wellness have reviewed the 2025-2026 main estimates and business plan of the Department of Health.

The Department of Health is requesting just over \$580 million for 2025-2026, an 8% increase of approximately \$60 million more than the main estimates requested for 2024-2025. The Standing Committee notes that Supplementary Appropriation requests to meet additional budget needs in such areas as out-of-territory care and contract services have exceeded \$125 million since the end of the Covid pandemic.

The Standing Committee recognizes that ensuring the ongoing delivery of health care services across the territory is a major challenge, given the critical staffing issues faced by the department.

During the Minister's appearance before the committee to discuss the Department of Health's draft 2025-2026 budget, members were happy to receive updates on various initiatives being implemented to recruit nursing staff to work in our communities, including job-share initiatives, return of service and loan forgiveness options for newly graduated health professionals and bonus and allowances packages for full-time indeterminate employees. The committee fully supports the minister and his officials in their ongoing efforts in this area. In the interim, members recognize the ongoing need for

paramedic and agency nursing contracts to keep health centres open and operational when staffing levels are low.

The Standing Committee notes that rising costs for physician services and hospital services both within and outside of the territory again account for proposed increases in the upcoming budget.

Chair, Members of the Standing Committee fully support the minister in his ongoing negotiations with the federal government to ensure that any upcoming contribution agreements for the Non-Insured Health Benefits program continue to reflect the federal government's fiduciary duty in covering health care costs relating to medical travel, dental benefits, vision care and medications for Nunavut Inuit. Members look forward to the Minister's update on the result of Health's most recent negotiations respecting this program.

While the Standing Committee has been given to understand that the implementation of the federal Inuit Child First Initiative has often resulted in some additional costs and administrative work for the Department of Health, members have been receiving a growing number of communications from communities and constituents who are concerned that the loss of this federal funding program will have a negative impact on the health of Inuit children, youth, and their families.

Chair, members recognize that ensuring a safe and secure environment for staff and clients at community and regional health facilities is essential. The Standing Committee has noted that the need for enhanced security services at health facilities across the territory has grown significantly over the past few years, with the current security contract valued at several million dollars. Members encourage the minister and his officials to seek opportunities for local residents to be trained and mentored to provide security services in their home communities. Members have suggested that the introduction of related legislation could help to bolster this growing sector of the economy.

Chair, the new 24-bed Long-Term Care Facility in Rankin Inlet will soon welcome its first clients thereby increasing the number of long-term care beds in the territory.

The committee notes that the department will need to ensure that individuals and their families are provided with a clear and straight-forward explanation of the process by which clients are selected for placement in specific long-term care facilities.

The committee welcomed the Minister's recent announcement that Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated has committed to investing \$15 million of its Indigenous Community Infrastructure Fund to support the renewal of Elders' Care facilities across the territory, beginning with renovations to the Arviat Elders' Home. Members look forward to updates on any plans to renovate and expand the facilities in Gjoa Haven and Igloodik.

While the Standing Committee appreciates that the newly-formed Tagjaq Corporation, a collaboration of Sakku Investments and Embassy West Senior Living, will operate Rankin Inlet's new Long Term Care facility, Members have raised questions concerning the Inuit labour content of the contract, which is worth approximately \$15 million per year over the next ten years. It is not clear how many of the Inuit who have been trained through Nunavut Arctic College's Personal Support Worker program will be employed at the facility once it is open. Members encourage Nunavummiut to take advantage of opportunities to receive training and certification in the health care field.

For those elders and residents who require additional support while remaining in their home communities, the Standing Committee looks forward to updates from the Minister on how Health will be working to enhance and expand such community-based health services as the home care program.

Chair, last year the Assembly approved additional funding in 2024-2025 for the department's Health Information Unit to improve the management and analysis of health data and information. Members were somewhat disappointed that so few updated reports on such topics as chronic diseases, communicable disease, maternal child health or the social determinants of the health of Nunavummiut have been published. An enhanced focus in key health issues can go a long way in supporting health promotion and protection initiatives across the territory.

The development of health privacy legislation has been an ongoing priority in recent years and members look forward to reviewing the results of the 2024 community consultations on this issue. Members recognize that there is a fine balance between providing information to the public while respecting the confidentiality of highly personal information.

Chair, mental health care, addictions treatment and related services continue to be in high demand across the territory. Members recognize that Health's proposed budget for 2025-2026 includes funds for an increase in mental health services provided out of territory however, there is an ongoing and critical need to expand mental health services at the community level. Members look forward to updates on Nunavut-based initiatives to implement Nunavut's new Mental Health Act especially with respect to the training and recruitment of more Inuit to work in the mental health and addictions fields.

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

Thank you, Chair.

Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Brewster. With regards to general comments I understand Mr. Lightstone has some general comments. Please proceed.

Mr. Lightstone: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon Minister, and officials. I would just like to go back four years to the opening comments I made at the Minister of Health's appearance during the Minister of Health's appearance before the last Assembly to review the department's budget. I would like to reiterate some of the issues that are raised then and how they have incorporated into today's issues.

Every year the Standing Committee has repeatedly raised concerns over the high number of transient agency and casual staff, while vacancy rates for indeterminate employee positions remain high. At that time I said I believe that that is somewhat of an understatement, as I have a very grave concern over the high vacancy rates and turnover with the Department of Health and more specifically the impact it has on our health care system.

