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HANSARD

Tuesday, April 30, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2024 Spring Sitting

SPEAKER — Hon. Jeremy Harper, MLA, Mayo-Tatchun
DEPUTY SPEAKER and CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Annie Blake, MLA, Vuntut Gwitchin
DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE — Lane Tredger, MLA, Whitehorse Centre

CABINET MINISTERS

NAME	CONSTITUENCY	PORTFOLIO
Hon. Ranj Pillai	Porter Creek South	Premier Minister of the Executive Council Office; Economic Development; Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation
Hon. Jeanie McLean	Mountainview	Deputy Premier Minister of Education; Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate
Hon. Nils Clarke	Riverdale North	Minister of Environment; Highways and Public Works
Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee	Riverdale South	Minister of Health and Social Services; Justice
Hon. Richard Mostyn	Whitehorse West	Minister of Community Services; Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board
Hon. John Streicker	Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes	Government House Leader Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources; Tourism and Culture; Minister responsible for the Yukon Development Corporation and the Yukon Energy Corporation; French Language Services Directorate
Hon. Sandy Silver	Klondike	Minister of Finance; Public Service Commission; Minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation and the Yukon Lottery Commission

OFFICIAL OPPOSITION

Yukon Party

Currie Dixon	Leader of the Official Opposition Copperbelt North	Scott Kent	Official Opposition House Leader Copperbelt South
Brad Cathers	Lake Laberge	Patti McLeod	Watson Lake
Yvonne Clarke	Porter Creek Centre	Geraldine Van Bibber	Porter Creek North
Wade Istchenko	Kluane	Stacey Hassard	Pelly-Nisutlin

THIRD PARTY

New Democratic Party

Kate White	Leader of the Third Party Takhini-Kopper King
Lane Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
Annie Blake	Vuntut Gwitchin

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, April 30, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.
 We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: We will proceed at this time with the Order Paper.

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming some guests who are here today for the Territorial Skills Competition tribute. We have Doug McRae from Skills Canada; Ryan Cumming from Skills Canada; Katie Mooney from Skills Canada; and Jessica Zinn from the school of trades at Yukon University. Joining Jessica is Sasha, her support dog. Welcome.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to help me welcome a few guests who we have here today from the Mental Wellness and Substance Use services of the Department of Health and Social Services. We have Cameron Grandy, the director. We have Andrea Abrahamson, the acting manager, and we have Kristy Petovello, who is also new and is the acting manager at the department. Thank you for being here.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we have two guests here today: Melissa and Ben Yu Schott. Ben is a past public servant, and Melissa works with the Executive Council Office. They also happen to be the proud parents of one of our lovely pages here this year. Thank you, Mr. Speaker — if we could welcome them.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of the 2024 Territorial Skills Competition

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the 2024 Territorial Skills Competition, which will be held this Thursday, May 2 at Yukon University in Whitehorse.

For 26 years, Skills Canada Yukon has provided a forum for skilled trades and technology students and apprentices to showcase their craftsmanship at a local level. The Territorial Skills Competition provides a springboard for those at the top of their trade locally to showcase their skills at the national

competition, which will be held in beautiful Québec City in May.

Many journeypersons with successful careers and businesses today are where they are now because they were inspired to register for the Territorial Skills Competition by a teacher, parent, friend, or mentor.

Building, creating, and innovating along with their peers empowered them to continue their chosen craft because of their powerful experience at this competition. Not only are competitors provided with an opportunity to demonstrate their talents, they also gain valuable, potentially lifelong connections with other students, apprentices, experts, and journeypersons that can carry them forward into a meaningful and rewarding career.

This year, Yukon's secondary students and post-secondary apprentices have practised for weeks and months leading up to this annual competition. They have learned modern techniques, tried new patterns and/or recipes, and have worked with once-unfamiliar tools and materials.

They have challenged themselves and discovered new passions. We can't wait to watch you apply all that you have learned and see what you can create in your chosen field. Volunteers, parents, mentors, employers, and communities are behind the scenes encouraging and training individual competitors, providing their expertise as judges, and tirelessly organizing the logistics to make this year's competition better than ever before. Today, I acknowledge that we see you and we appreciate you.

To the entire Skills Canada Yukon team, we thank you for hosting this event every year, for being passionate about the pathways that youth take to enter the skilled trades and technology fields, and for making each competition better and more inclusive than the last. From baking, plumbing, and cabinetmaking to photography, robotics, and hairstyling, there will be many competitions to take in and cheer on students and apprentices alike.

I encourage all Yukoners to join me in visiting the competition at Yukon University this year and see for yourselves the exceptional talent that will be displayed. Good luck to all of the participants, and I look forward to the results at the awards reception that will take place this Friday.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 2024 Yukon Territorial Skills Competition, which will take place on May 2. This event brings together up-and-coming tradespeople of the Yukon to showcase their talents and test their skills against their peers for a shot at representing the Yukon at the Skills Canada National Competition, which will be taking place on May 30 and 31 in Québec City.

Competitions are held in many areas and highlight an incredible array of skills — 25 different areas of specialization, to be precise. Competing is a bit scary, but it creates connection to your community and business owners who work in your chosen skill area. I love the fact that the local winners from the territorial competition are paired with mentors in their trade in

order to master their craft and compete at national and international levels.

It's amazing to see young, local secondary students and apprentices test their skills and to see just how much support our youth have to find their place in the world. In the Yukon, I am pleased that we encourage, support, and promote skilled trades and technologies for youth and their communities throughout our beautiful territory.

Organizations like Skills Canada Yukon, Yukon University, Yukon high schools, Yukon Women in Trades and Technology, and so many more work to help youth find their true passions, prepare for careers in their chosen fields, and hone their skills. Wherever the journey into the trades or technologies takes a person, know that an incredible career can be built and there is no limit to how much one can learn and how far one can go.