At that time in 2021 the Department of Health's capacity or number of filled positions remain stagnant about 55 percent, and as of the last Inuit employment stats report, that figure remains constant.

In addition to that, executive positions, those identified in the accounting structure chart, at that time in 2021, those positions had seen complete turnover throughout the life of the previous Assembly. However, I do recognize that over the last four years there has been some stabilization amongst the executive team in the Department of Health. Again, four years ago throughout the life of that Assembly there was a complete turnover between DMs and ADMs and other senior management positions in the Department of Health, but today I am proud to say that it's quite obvious that there have been some major changes in the department, given the fact that four years later we have regular recurring faces here in the Assembly. So I would like to give kudos to Deputy Minister Hunt for your efforts in making that significant improvement.

Returning to my 2021 comments with regards to the capacity levels of the Department of Health, the reliance on casuals. Four years ago the casuals in the department had hovered around 400 individuals, and that number still remains constant to this day. And four years ago the department had 500 relief staff to fill those vacant positions and that number is still stagnant today.

With that being said, I also do recognize that the nurse retention rate has improved as well as the reduction in health centre closure days. So again I would like to give recognition where recognition is due to the MINISTER and all of the officials at the Department of Health for the changes that have occurred over the last number of years.

Returning to the issue of casuals and agency and transient health care professionals, of course they are necessary to fill the gaps in our health care system. I do again recognize that there is a need, but I also recognize that there is a negative implication of having

transient employees working alongside full-time indeterminant employees, not to mention the turnover of transient employees and the impact that has on health care.

But in addition to the reliance on casuals and transients, I don't want to just identify the issue; I also want to further identify recommendations to try and address the issue, and that our reliance on transient health care professionals is due to two issues, the lack of Inuit trained in the health care proceedings as well as necessary staff housing to bring up full-time indeterminant employees to fill those vacancies across the Department of Health.

With regards to the lack of qualified Inuit and Nunavummiut to fill vacancies in the Department of Health, I strongly encourage the Minister to expand the accessibility of the health career camps and other youth programming to incentivize more youth and allow them to experience firsthand what it's like working in the health care field before they complete high school.

I recognize that the Department of Health works closely with Nunavut Arctic College for the pre-health and nursing program, and I really wish that there would be some more uptake in that amongst our youth, and hopefully we'll see significantly more nursing grads being produced here, home-grown nurses in Nunavut.

But beyond the nursing program, I highly encourage the Department of Health to collaborate more with Arctic College, especially for one-off training programs such as personal care workers, but more, expand on that to include other areas such as clinic technicians or radiologists to provide more than just nursing as programs in post-secondary programs in Nunavut.

But thirdly, recognizing that the Arctic College cannot provide all the specialized tools and spaces necessary for more specialized programs, I highly encourage the Department of Health to work with youth and other adult Nunavummiut to put together cohorts in our adjacent cities such as Ottawa and Winnipeg and Yellowknife and Edmonton to have a group of Inuit and Nunavummiut studying together, living together, helping each other to get through programs. I cannot emphasize that last one enough. It is a very powerful tool to have an entire cohort working throughout the duration of a program.

And just to touch on the last topic, with the critical staff housing situation, you you must also be met with critical solutions. I have mentioned this to the Minister of Health before in Question Period. Nunavut Housing Corporation is doing their best to build staff housing, but is inadequate to fill the needs, especially for the Department of Health. So I strongly, strongly encourage the Department of Health and the Minister of Health to put forward a critical staff housing solution and put a specific capital request in for staff housing to fill those vacant positions in all of our communities in Nunavut, and especially in the communities with the highest vacancies and highest dependencies on transient employees.

With that being said, I just wanted to add that in as additional opening comments and I hope that the minister will take those into consideration. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Anyone else with general comments to the opening comments? Seeing none, please go to page H4. Directorate amount being total operations and maintenance appropriated, \$167,791,000. Any questions? Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, the minister and your officials, welcome. I would like to ask (interpretation ends). Construction on Rankin Inlet's long-term care facility was recently completed. What specific activities and initiatives will the Department of Health be undertaking in 2025-2026 to improve the enhanced community-based services for elders who may not wish to move away from their home into long-term care facility? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I'll just touch on very briefly a number of ongoing initiatives issues. There's an ongoing review of the home care program. We know that there's been a lot of interest in that and we're looking for opportunities to expand, whether we can expand the hours of operations or the types of services provided. There's a review of recreational programming within existing facilities happening with Culture and Heritage. There's building condition assessments that are going to be proceeding on the Igloodik and Gjoa Haven continuing care centres. There's ongoing design work for the Cambridge Bay facility; that's on the capital side. There's a number of different fronts that we're working on to try and strengthen in-territory services. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It seems like my question has not been answered in regards to the elders. What do you do with elders who want to stay at home and not want to move to elders facility? Thank you.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I think the reason I mentioned the home care program review is that we know that's one of the major tools that allows elders to remain in their homes for as long as possible. We know the more support that's available through home care, then it typically allows elders to stay in their homes longer and that's why we're so interested in strengthening that program.