A huge shout-out to the Skills Canada Yukon board and all staff for your dedication and support all year long, especially during the planning and execution of this important competition. Thank you for your work. Best of luck to all those taking part in the competition and congratulations to you all for getting to this point in your training. Good luck and have fun.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate Skills Canada Yukon ahead of the annual Territorial Skills Competition happening at Yukon University on Thursday, May 2. For the last quarter of a century, the annual Territorial Skills Competition has given an opportunity for budding trades and technology folk across a wide array of fields to test out their skills in a public forum. This exciting event is a celebration of the incredible craftsmanship, innovation, and dedication to excellence that Skills Canada Yukon promotes year-round.

Competitors from both the secondary and post-secondary streams will be able to test their knowledge in a fast-paced, stress-fuelled environment. Why does this matter? Because it's easy to perform when there isn't any pressure and everything is going right, but it's much harder to do when your nerves are on edge and there is an audience. Competing with others creates connection to community members and business owners who work in the world of skilled trades and technology. Competing at the territorial level gives you the potential of competing at the Skills Compétences Canada national competition against secondary students and apprentices from across Canada. This year, the national competition will be held on May 30 in Québec.

Competing isn't just about the successes; it's also about how you persevere through the adversity of things not going your way. I know that there are many of us who had to adapt at the national competition because of unexpected hiccups. In my case, it was sugar boxes constantly breaking in my hand over and over and over again, with an audience whispering like they were watching figure skating on television. But I adapted and I got through it, but I did have to take a time out in the walk-in freezer.

Good luck to the competitors and thank you to the mentors and volunteers who make this event the success that it is.

Applause

In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Week

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Mental Health Awareness Week, observed from May 6 to May 12 this year.

I want to commend the Canadian Mental Health Association Yukon division and all Yukoners who embody this year's theme by dedicating their time to mental health advocacy, support, and education. Their tireless efforts ensure that mental wellness is recognized and nurtured across the territory.

In the spirit of mental wellness, we also celebrate the various community initiatives that illustrate compassion in action. From local wellness programs to mental health first aid courses, these efforts exemplify the positive impact of community-led support.

This year, this important observance focuses our collective attention on healing through compassion, emphasizing the role of compassion in fostering mental health and well-being. This year's theme encourages us to cultivate compassion not merely as a reaction to the suffering of others but as a proactive gesture of empathy and community.

It encourages us to extend kindness to ourselves first, which then enables us to share that kindness with friends, family, strangers, and everyone. Our individual and collective well-being benefits immensely from the acts of compassion that we give and receive.

Science tells us that compassion not only alleviates stress but also enhances our overall happiness and life satisfaction. Compassionate behaviours enhance emotional resilience, enabling us to better cope with and recover from adversity. They strengthen social connections, reducing feelings of isolation and depression, and improve physical health by mitigating stress-related impacts on our bodies. Engaging in compassionate acts also boosts cognitive function such as empathy and emotional intelligence, which are essential for effective communication and strong interpersonal relationships.

Cultivating a compassionate society supports inclusivity and accessibility in mental health care, helping to break down the barriers and stigma associated with seeking help. Let us each commit to a personal act of kindness, whether it is checking on a neighbour, sharing a warm meal with someone in need, offering a listening ear, or simply being polite and grateful to those who serve us in a store or in restaurants. These gestures build a fabric of community that improves mental health.

Compassion has the power to transform lives. As we observe Mental Health Awareness Week, let us continue to support each other. Every act of kindness contributes to the healing of our community.

I invite Yukoners to engage with the activities of this week to learn more and to carry the spirit of kindness and compassion out into our community — to lead by example.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize May as Mental Health Awareness Month. This important observance serves as a time to educate communities about mental health issues and supports, promote mental wellness, and highlight the importance of increasing access to mental health services.

Fostering an environment where we can openly discuss mental health is important not only to those who suffer from mental illness or mental health issues but to those who are trying to support them. Mental health support availability must be prioritized in our communities and be accessible to anyone in need. Mental illness doesn't operate on a timeline. It doesn't always give warning and must be navigated quickly to ensure that support is available when it's needed the most.

Conditions affect people in many different ways and can have very debilitating effects on family members and friends as well as the individual. It's important to learn about different mental health conditions and issues, recognize their signs, and easily locate supports in your community. Be there for family or friends who you think may be struggling. Be an active and compassionate listener and keep an eye on your people.

We would like to thank the Yukon branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association and all organizations that work to support mental wellness across the Yukon. Thank you to our mental health professionals who work directly with individuals and families to provide supports and assistance.

Remember, it's okay to ask for help, and it's okay to take time and do things that nurture your own health and wellness.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the NDP to pay tribute to Mental Health Awareness Week and the many individuals who work in NGOs, schools, counselling services, and government agencies throughout the Yukon. This year's Mental Health Awareness Week is centred on the healing power of compassion while emphasizing kindness.

Mental Health Awareness Week raises awareness of trauma and the impact that it can have on the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of children, families, and communities. Rural communities in the Yukon continue to struggle under the burden of grief and addiction. They continue to live through a mental health and addiction crisis. We are well aware of how the substance use emergency impacts the mental wellness of children and youth, and we are becoming much more aware of the need to provide children and youth with the direct supports and tools that they need to thrive.

Families need to be able to access services for their child when dealing with mental illness. Caregivers need tools and adequate resources when trying to support the young people in their lives. Services and supports provided to our youth and children mean better health outcomes and futures for them and for us.

We also need to be listening to children and youth and ensure that their voices are heard when talking about services and supports that they need across all government systems. This means investing in reducing poverty and increasing access to secure, affordable housing, food security programs, family unity programs, restorative justice services, cultural programs and services, nursing, psychiatric services, and much more.

In all parts of society, we must invest in destigmatizing mental health by normalizing the practice of taking moments to prioritize mental health care without guilt or shame. This means investing directly in the homes where children and youth are being raised and building on community-based programs that are delivered by First Nation governments, NGOs, schools, counselling supports, and government agencies across our territory.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a legislative return to support the response to the petition from the Member for Porter Creek Centre regarding electricity costs.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I have a letter addressed to CPAWS Yukon dated April 16, 2024.

Speaker: Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Petitions.

PETITIONS

Petition No. 23 — response

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to respond to Petition No. 23 regarding the cost of electricity, tabled in the Assembly on April 17.

I would like to thank the 170 Yukoners who signed the petition, including the Member for Porter Creek Centre. It is critical that we work to have an electricity supply for Yukoners that is reliable, affordable, and sustainable. I am sure all Yukoners care about our electricity rates.

In the Yukon, electricity rates are the same across all communities, both on and off grid. Yukoners pay on average \$194 per month per 1,000 kilowatt hours after rebates, which is higher than Vancouver and Regina but lower than Calgary and Edmonton. Our rates are by far the lowest in northern Canada. Yellowknife is one and a half times higher; Iqaluit and Inuvik are more than three times higher.

Rates are impacted by many factors: growing demands for electricity; maintaining and upgrading our electricity system; electrifying the Yukon's heating and transportation sectors; and rising material and labour costs. Earlier today, I tabled a rate comparison to provide a fuller picture for interested Yukoners.

Yukon has an islanded electricity grid extending from Teslin to Haines Junction, Dawson, and Ross River. We have several communities on stand-alone generation systems. In 2023, on our main grid, we had 91 percent hydro power, seven percent LNG, and one percent each from our permanent and rented diesel fleets.

In the Yukon and across Canada, demand for electricity is rising, and both utilities and governments are responding by making investments needed to support this growth. Yukoners have told us, and we agree, that sources of local, clean generation are the best way forward for the Yukon.

We are working to identify what types and where those projects can be built in collaboration with First Nations and other partners. Until new renewable generation comes online, Yukon Energy must ensure that Yukoners have the electricity they need on the coldest days through diesel and LNG.

We agree that, over the long term, Yukon Energy should not rely on rented diesels or fossil fuels in general to provide primary winter energy. We also agree that generation needs to be reliable. We don't believe that this precludes intermittent renewables, like wind. For example, wind/battery backup can provide clean, reliable winter energy. We disagree if the petition is suggesting that, as an islanded grid with a cold climate, we don't need backup. Backup must be some form of permanent, dispatchable electricity. This could be diesel or LNG generators, but it could also possibly be biomass or some other fossil fuel. The goal is to use backups as little as possible.

Transparency and clarity in our electrical bills are essential for consumers to ensure accountability. We acknowledge the concerns raised about the complicated information on our electrical bills provided by ATCO Electric. I have spoken directly to the utilities urging them to simplify our bills. ATCO Electric and Yukon Energy are collaborating to identify ways to make energy bills more clear within the rules set for utilities. While this work is underway, Yukoners can get more information from the "Understanding Your Bill" resource found on their websites. Better information fosters greater clarity and understanding, empowering consumers to make informed decisions about their energy use and expenditures. With respect to the Yukon Utilities Board, we believe, as a government, in allowing the board to carry out its mandate independently, free from political influence.

The Government of Yukon continues to support the board in fulfilling its responsibility to make independent, evidence-based decisions that are consistent with national standards for utility regulation and reflect the interest of Yukoners. We recognize the importance of public input and I encourage the signatories of the petition to share any feedback with the Yukon Utilities Board.

Managing electrical demand is a complex challenge that requires proactive planning and collaboration. We are supporting Yukoners to be directly involved through programs aimed at reducing their bills. For example, the Energy branch is helping Yukoners to improve the efficiency of their homes and Yukon Energy's peak smart home initiative supports Yukoners to shift to electricity use away from periods of peak electricity demand.

We are also committed to working closely with ATCO Electric and Yukon Energy to understand how the grid must modernize to meet increasing demands for electricity.

Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to respond to this important petition regarding electricity affordability, balanced with reliability and sustainability.

Speaker: Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?
Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to support the Ronald McDonald House BC and Yukon in their Willow House campaign to expand their facilities and add a new building targeted to long-stay families by providing a generous financial capital contribution.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Department of Health and Social Services to increase public reporting of health care wait times for tests, specialist procedures, and surgeries.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House recognizes the Yukon's strong economic forecast provided in the 2024 Conference Board of Canada's territorial outlook, including:

- (1) strong GDP forecasts averaging four percent;
- (2) positive growth in the mining sector;
- (3) positive growth in capital planning;
- (4) sustained low unemployment rates; and
- (5) rebounding growth in the tourism sector.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the First Nation School Board and the Vuntut Gwitchin Government to increase supports for literacy and numeracy for youth in Old Crow.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the First Nation School Board and the Vuntut Gwitchin Government to address the issue of school absenteeism in Old Crow.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?
This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD**Question re: Immigration fraud**

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, in December 2023, a Richmond court found an individual named Joyce Chang guilty of immigration fraud. A *Richmond News* article reported that this individual had overseen a multi-faceted deception scheme that involved forged documents from the Yukon business nominee program.

Between 2020 when the charges were first issued and 2023 when this individual was found guilty of all 11 charges of immigration fraud, she made cash donations to both the Liberal Party of Canada and the Liberal Party of the Yukon. So, Mr. Speaker, did anyone from the Yukon Liberal Cabinet Office ever meet with Joyce Chang or discuss issues related to immigration with her between 2020 when she was first charged and 2023 when she was found guilty?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, again — no idea of the individual of whom they are speaking. I can talk to our Cabinet folks, but immigration matters are held and dealt with by the Department of Economic Development and the Immigration unit there.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, Elections Yukon's annual report about political donations shows that this individual donated money to the Yukon Liberals in 2022, which would have been when her case was before the courts. So, if someone is donating to the party, it doesn't seem outlandish to ask if someone from the party ever met with her.