We also have secured federal monies to work towards a familial pilot of a family home-care program, which would see family members being compensated for care for elders.

That is something where we're working towards a pilot and then after the pilot we would look at whether that could be rolled out throughout the territory. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Just before I go back to Mr. Malliki, any other committee members that have questions under this, please put your name on my list. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's very interesting to hear what the Minister had stated that the elders remain at home and have home care more. In my constituency there are elders and we would like to see that go ahead, because there's no employment opportunities and I know that I'm quite passionate about having employ people or Inuit in our community. So I urge the minister to move on. I'll move on.

(interpretation ends) Since 1999 the Department of Health consistently overspends its budget, mostly due to the cost overruns in medical travel. In 2022 negotiation with the federal government increased a Non-Insured Health Benefit amount to allocate for medical travel cost. When will the next round of Non-Insured Health Benefit negotiation with the federal government get underway. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Well, depending how you look at it, you could say the negotiations are underway. They're not proceeding as we would like, and the end of this fiscal year is just around the corner and we are without a contribution agreement for the upcoming fiscal year. So it's a little bit like déjà vu.

I know there's a number of previous ministers who have encountered similar difficulties working with Indigenous Services Canada. We've made our position quite clear to them, and we continue to hope they will respond with an agreement or proposal that would meet our expectations. We can't be subsidizing federal programs like Non-Insured Health Benefits and I really appreciate the member's support or the Standing Committee of Social Wellness's support in terms of having this in the opening comments. We look forward to getting a fair deal with our partners for this program. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Also thank you, Minister. I urge the minister to make sure that we do get funding or larger funding from the federal government. So I'm urging the minister.

(interpretation ends) The federal government, December 13, 2024 letter to Nunavut Minister of Finance stated that "among the funding for Canada health transfer will be

increased by \$1 million as a result of improvement to the collection and the management of health data."

What specific issues respecting health data have undergone improvement? And are any further improvements necessary? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main: *Matna, Iksivautaq.* In terms of improvements, in terms of health data, that's our health information unit which is leading a lot of the work and we really appreciate their efforts. I'll just touch on a number of things that are ongoing.

There's work towards a public health information system, so we've sketched out the needs and requirements for such a system. Work continues on health-specific privacy legislation. We've put in place an audit tool as part of our Meditech health information system. So that's to track privacy and to prevent snooping into personal health information. There's also privacy training that's been ongoing.

I hope this is along the lines of the question: There's also been a huge expansion in virtual care, and we're also exploring integration of artificial intelligence tools into our work flows. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a question coming from the minister's response. Artificial intelligence, how is it going to be used. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We are exploring the integration of an artificial intelligence scribe tool with Meditech. This would be an AI-powered clinical documentation tool. They use speech recognition to generate summaries. It would boost productivity for health professionals like doctors, reduce the burden of note-taking, and enhance accuracy and completeness of medical records. I don't know if you've ever tried to read a doctor's note, but it can be near impossible.

But on a serious note, you know, we're not in this on our own. We participated in a working group with Canada Health Infoway to develop requirements for these type of tools. So we are getting some federal or national guidance on this. And of course we understand the importance of privacy, as do the folks who are working with Infoway and

that will be top of mind. There won't be any compromises to health privacy as part of this work. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Minister, for your response for explaining that to me. Dedicated third-party funding for specific health issues is critical to the department's ability to provide quality health care across the north. Which federal initiative will be accessed to provide additional funding to address specific health issues in Nunavut in 2025-2026? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) So we really appreciate third party funding when we can secure it. Federal funds are very important to the department. You know, there's several large programs, like the Nunavut Wellness Agreement, Canada Health Transfer, Territorial Health Investment Fund, as well as Hospital Physician Services Agreement, and of course Non-Insured Health Benefits.

And so, you know, when we look at these third party funds, our approach is always to push for predictable streams of funding so that we can plan and use it most effectively for Nunavummiut.

When we have funding that's made available to us and they say here's two years of funding, and the next two years you're going to have to come back, it increases the workload.

We really do appreciate the amazing funding support we do receive from federal agencies as well as, you know, partners like Nunavut Tunngavik. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for explaining that to me, Minister. (interpretation ends) On page H1 of the main estimates the department will have two fewer PYs in 2025-2026 compared to 2024-2025. The department is still at 55 capacity. How is the department working to address the long-term vacancy. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) We appreciate the comments from Member Lightstone as well as Member Malliki for asking these questions.

There's a number of different fronts we're working to address vacancies. One is making sure that we are competitive with other jurisdictions nationally, in terms of health professionals. We want to reduce the reliance on agency as well as contract staff, because we know that those come at a premium.

So we are offering things like job shares where we've strengthened our casual pool for nurses. We've brought in contract resources like paramedics to try and better address burnout and try and make sure that our staff are feeling like we care about them, which we do; very, very deeply. It's multifaceted.

We have a good working relationship with Nunavut Employees Union, of course. Other things like providing security services at the Health Centre, that is a huge retention tool to us, because our staff know that when they come to work, they're in a safe environment. And if there's a threat, if there's a disturbance, they know that they're not on their own, particularly when you look at staff working after hours, maybe working alone.

So there's a number of different things we are working on in terms of the vacancy rate.