I would like to ask the Premier for a bit more clarity: Did he or anyone from his Cabinet Office meet with this person while the matter was before the courts?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will ask our Cabinet members. I don't believe that I have ever been made aware of anybody who has met with this person, and I certainly have not met with a — I think — Joyce Chang.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, this individual was charged with 11 counts of immigration fraud in direct relation to the Yukon business nominee program, which is a program that is overseen by the Premier himself. While that matter was before the courts, this individual made financial political decisions for the Premier's party.

What message does the Premier think it sends that someone convicted of immigration fraud was donating money to the minister responsible for immigration while her charges were before the courts?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that it's always the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin whenever there is mud to be thrown; the Leader of the Official Opposition never has the guts to stand up and actually go tête-à-tête. It's always the member — not the critic for the department. But as soon as he was getting up today, I knew that there would be some level of mud being thrown.

You would remember that I brought to this House and had requested Elections Yukon to ensure that we have a strong system in place. I think that I was the first member of any Legislative Assembly of any provincial or territorial — there might have been one ahead, but I don't remember. I would say that it was maybe the first in this country to make sure that we

have a strong system and that there is no inside influencing or outside influencing from folks. I don't think that is appropriate. I think we need to work on those things across this country.

Again, today, I thought that there would be some mudslinging and certainly knew it would be from the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, but we have seen this before. I know that we on this side always followed ethical standards and will continue to do so.

Question re: Immigration fraud

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I will try again then with the Premier on this one. Public reporting on this immigration fraud case has described it as a "multifaceted deception scheme" which involved forged Yukon government documents. It also involved at least one employee from the department. If anything, this case shows the vulnerability of this program to abuse.

My question for the Premier is: Since this court case has found this person guilty of immigration fraud in relation to that program, has the government made any policy changes to prevent future abuses of this program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a number of pieces of work when it comes to our *Immigration Act*. We are closely watching this work, but just for clarity to the House: Was the Leader of the Official Opposition also the minister of this department when these activities were happening? Maybe when he gets up for the second question, he can clarify, because I think this situation goes back a long period of time.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the charges were laid against this individual in 2020. The individual was found guilty of immigration fraud in 2023. During that period, while the matter was before the courts, this individual made a donation to the Yukon Liberal Party, so it stands to reason that she had some interaction with that party in some way, shape, or form. The Premier has been clear that they did not meet with her, but, of course, it remains to be seen whether he's going to check with his colleagues about that or not.

My question to this is simple, Mr. Speaker. This case of immigration fraud raises some serious questions about the program here in the Yukon. So, my question for the Premier is simple: Has the government conducted any internal audit or any review of the program to ensure that this kind of activity never happens again?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Certainly, we are constantly making sure that our programs are strong, doing the work that we need to do. I met with officials this morning to make sure that we are always strengthening and doing reviews.

But, again, interesting question — was the member opposite, the Leader of the Official Opposition, the minister when these frauds were taking place, or was it his colleague sitting next to him?

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is well aware of the time when I was the Minister of Economic Development. Of course, I had no knowledge of fraud. However, in the case of the Premier, he had knowledge of the fraud. In fact, he discussed it on the floor of the House before. In fact, the person

who has been convicted of being guilty of immigration fraud donated to his party while the matter was before the courts.

So, I will ask again: What message does the Premier think it sends to Yukoners that an individual who has been found guilty of immigration fraud made a donation to the Premier's re-election campaign while her case was before the courts?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, again, I will go back and look at the timing on this, but what I do remember is — I thought that this program used to actually fall under the responsibility of Education, and maybe it was the current Leader of the Official Opposition; maybe it was the Member for Copperbelt South when he was Education minister — but I do know that this was taken to the courts. But when the activity was happening, it was happening under the Yukon Party, as far as I remember. We can go back and look, but I believe that's when these activities were happening — under their government.

Question re: *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* implementation

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, this government declared a substance use health emergency in 2022. Territorially and nationally, front-line workers and people who use drugs know that we've been in a state of emergency since at least 2016. All overdose deaths are preventable, and yet Yukoners continue to die. Advocacy groups, people who use drugs, and front-line workers have been telling us about the solutions for years, if not decades.

The evidence-based solutions that work are a safe, accessible, and regulated supply of drugs, decriminalization, and trauma-informed treatment programs. The *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* was released almost a year ago. It includes goals but no budget and no timelines.

Can this government tell Yukoners how many of the 43 recommendations from this plan have been achieved to date?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the substance use health emergency is a critical priority for our government. It represents our commitment, and the declaration of the substance use health emergency and the strategy represent our commitment to implementing innovative, evidence-based initiatives to reduce and prevent substance use-related harms and to support Yukoners in their health and well-being.

In 2023 — in August of that year — along with the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Government of Yukon released the strategy. In response to the substance use health emergency, we developed Car 867. We have increased opioid treatment services with access to safer supply. We have expanded the methods of consumption available and extended the hours of the operation of the supervised consumption site. We have held two mental wellness summits. We have initiated a paramedic response unit in the downtown core of Whitehorse and increased access to harm-reduction supplies such as Naloxone kits. We have developed a managed alcohol program. It is being initiated as we speak.

This is a territory-wide challenge and it certainly cannot be solved alone. We have many partners in this goal, including

Blood Ties Four Directions, and we continue to work with other partners to make sure that Yukoners are as safe as possible.

Ms. White: So, Mr. Speaker, it sounds like some of those recommendations have been achieved, but I wanted to know how many exactly.

So, if I were looking to attend a treatment program in Whitehorse, I would be hard-pressed to find that one even existed. The government website only lists a number to call for supports and gives no details about what those supports might look like, and good luck if you need to access safe supply. Even people working on the front lines don't have access to information on this program or the ability to refer people to it. According to the government website, it doesn't exist.

We know that programs like these need to be low barrier, accessible, and trauma-informed, yet leaving people calling random phone numbers, jumping through bureaucratic hoops, and wondering if a program even exists is not low barrier; it is not accessible and it certainly isn't trauma-informed.