Other things include making sure our Inuit employee plan is strong and being implemented as well as making sure we stay on top of things like direct appointments for Inuit. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Minister. We want to make sure that the people of Nunavut are properly taken care of, and to be provided adequate services. And I'm thankful for that. (interpretation ends) The minister's 2023-2024 Annual Report on Operation of Nunavut's Medical Care Plan tabled on November 5, 2024 states that the medical travel and hospital service outside of the territory accounted for 42 percent of the department's total expenditures in 2023-2024.

What initiative are underway to reduce the number of Nunavut residents travelling out of territory for medical travel? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In terms of the out-of-territory hospital physicians line item, those charges and the rate of increase of those charges is a concern to us.

You know, we had a kind of a dip during the COVID years, we'll call them. In 2024-2025 the increase of the per diem at public hospitals, these are the hospitals that receive Nunavut patients increased 5.9 percent. That's beyond the average, which is usually three to five percent.

And so I think that just shows that, you know, our southern receiving jurisdictions are also being hit hard by inflation, and they are trying to cover their costs.

I think in terms of medical travel and the flows for Nunavummiut, investments we could make in terms of prevention, things like quit smoking campaigns, those I would hope to reduce reliance on medical travel, reduce cancer.

Also our increased use of virtual care has really been an exciting front for the department, in terms of offering very specialized care right across Nunavut. We can provide virtual care in every community in Nunavut. And it's something that's directly tied to the need for medical travel. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki.

Mr. Malliki (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you. This will be my last question.

(interpretation ends) On November 5, 2024 the minister tabled a review of his department's COVID-19 pandemic response. The following recommendations from the review. What specific steps have been taken to ensure that Nunavut is fully prepared for another pandemic or major outbreak? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main: *Matna, Iksivautaq.* So under the leadership of Dr. Agyemang, we have been working through processes like the one that the member mentioned to learn lessons from the COVID pandemic, and also being prepared for the next pandemic.

My understanding is that it's not a question of if but when we'll be hit with another pandemic.

For example, the Chief Public Health Officer has been engaged with national working groups, I believe they're called, in terms of highly pathogenic avian influenza, and making sure that work is being done on things like vaccine procurement, identifying

plans or preparing plans should that and avian influenza become a higher threat. Right now the threat level is low, but there's always a possibility that that threat level will increase. And if so, we will need to be ready to respond appropriately. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Malliki, *taima*. Next name I have on my list, Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to go back to a question that was brought up by Mr. Malliki earlier regarding the elder's facility, and it also includes people being moved away from their communities to another location in order to receive the specialized care.

Is it at your discretion as the Department of Health to move a person from their community to a southern institution or to another location, or is it the contractors who make those decisions? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) if I could get a little clarification. I'm not sure if the member is asking about facilities and the contract for facilities, or the question is about individuals and the care they receive. Thank you. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize if I'm not getting through directly. I'll rephrase my question. Regarding the elder care facilities, and in here it states that you contract people who will run the facilities and also increase, would like to increase the payments to those caretakers.

So I have a question. If you're going to be increasing the contractor's pay, are the caretakers the only ones that make the decisions, or what happens if there is a problem between the contractor and your department; who makes the decisions on how those facilities should be operated, or do the contractors make their own policies, or is it your department who writes up those policies. I hope I'm getting clear. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you, Ms. Killiktee. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes, and I do apologize for not understanding your question in the first place.

The contractors operate the facilities, and not everything is at their discretion. We are responsible for those elder care facilities, but we always have to be informed about the steps that are being taken at those care facilities.

For example, I can use the elders care facility here in Iqaluit; our staff, we have meetings with the staff. Not everything is at their discretion. According to the contract, they have to keep us updated on what's happening, how many staff they have, how many of those staff are Inuit, and if there's a problem or a concern then they go directly to our department. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm very glad to hear that, and thank you for that explanation.

There are many things that we're concerned about, and I've been waiting patiently to ask this question. We have to provide the proper support to the elders by way of the people who have the contract to run those facilities.

And I'm glad to hear that we have those policies and there's an agreement between your department and the contractors of who is responsible for what, and there's going to be some things that we will have to do this coming year.

I would like to move on then and ask a question on your business plan priorities for 2024-2025. On page 100, and the fourth bullet that you will provide training and also hire summer students over the course of the summer, I don't know whether this is new, but does that apply to all 25 Nunavut communities, or is this only being implemented in the larger communities. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the summer student program, it applies to all Nunavut communities. There's 25 health care facilities. But I don't have that information on me whether all community health centres apply for this program. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Killiktee.

Ms. Killiktee (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It would be very beneficial to the youth as they gain work experience in their community, and it's something that we would like to see and have it implemented in all communities.

And again, onto another subject, and again directed to the elders. Since I've been sitting here for the past three years, I have been vocal or very vocal about advocating for the elders, that they need our proper care, proper services provided, because it's our future. We're all heading in the same direction, and I would like to make sure that I get proper care and proper services provided to me when I become an elder. I don't know what the future holds for me, but we're all heading in the same direction. And we want to be comfortable. You don't want to worry about what's going to be happening next when you become an elder.

For those of us as members of the Legislative Assembly and taking care of our residents, and you as the Minister of Health, have you considered caretakers from the communities?

(interpretation ends) For those elders and residents who require additional support while remaining in their home communities, the Standing Committee looks forward to updates from the minister on how Health will be working to enhance and expand such community-based health services as the home care program.

(interpretation) We all want to see this as MLAs for that reason. Can you take initiative and with the funds you're requesting that we will provide the support as it should be. And if we say no to your request and the increase in your budget, it's something we will have difficulty with.

So I'm also requesting through community Arctic College an area of elder care. I would encourage put it together and I think that will be great in your position as a very caring minister.

So I would encourage you, so as a minister for now, take this initiative. This will be a very positive for yourself because you have taken this very seriously yourself, so the area of training as a starter, even if it's a start that maybe small at first, because we always take caregivers very seriously. It's something I often advocate for, and I take very seriously. Perhaps he'll want to respond. But this is something I'm often advocating for. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank my colleague for his continued advocating on this. And we're not just sitting around and we're looking for options how we can strengthen this area.

(interpretation ends) I will mention two things. The comprehensive review of the home care program is ongoing. It's supposed to be finished by the end of March, and that's our plan. Following that review, there's a potential for identification of additional needs, additional staff, additional training, potentially additional policy development.

In terms of the review to date, housing has been identified as an issue for staff and clients alike. So, you know, it's not a surprise that that's been identified as a big issue around supporting individuals at home, as well as transportation services have been identified.

And we are seeing increasing numbers of home care clients year over year over year. And it's through the support of members and support of this Assembly that we're able to fund that program. And so I thank the Assembly for the ongoing support and advocacy.

And on the training front, Nunavut Arctic College is doing some amazing work with their personal and community wellness courses. And I won't get into too much detail there, but there's online delivery that's making it available to students in many different locations. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you next name I have on my list, Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Minister and your officials being here. I have some follow-up questions, the first question that was asked about what do you do with elders who want to stay home, and the response was around home and community care.

The minister stated that home and community care allows elders to stay home longer. He just mentioned in this last response that there's a current review ongoing of the home care program that's due to be done at the end of March.

I'm just wondering what sort of data there is to back that claim that home and community care allows people to stay home longer, and what sort of data is captured on that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) In terms of data, I'll talk about the number of home care clients. I mean, it's very fundamental to the program, in terms of the goals of the program.

One of the goals is to support families to care for people at home and in community, rather than in a facility. So it's kind of the reason, one of the reasons why the program was created.

So in 2020-2021, we had a 23 percent increase in the previous fiscal year in the number of clients; in 2021-2022 we had a 17 percent increase from the previous fiscal year. In 2022-2023 there was a 2.5 percent increase, and in 2023-2024, there was a 3 percent increase. So in that couple years where there was a big jump, that might have been COVID related.

But the last count we had was 2,336 home care clients in Nunavut, and that is, you know, a large number. That's important work that, you know, it's not just for elders. It's for people who have, – it can be children, it can be other Nunavummiut who have specialized needs. The program supports things like equipment loans, purchasing of required medical materials and supplies. I won't get into too much more detail. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You seem to have anticipated my follow-up to that follow-up question which is what is the split between, because I know a lot of people think about elders when it comes to home and community care, and I'm curious about whether or not there's information on how many clients are elders versus how many clients are not elders with special needs or needs that require home care. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We don't have that breakdown in terms of the different types of clients, not here in front of me unfortunately. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. If it's not available with you now, does the department have that information at hand that it can provide to the committee at a later date? Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) I can commit to seeing if we have breakdowns. I don't want to give a blanket commitment, because it could be quite intensive to go through the 2,300 clients if we don't have that, but I can definitely commit to sharing what we do have. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would be interested in having that information. I think it's important not just for the members, but for the department to be looking at that, especially when it comes to long-term planning and health outcomes for those who are current clients who may not be elders or seniors.

In a response to the second question that was asked today, Minister, you mentioned the pilot program that may be launched, or that is going to be launched to support caregivers who stay at home and take care of, is it just elders or is it just people in need?

Can you elaborate a little bit on that pilot program for me, please. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main: I'll let my Deputy respond. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chairman: Please proceed, Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you to the member for the question. Within the pilot, those clients or community members may be those who are elders who are frail or requiring supported home with daily living activities. It could be those who may have a disability. It could be from injury, traumatic brain injury. They could be from childhood, all the way to elders. Qujannamiik.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. How will the participants be chosen? What kind of numbers are we talking about? You mentioned that there are well over 2,000 current clients that are receiving home and community care and I'm wondering, knew, are you targeting 10 percent of those clients, 25 percent? Are you looking at providing a living wage? If so what is that living wage? What are the factors that are under consideration for this pilot project? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) Those are all excellent questions, and we're still in the stage of scoping out the pilot. And so we don't have answers to those questions as of yet. But, you know, those are ones that we would need to answer to direct the pilot appropriately hopefully to set it up for success. It is federal funds that we are looking to use for that pilot. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I feel like the Minister might have a direct line to my pencil here, because I wrote down federal programs, as you were scoping out this pilot project. I know that there are federal programs that allow individuals who are individual caregivers to seniors, for example, who have an income that's under a certain threshold, their caregivers can apply for a certain amount of funding.