So, will this government commit to making detailed and comprehensive information about its treatment programs and safe supply program available for the public?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, I don't think that all of that information is accurate. I am certainly concerned if individuals who are looking for the availability of services and how to access those services don't have the opportunity to do so or if they are not made available to them. We have programs at 405 Alexander.

We have connections between those programs, Blood Ties, and the supervised consumption site; we have programs and connections between there and the Referred Care Clinic, where individuals can have alternatives to street drugs available to them and full medical care through those programs. We have an awareness campaign that has been supported by Blood Ties Four Directions and other partners, and they have received educational materials for the public regarding the substance use health emergency.

The strategy and the mental wellness substance use service is available at the Department of Health and Social Services. This initiative has supported 200 vulnerable individuals with direct access to information on substance use and mental health services, along with comfort items. We are supporting the Council of Yukon First Nations with \$50,000 for an anti-stigma campaign; we have community outreach.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, the supervised consumption site is an incredible program, and we all know that this program was a commitment in the 2021 confidence and supply agreement, and without this agreement, this government would have never started the program. We could say the same for the managed alcohol program. So, the same goes for safe supply, and even then, we know that this government has ensured that the safe supply program only meets the bare minimum.

The minister talks about the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, yet without a budget and without timelines, Yukoners have to wonder what this government is trying to accomplish, if anything. People who use drugs, front-line workers, and the families and loved ones of those who have

been lost are waiting on action and at this point wondering if this government is taking this crisis seriously at all.

To put it bluntly and use the terminology that has been coined by activists on the ground and people who use drugs: “They talk; we die”. So, will this government commit to a long call for solutions, including decriminalization, accessible safe supply, and evidence-based treatment programs?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that we should speak about the decriminalization of certain drugs after further research has been done by the members opposite with respect to the programming that has taken place since January 2023 in British Columbia and has not, unfortunately, been successful.

Our actions to date have included opening and expanding the supervised consumption site. It has had extended hours; we have increased access to opioid treatment services at 405 Alexander by expanding prescriber coverage up to two days a week and access and referrals to the Referred Care Clinic. We are strengthening the opioid treatment services team with new positions that include registered nurses — a supervisor, individual registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, community engagement workers, and administrative support.

We expanded the opioid medication coverage to include Sublocade. We have launched Car 867, a mobile crisis unit that includes an RCMP officer and a trained mental health nurse. We have organized the three territory-wide public awareness and education campaigns. We have continued to support Yukoners through the implementation of the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* and will continue to do so.

Question re: Dawson City daycare

Ms. Van Bibber: The first promise that the MLA for Klondike made when he became Leader of the Liberal Party was to fund the construction of a new Little Blue Daycare in Dawson City. That was in 2015. Can the government provide an update on this commitment?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We continue to work with all of our partners and stakeholders to enhance early learning and childcare programs in the Yukon as we move toward a future in which all families have access to high-quality early learning and childcare that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive.

The Government of Yukon is committed to high-quality early learning and childcare. We have a strong interest in supporting the sustainability and growth of early learning and childcare in the Yukon. The Department of Education is actively working with other departments, Little Blue, and the Dawson Society for Children and Families to support their expansion.

In 2021, we provided funding for Little Blue to update their feasibility study, and in 2022-23, we provided additional funding to support the expansion planning and design. Officials are regularly in contact with the Little Blue program, and we will continue to collaborate with them. We continue to support the childcare centre financially by providing operational funding. In 2023-24, we had a transfer payment of \$482,700.

I will continue to build if there are more questions.

Ms. Van Bibber: In the 2019 Speech from the Throne, the Government of Yukon promised that K to 4 would be rolled

out in all Yukon communities, including Dawson. Can the Minister of Education tell us if that has happened?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the question was about early kindergarten. It is definitely a high priority for our government.

I actually spoke about it yesterday in Committee of the Whole. We have rural early kindergarten in all of our communities, with the exception of one. We are working closely with the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in First Nation and partners in Dawson to ensure that we are hearing their concerns, and we’ll move forward on the expansion of the program there when the community is ready, but I’m happy that we have early kindergarten in all of our rural communities. We are now working on a policy review for early kindergarten and will work with all of our partners around that.

I know one of the questions in Committee of the Whole yesterday was about the expansion into urban and Whitehorse-based schools, and that is part of our review that is happening right now.

Question re: Diabetes program for children

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, in May 2021 during the Special Sitting of this Assembly following the election, we unanimously passed a motion urging the Government of Yukon to develop a territory-wide type 1 diabetes strategy to be completed by September 2022. We know that the strategy has not been completed and will soon be two years overdue.

In January 2022, the Yukon T1D Support Network wrote a letter to the Public Accounts Committee stating — and I’ll quote: “Since 2018, the Network has been trying to see implementation of Type 1 diabetes policies in K-12 schools, to no avail.”

We know that school children are still attending school in the absence of policies specific for the management of T1D. My question for the Minister of Education is: What is causing the delay in developing policies for schoolchildren living with type 1 diabetes?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, the health, safety, and well-being of students and staff is our first priority always. Our schools accommodate students with a wide variety of chronic and severe medical conditions, such as diabetes and anaphylaxis and those who may require medication and other care while under school supervision.

All Yukon schools follow the administration of medication to students policy, which requires planned care and support for students with various medical conditions. We have certainly had a lot of contact and work around the specific question on the floor. We’re working with Health and Social Services to review proposed changes to the existing administration of medication to students policy specifically for students with type 1 diabetes when in school and will update the policy if appropriate.

The department and T1D Support Network work together to review the existing policy and the T1D protocols which led to proposed changes. Over the last two years, as of the end of February, the Department of Education has met with the T1D Support Network seven times on how best to approach and

support students living with type 1 diabetes in school settings. We remain committed to ensuring that both staff and students are supported in schools around these matters.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, for the minister, the T1D Support Network still remains concerned about the lack of policies in schools. The Department of Education is currently undertaking the review of inclusive and special education in response to the Auditor General's report in 2019. From their January 2022 letter, the Yukon T1D Support Network — quote: "... believes that the Department of Education's response to the Auditor General's recommendation that there be a full review of the services and supports for inclusive education is inadequate as it fails to incorporate the needs and perspectives of children with disease."