I'm curious to know what is this federal program called and, you know, who's the team that is developing this pilot project; who are the stakeholders that you are working with. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (interpretation ends) The funds would be coming from the territorial health investment fund. And in terms of who would be working on this, it would be our long term care team.

However, they would be also working with the Operations in terms of the boots on the ground or sketching out the potential boots on the ground at the community level.

We would also be looking to make sure that our partners at Nunavut Tunngavik are engaged on this. They have been a strong voice for enhanced care for elders, not just in terms of facilities, but also along what we can do through programs like home care. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you for that response. I do have a lot of follow-up questions, so I'll move on from that. Every time I hear a response, I have more questions. I'm excited by this idea. And just before I move on, can we just get a timeline on when that might happen. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main: Mut'na. In terms of the timeline, we're hoping to see movement on this during the life of this government. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you for that. In an earlier response, Minister, you mentioned that they are looking forward to a "fair deal" on the Non-Insured Health Benefits negotiations. I wonder if he can elaborate on that, as well as what are the options if that fair deal doesn't come about.

I remember being Director of Travel Programs when there was a negotiation underway, and there was a question about whether or not the program would be handed back to the federal government. So I would welcome some more remarks on that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) In terms of a fair deal, we were, you know, quite pleased with the last contribution agreement that we were able to secure which effectively brought the practice of subsidizing this federal program to an end for that two-year period. So we would be wanting to see a contribution agreement that meets our projected spend on medical travel.

It is difficult to predict, because volumes are continually increasing year over year, but we do have, through Mr. Tanga and his team, access to quite accurate figures that show how much we're going to spend and we need the other side of the table to put that on the table or make it available and then we'll have a deal. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm still not clear on what a "fair deal" would be and whether or not there is an option of giving back that program and whether or not it's under consideration. Can I get an answer to that, please. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It's absolutely on the table, and my deputy can speak to the work that's underway in terms of mapping out a path, should that need to happen, in terms of handing back parts of the program. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: Thank you to the member for the question. I think the member's first question is what will be a fair deal, and the appropriate deal is a hundred percent and administration.

To your second question around what would happen if that deal were not to occur, some of the good work that has been taking place behind the scenes as we are working with our federal partners was to develop a scope of work, to undertake a review that gives us the ability to identify different options. One of those options could be to give the program back.

There will also be other options about potential parts of the program that may be better served not delivered by the Government of Nunavut, but with our federal partner or

others, creating options to modernize the program for efficiencies, effectiveness, services closer to home, so the makeup of the program.

So really being able to create some different options and to be able to work with our federal partners to ensure that the best program possible is available to Inuit, and that it is one that maximizes on the strengths and services not only in Nunavut and with our federal partners, but with all of our partners that we rely on to be able to provide services outside of territory. Qujannamiik.

Chairman: Just before we go back to Ms. Brewster, I'm presuming a little bit here. If the program or portions of the program had to be given back to the federal government under their responsibility, how long would that transition take. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you for the question. That is part of the scope of work, so under each of those options, developing a specific plan, timelines and process for that to take place. Qujannamiik.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. What are the main risks involved in, you know, if we can't reach a fair deal, we have to give the program back or we choose to give the program back, what are the risks?

For example, right now even though I know that a lot of people have concerns about medical travel, I know that the program is staffed by individuals who have close connection with the clients and know who their clients are. So I would see a risk, one major risk being that especially Nunavut Inuit wouldn't get the service that has a high prevalence of cultural humility and cultural safety in delivering that program. So that's one risk I wonder if I could hear about any more. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I think the member touched on the biggest risk, which would be impacts to Nunavut Inuit seeking health care.

In any scenario under this program, that would be top of mind for the department. We would want any transition or any handing back of the parts of the program or the entire program, we would want it to be as seamless as possible so Nunavut Inuit don't feel any negative effects from that.

And, you know, I thank the member for mentioning the cultural issues. You know, Mr. Babstock and his team take a great deal of care in terms of making sure that medical travellers are adequately supported.

In many cases, we are more generous with providing escorts for travellers than following the policy to the T would allow.

For example, a young Nunavummiut who's never been to the city before, following the policy, they would not be eligible for an escort. They are able-bodied, they can carry their own suitcase, they can speak English. But, you know, we've learned over the years that there can be other factors that need to be taken into consideration.

That's a long-winded way of saying that care for patients and Nunavut Inuit receiving services would be the largest risk we would be concerned about. (interpretation ends)
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for that response. I wonder if there's also a risk involved that's a new risk that we're now aware of, is the acquisition of our major airline, Canadian North, by a new entity. Is that added to your list of risks? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I mean, we expect that fair and reasonable pricing will be maintained. You know, the existing contracts that we have with Calm Air and Canadian North remain in place, so there's definitely some questions that are created with this news.

However, for the time being, it's business as usual in terms of essential medical travel for Nunavummiut. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I wonder if during this process there's also a consideration to realign the program. I know that certainly there is a lot of confusion about medical travel, in terms of people having this assumption or this idea that medical travel is one entity when in fact it is not. I wonder if the Minister could speak to that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We do want to provide clarity and effective resources for Nunavummiut who are utilizing medical travel.