So, since this letter was written, what direction has the minister given her department to incorporate the needs and perspectives of children living with disease into the review, and when will those actions translate into policies that are implemented in our schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question regarding inclusive and special education. I think that it may be the first one that has been asked this Sitting and we are a couple of days away from completing this session.

Reimagining inclusive and special education definitely comes out of the work that the Auditor General did to review our school system. It was received in 2019 and we have done extensive work — actually rearranging our whole department in response to that.

As I stated — and I just want to correct the record; the member led by saying that we don't have policies. We do have policies. The Yukon follows the administration of medication to students policy, which requires planned care and support for students with various medical conditions, including type 1 diabetes.

As I have stated, we are working with Health and Social Services to review the proposed changes to the existing administration of medication to students policy and specifically around students with type 1 diabetes when in school. The department will continue to ensure that we have strong policies in place that support students with these types of medical conditions.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, for the minister, these questions are coming directly from the Yukon T1D Support Network and we are asking them on behalf of that organization.

Another concern that they have raised with me is around transition. We know that young people living with T1D are still transitioning from youth to adult care with little to no support, so this is something that can be rectified in advance of the T1D strategy being concluded, whenever that is scheduled for.

Is the minister aware of these concerns, and if so, why are young adults still not receiving transitory care as they move from childhood to their adult years?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Health and Social Services continues to work with the T1D Support Network, and if the member opposite is in touch with them, he will be fully aware of this. We are working toward implementing a territory-wide T1D diabetes strategy. We hope

that the strategy will be released this spring. The strategy will address areas such as: accessing health technologies; person-centred, responsive, and timely care; education and awareness; and data collection and system improvement.

We are taking the time, working with our partners, to make sure that this is done right. We are building on the success of a pilot project with the T1D Support Network. Our government became the first in Canada to provide continuous glucose monitors for all individuals with type 1 diabetes and to offer funding to those with type 1 diabetes over the age of 18 to cover their choice of glucose monitoring devices.

We are reviewing a position with our Chronic Conditions Support Program to focus on T1D and we are involved with a working group that includes the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the T1D Support Network that will review several areas of concern, including discharge planning and potential for outreach support for Yukoners with type 1 diabetes.

We take this very seriously. We are working with our partners to have the best possible response for Yukoners.

Question re: Haines Junction subdivision development

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, recently, the Mayor of Haines Junction wrote to the Minister of Community Services to express a number of concerns about issues related to the new subdivision in my community. The first of those concerns was that the community had clearly requested the retaining of as many trees as possible as a priority and an important community value, so the community was shocked at the unexpected and rapid removal of every single tree in that location in March.

Why was the clearly expressed priority of the community to retain some trees ignored?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise today to talk about the work that we're doing in Haines Junction. The development that the member opposite is referencing today has been underway for 15 years, Mr. Speaker — 15 years to bring these 44 lots to fruition. We have worked very closely with the community of Haines Junction on this project over the last 15 years, starting with the YESAB application that went to the community in 2009, so we've worked diligently over the last several years to bring this to fruition.

I heard the land blessings on the weekend. I know that we had staff there among the residents of Haines Junction. It was heartening to me to hear those folks on the radio talking about the hope that they feel for their community in light of this growth with this community. It's flourishing.

We have made strategic investments in this community to make sure that it grows and becomes a much more robust community. We are going to have more income and more people in this community. I think it will benefit the Village of Haines Junction tremendously. Hopefully, maybe in the future, we will see a new grocery store open up in that community, because I know that the last one closed many, many years ago.

We are making these investments in communities across the territory to make sure that it's flourishing. I have heard from

every community how rural lots are important. We have had these discussions on the Legislative Assembly floor. I look forward to the next question.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I think that the minister ignored my question. My question was about the expressed priority of the community to retain some trees being ignored.

Next, the Village of Haines Junction has raised concerns about the policies and design choices of the Yukon government that have increased the cost of the subdivision. According to the letter, they have indicated that this has led to an increase of the total cost for the project of at least \$1.5 million.

Will the minister assure the community that the cost of the project will not affect the cost of the lots and that the Government of Yukon will ensure that these are affordable when they are released for purchase?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite well knows that he has the letter — I'm not sure how he got the letter. I got the letter this morning — at 9:00 this morning. I opened it up and started reading it. I have already met with my departmental staff about the letter and we are working through it. I have every intention of following up with the community of Haines Junction because these are the first concerns that I have heard from the mayor directly — the letter that I received this morning at 9:00. There is a lot of information in this letter; I'm certainly working through it.

But for the House today, I will say that we have made enormous investments in Haines Junction. We are bringing 44 lots — 44 lots — into that community after 15 years of work — 15 years of work on this community. The member opposite was a part of a government that didn't get 'er done, Mr. Speaker. I'm just happy that we can see, under the work that we are doing, this flourishing community — 44 more lots that are going to grow the community, bring more people into the community, more skills, more income, and a more dynamic environment.

The subdivision is being built by a local contractor. I'm very pleased with the work that is being done there. I know that the lands branch has worked diligently for 15 years but certainly in the last year very, very closely with the community, and I look forward to the third question.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, the community has also clearly expressed a desire to have underground power available to the lots in this subdivision as was requested in the previous subdivision. This is even more important now that the entire area has been clear-cut because the community is worried that the viewscape of these lots will be dominated by power poles, lines, and transformers. But overall, what has been most damaging for the community has been the level of trust in the Yukon government to follow through on the community's priorities as expressed by council.

So, will the minister agree to an in-person meeting in Haines Junction to address these concerns and begin to repair the relationship between this government and my community?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I'm always willing to meet with the municipalities and municipal leaders. I appreciate the advocacy from the member opposite for his constituents and I will certainly take that under advisement, but I'm always

willing to work with the municipalities and with municipal leaders.

I want to draw the House's attention to a biomass district heating system in Haines Junction, an underground and road upgrade being done in Haines Junction, water-well replacement in Haines Junction, and 44 new lots of lot development, which has been the focus of a lot of conversation in the House over the last several years. We all know how important lots are. We're getting that work done.

I also remember that the highways minister just recently announced that he has \$30 million-plus for the Shakwak system, another project that the member opposite, despite his decades of work in the Junction, never got done — no lots done; no Shakwak done. This government is doing the hard work to make our communities more robust, more economically viable. We're seeing growth — green shoots across the territory because of the work this government is doing.

I'm proud of that work; I'm proud of the Department of Community Services for their work — close work with municipalities — on these lots, and I look forward to further discussions.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members' business

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, May 1, 2024. They are Motion No. 775, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake, and Motion No. 905, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge.

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, May 1, 2024. It is Motion No. 982, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

Speaker: We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Ms. Blake): Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

Bill No. 213: *First Appropriation Act 2024-25* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Environment — *continued*

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: It is an honour to be here again for the opportunity to debate the mains budget appropriation for the Department of Environment for fiscal year 2024-25. To my immediate right, assisting me is Deputy Minister Michael Prochazka, and to his right is Assistant Deputy Minister Briar Young. Thank you very much, and I look forward to the discussion this afternoon.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to thank the staff who are here today, as I always do, and those on the phone, texting, or e-mailing, ready to provide additional information. I actually do not have much today before I turn it over. I just want to follow up on a couple of things.

I did debate with the minister about the Yukon Fish and Wildlife branch mandated review that ERM is doing. The minister had said to me that it was to be done internally when we had these discussions. I am looking at the actual piece of paper, the contract, and it says “external engagement guide”, and if you look on the document’s subtitle, it also says “external engagement guide”, and “external” to me would mean that you talk — you have community meetings, you talk to locals, and you talk to the resources councils — they would probably host those meetings — maybe the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board would go off to different — and help in this process, along with the department, of course.

I am just wondering how it went from when it was tendered and put out there as an external engagement guide — how it turned to an internal review.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have a detailed note which I believe that I shared most of that last time, but I will just provide the highlights of it from last time.

Of course, it’s not a completely internal process. The interviews with key organizations and individuals are expected to be completed by the end of April/early May, which the member opposite heard last time. Information sources for this work include: a document review; a focus set of documents to summarize the branch mandate, priorities, activities, and engagement; key informant interviews; focus groups — and I will put on the record again who they were.

As the member also asked, a summary of the report can be made available to the public. The ERM review will look at the

strengths of the Department of Environment Fish and Wildlife branch in fulfilling its mandate, activities, and objectives and identify opportunities for improvement. This is part of the cycle of continuous improvement being undertaken by the branch to ensure that they continue to provide relevant services to the Yukon.

The member will have heard at our previous time here in Committee of the Whole that the review has included interviews with current and former Fish and Wildlife staff, members of the organizations that the branch regularly engages with, including the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, renewable resources councils, First Nation land and resources directors, the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), the Yukon Conservation Society, and the Yukon Fish and Game Association. While I would perhaps concede to the member opposite that this doesn’t represent a full territory-wide engagement, it does cover a number of interest groups with various interests — well, in the instance of the Yukon Fish and Game Association, a membership in excess of 2,000 Yukoners — 2,000 chiefly Yukoners, I would say.

That is where it’s at with respect to this review, and I think that we are still at the place where this review is almost completed or perhaps has been completed and that recommendations are being synthesized. I think that I indicated to the member opposite that the final report will be available during calendar year 2024 and that it will be made public.

Mr. Istchenko: The minister just — I think that I did catch him say “not completely internal”. For me, as a legislator and a rural Yukoner, I firmly believe, from my time actually on the resources councils — and I have the utmost respect for how they are set out in the *Umbrella Final Agreement*.

I have been to many, many community meetings, whether it has been a rate change proposal — but being out in those communities and having those locals who normally — there are over 5,000 resident hunters, and 2,000 are part of the Yukon Fish and Game Association. That’s a great organization. I am also a member of that organization, but many people aren’t. The Trappers Association is another huge group; same with the Outfitters Association, which provides a lot of opportunities.

I would have liked to have seen the department in the communities consulting and listening a little bit more. I guess I will have to wait and see what comes in the recommendations, and I will tell my constituents who ask me about that — how they can comment — that they can’t. I guess I commented in the House for them and brought my concerns on behalf of them.

I will leave it at that. I do have a quick question about the *Animal Protection and Control Act*. The regulations under the *Animal Protection and Control Act* are in force now. What wasn’t clear from the regulations or the press release was whether they plan to bring in more regulations under the act or if this is the extent of what they are currently working on. Could the minister explain that?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, the short answer is that, as the member opposite will well know, the act was passed by the House in the fall of 2022, and then there was both targeted and fairly wide-ranging engagement between basically November/Christmas of 2022 until the beginning of — well,

into early 2024. The short answer to the member opposite's question is that no, there is no intention, right away, of having any additional new regulations. The regulations as they have been promulgated or they have come into force and effect are the regulations that the Department of Environment and the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources are working with.

Just for greater clarity, there are changes under the new legislation. The first phase of implementation will be to share the details of these changes with affected individuals, groups, and businesses. This is an extension of the conversations that took place during the engagement period.

Targeted engagement has continued with stakeholders since the close of the formal public engagement period to gather further feedback and clarity. Stakeholders emphasized that education and information-sharing are the cornerstones of implementation, and I tend to agree with that. These priorities will be reflected in the enforcement approach, which is to first assist people to meet their obligations under the new law. Chief veterinary officer Mary Vanderkop, in the technical briefing, was certainly very eloquent in providing that message, in my view, loud and clear about the importance of the education and information-sharing.