Staff have been working on a handbook, which I'm not going to give a timeline for when we will have that ready, but as soon as possible. And through our review of the medical travel policy, it's become apparent to us, you know, there's a huge amount of public interest in this topic.

We had over 700 completed online surveys. Our staff are now working through policy options, you know, based off of the consultation results.

So we absolutely understand the importance of the program, and we believe if we can communicate more effectively that we can reduce stress and make the program better for Nunavummiut. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll just ask a couple more questions and then I'll move on from medical travel.

Can the minister tell us how many medical travel flights and trips are there per year, and whether or not there's knowledge of if there's a regional breakdown. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) We do have those numbers, and my staff are just working to pull them up.

I just wanted to briefly touch on actions that have been taken to improve or reduce our reliance on medical travel.

So we are delivering more virtual care than ever before. We've increased numbers of specialist clinics in communities, including allergists, gynecology, cardiology, surgery, pediatrics, ear nose and throat and oncology clinics. These have been outside of the regional centres.

And there's another major piece that's been done, in terms of providing more pre-clearances to eligible clients, to avoid the situation where they are cleared to come home, but they are waiting perhaps in the south for their flight to be booked. And so that has sped up things up for many travellers.

In terms of the number of medical travellers per year – sorry, apologies. If you'll just give us a moment.

In terms of the medevac volumes, our forecast volumes for this year, or that we're budgeted for in the current fiscal year is 2,350. And in terms of scheduled airline round trips, our forecast volume for 2024-2025 is 33,300.

I apologize for the delay in getting those numbers to you. (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Minister, I'm going to ask you to turn to your patient relations binder now. Can you tell us how many complaints you received last year that were directly related to medical travel.

If you have the numbers, if you could give us an idea of what percentage of those complaints are in relation to the number of clients who are on medical travel. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) So I can say that medical travel tends to attract or tends to be the source of complaints, and we take every issue that is raised through the Office of Patient Relations seriously, of course.

I have the breakdown in terms of the percentage broken down by region, percentage based on how many days it takes to close a case, whether clients are satisfied or not.

I don't have it based on specifically broken down on medical travel and not medical travel, but we have detailed annual reports through Patient Relations that are filed, and I can commit to pulling the medical travel numbers that are available. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Ms. Brewster.

Ms. Brewster: Thank you for that commitment, Minister. I thought it was an excellent opportunity to give a clear understanding that actually the number of mishaps and complaints that occur in relation to the number of trips is actually quite low, even though it seems like it's very high.

We were talking about squeaky wheels earlier this week, and certainly there are a lot of squeaky wheels that we hear about. So I'll just move on.

There was a question earlier about the development of the information and privacy plans, and the minister mentioned that the health information is leading a lot of the work, and there's a development of a public health information system in mind.

I have Meditech in question, that I'm not sure that I meant to tell myself there.

I know there was a mention of privacy legislation and an audit tool being developed for Meditech to track privacy and a mention of privacy training. I know the minister mentioned there were incidents in the past where people did breach privacy, and I wonder if there have been any more, and if that's still a concern. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) I thank the member. In terms of Meditech, I'll answer the question. For the public health information system, my understanding is that it will not be Meditech, it would be a separate standalone system. So we're in the process of creating a steering committee to guide the multi-year implementation of this, and developing a work plan and then a business case for long-term funding.

In terms of the Meditech audit tool, the privacy audit tool is now called Fair Warning, and it's now active in Meditech. And you know, we are establishing guidelines so that this tool can be effectively used. We're setting up audit processes and allocating dedicated staff to this because we do take invasions of privacy very seriously.

We recognize that the personal health information does not belong to the department, it belongs to individual Nunavummiut and we have to guard it, and so we continue working on this audit tool. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just a follow-up question in regards to the Non-Insured Health Benefits and the negotiations with the federal government.

Mr. Chairman, it's a known fact it's not the first time that the Government of Nunavut is asking for funding from the Non-Insured Health Benefit and the program from the federal government.

We're here as MLAs to give recommendations to the departments or to help the Government of Nunavut. And much like Nunavut 3000, I just want to make a recommendation to the health department in regards to the Non-Insured Health Benefit program that it helps the government provide patient care. And it's very important that I really do hope that the Government of Nunavut continues to keep this program for patient care.

And my question is, Mr. Chairman, or can I make a recommendation to this Government of Nunavut to at least have a one-time – asking for the federal government to at least every four or five years to ask for funding from the federal government to prevent the ask of the Non-Insured Health Benefits.

I would like to see this government asking the federal government for at least a five-year strategy, much like Nunavut 3000, or a ten-year strategy for a lot of reasons so the department don't have to come back and we don't have to discuss this anymore.

So during the life of this Assembly, how many times will this government ask the federal government for the Non-Insured Health Benefits? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) I really thank the member for the question and for highlighting this issue. It's a big concern to the health department, having this uncertainty. These are big expenses under medical travel, and without the certainty in terms of the revenue side, you know, for the finance folks as well as right across our teams, it creates a lot of stress and extra work, not to mention our partners at Department of Finance. These are not small figures we're talking about.

We continue to encourage Indigenous Services Canada to provide a long-term funding arrangement that would see the costs covered.

Right now they're setting funding caps based on their calculations on their side. We would prefer to see a flexible approach which would see the incurred costs covered.

If we are successful in reducing medical travel expenses through things like virtual care, that we wouldn't be in a situation where we're overcharging Indigenous Services Canada. We're just asking for them to cover the medical travel function that's their fiduciary responsibility to Nunavut Inuit.

The other concern has been around administration costs being covered. We haven't succeeded in securing the administration costs either, to date. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I really encourage this government to cover the non-insured medical health program for a lot of reasons, especially when it comes to patient care whether you have to go to Edmonton, or the big cities like Winnipeg, Ottawa. It's very important that they do have escorts when they do need patient care down south. The cities are very huge. It's large. Anybody can get lost who's not familiar with the cities.

Even just to go to Edmonton, it's huge. It's like where do we need to go, especially when it's our first time going to the city. So I really encourage this government to continue with the Non-Insured Health Benefits. And I really do hope that they don't bring it back to the federal government.

I'm going to move on, Mr. Chairman, when it comes to the data entry. My background being a certified multimedia archivist, I guess my first question is when the data entry, or who does the data entry when they go to the health centre, is it the nurses? Do they have data entry clerks. That would be my first question, and then I'll have follow-up question after that. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(interpretation ends) It really depends on the type of data being collected. Looking at Department of Health, there's a huge amount of different types of data that are held by the department.

There may be cases where there are clerk interpreters who are collecting or recording data. Sometimes it may be a health professional. It could be somebody on the pharmacy side. It could be the home care side, medical travel, public health officers. So, you know, right through our health system there is health information that's being held by us, and that's where the drive for health specific privacy legislation is coming.

We need legislation to help us better manage the information that we hold that rightfully belongs to Nunavummiut at the end of the day. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Quqqiaq.

Mr. Quqqiaq: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Minister, for your response. When it comes to us, we're here to ask questions and hopefully make recommendations also.

I want to help the Health department whether it comes to data entry. It would be nice if the nurses, or whoever is in the communities to provide the health services in the communities.

I want to help the Health department. It would be great and I want to make the nurses' jobs easier. I want to keep the nurses in the communities. I want to help the department in every way possible.

It would be great if the nurses enter that data when they see their clients, and then if they do need to travel, make a recommendation and put that data entry. This is my background. I'm very familiar with data entry metadata. So I'm just going to make a recommendation to the Health department.

It would be great if the nurse entered the data, and if they go to travel, make a recommendation to medical travel. And then the way I see it they could have a third block server where they enter it and if the doctors need to see that data information, the doctor should have only access to the metadata. They could use that metadata and it could help them make their jobs easier.

So that being said, Mr. Chairman, it's just a recommendation from myself, my background being a certified multimedia archivist. During my training is when we do data entry, we put into a third block server, and then it can be pulled out from another city or any location, and what the person does is they get that metadata.

I want to help the department to do their jobs easier. I want the nurses to stay in the community so we don't have shortage of nurses.

I guess the question is, Mr. Chairman, will the department take my recommendation into consideration for the future, so we can keep our nurses in our communities. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Minister Main.

Hon. John Main (interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I certainly appreciate the member's concern for retention and finding ways to make our work flows more efficient.

We use Meditech as our electronic health record software. That system is used right across Nunavut as well as two referral centres outside of Nunavut.

One of the projects that's happening Canada-wide is around interoperability. So say, for example, if you have a resident of Taloyoak who goes to Edmonton to receive care, right

now the electronic health records in Alberta don't speak properly, they don't connect to our health record systems.

However, nationally it has been identified as an issue. Our Deputy actually sits on, is it a steering committee? My Deputy can act a little bit around the interoperability task, if you allow, Chair, because it is a key process to improve care across Canada. (interpretation ends) Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Ms. Hunt.

Ms. Hunt: (interpretation) Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (interpretation ends) Minister Main is correct, I sit on the Canada Health Infoway Board.

There is, you know, federally an interoperability roadmap that is work that is happening across all jurisdictions to find ways to ensure the standards that provide the ability to integrate systems, so information can be shared and accessed across many jurisdictions. Qujannamiik.

Chairman: Thank you. Before I go back to Mr. Quqqiaq, I'm going to recognize the clock and I'm going to rise to report progress to the speaker. Thank you. Sergeant-at-Arms, please escort the witnesses out.

>>*Committee adjourned and House resumed at 18:00*

Speaker: Item 21, Report of the Committee of the Whole. Mr. Hickes.

Item 21: Report of the Committee of the Whole

Mr. Hickes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, your committee has been reviewing Bill 70 and would like to report progress. Mr. Speaker, I move that the Report of the Committee be agreed to. Thank you.

Speaker: The motion is in order. Is there a seconder? Ms. Quassa. Item 22, Third Reading of Bills. Item 23, *Orders of the Day*. Mr. Clerk.

Item 22: Orders of the Day

Mr. Clerk (interpretation): Thank you. For the *Orders of the Day* February 26, 1:30:

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 Motion
16. Notices of Motions for First Reading of Bills
17. Motions
18. First Reading of Bills
19. Second Reading of Bills
- Bill 73
20. Consideration in Committee of the Whole of Bills and Other Matters
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 Wednesday, February 26, at 1:30 p.m.
Sergeant-at-Arms.

>>*House adjourned at 18:02*