We appreciate the interest and support from speciality stakeholder groups in the Yukon to help with training officers so that they will better understand the unique circumstances for the care of animals such as sled dogs and horses used for outfitting.

There are new permit and inspection requirements for animal-related businesses, such as rescues, boarding facilities, and pet stores. These businesses will have a year to obtain their permits, and staff of both departments will assist them to complete the permit process and to arrange for additional inspections. There are also new opportunities for partnership agreements with Yukon First Nations and municipal governments to establish deputy enforcement officers and caretakers to deliver education and enforcement locally.

We are committed to working with communities and governments that are interested in taking on animal protection and control enforcement rules to ensure that enforcement respects local values and priorities.

This legislation is shared between the Department of Environment and Energy, Mines and Resources. Officers in the Agriculture branch will respond to welfare and control concerns regarding livestock, and those in the animal health unit will respond to other species.

During our engagement on the regulations, similar to our engagement on the act, there remained some concern about the authority of the officers. I would like to reiterate that authorities entering a premises without a warrant is unchanged from the legislation that existed previously and is granted only to RCMP officers. It can only be exercised in urgent or exigent circumstances when all the criteria for gaining a warrant are met, but it is not feasible to take a request to a justice.

To ensure that there are qualified and trained employees to meet the act requirements, staff with the essential qualifications will be appointed as animal protection and control officers. In addition, caretaker authorities have been identified and will be

put in place as required. Initially, the implementation will be resourced from existing departmental budgets, but this is a significantly enhanced legislative framework, and additional resources may likely be required in future years. Recruitment is underway for a program manager to oversee the development, delivery, and evaluation of new programs and agreements. In addition, one position will be dedicated for the first two years to the education, extension, and networking required to ensure these new responsibilities are understood by everyone affected.

A technical briefing took place on April 8 to review the requirements of the new act and regulations and to provide an overview of the implementation. In addition, two information sessions were held on April 11 and April 16 to provide stakeholders involved in the engagement on the new act and regulations with an overview of implementation.

I think that I will leave it at that for now. There is certainly more to say about the *Animal Protection and Control Act* implementation, but I think that this is a decent overview of where we are at. The act is in place, and the regulations — they are both the law of the land. In speaking to my officials, there is no intention to introduce new regulations on the hop, but rather, there is more of an intention, as I indicated previously, to have educational opportunities in the first instance, and the relatively heavy hand of enforcement will be used sparingly and only when all other information and outreach tools have been deployed.

I'll take this opportunity to thank the dedicated staff at the Energy, Mines and Resources Agriculture branch and all the dedicated staff at the Department of Environment for their significant work in guiding both the act to the finish line and the likely even larger task of drafting these very leading-edge and progressive regulations.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. I also do want to put a huge shout-out to everyone who got the regulations put together. The minister will remember that, when they tabled the bill, not many people knew they were tabling it and we had some huge issues with consultation. So, our chief veterinarian and the staff who went out and consulted and worked with everybody to get these regulations workable — I think they did a wonderful job, so I want to thank them.

This is my last question, and I'll turn it over to the NDP.

Another shout-out that I want to give is to all the campground staff — the people who work in our campgrounds — whether they are building safe places to sit or the wheelchair-accessible picnic tables, the ones who do the brush-cutting, and the ones who work in there all day long, the ones who have to do the enforcement on the way the rules of the campground are set up — they do a wonderful job.

I would imagine, if you are listening — I want to put a shout-out to Beth Martinson. She is the campground attendant out at Pine Lake, and hopefully, she's coming back this year. She had a bit of a setback medically, but she wants to come back and I hope she does. I remember when I was a minister meeting with them all at the very beginning of the season when they came to Whitehorse telling them what a good job they were doing.

One bee in my bonnet that I ask about every year — and this is probably one of the biggest things I get, and the minister will know what I'm talking about — is access roads like the Kusawa Lake Road, like the Watson Lake campground or Aishihik — there are so many of them out there. Most of the time, they are in pretty horrible condition. I've said before that they need regular maintenance, but sometimes the grading and maintenance, after a significant weather event or whatever, don't get done and there's only so much time. The maintenance is done by a different department: Highways and Public Works. I brought up with the minister that there might be other options so it can be done on a regular basis, maybe through the private sector. I think I asked this last year, but I'll just ask the minister again if the Minister of Environment has had a chance to sit down with the Minister of Highways and Public Works — they both control budgets and work on these budgets — to see if we can't get just a little bit more regular maintenance. I thank the staff who are here today, and that's my final question.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Perhaps some minor levity during this afternoon — yes, I find that the Minister of Highways and Public Works is difficult to contact, but I will make best efforts. I take the member opposite's point.

Briefly, specifically with respect to Kusawa, summer blading will start in June once the frost has gone and the road is not so soft. The Kusawa road receives one application of calcium. The Kusawa road also receives two bladings during the summer months and a possible third spot blading to touch up rough areas. We can try to apply the calcium in the middle of the week, but that does not always work because we blade and apply calcium at the same time to be as efficient as possible. We conduct this maintenance technique to one road at a time to ensure consistency. I'm advised that it takes six to seven days to complete the Kusawa road if everything goes to plan. That maintenance is in the current budget.

As the member opposite has had this opportunity, because I know that he is a strong proponent of the campgrounds and the beautiful campgrounds that exist in his neck of the woods — I had the pleasure to be out in the Congdon Creek area twice last summer — absolutely fantastic new infrastructure there. I also had the opportunity to have a tour of the Aishihik Road and I can certainly see that it is a challenging road. I was advised — I think by both HPW and Environment — that the original road construction wasn't a standard road. I was advised that, as you get close to the Aishihik campground, it's on a bit of a camber, and there are like pretty significant boulders — big rocks — that protrude in that road. I'm sure that there are challenges there.

In all seriousness, we will certainly be speaking to a combined team approach of the Department of Environment and the Department of Highways and Public Works. I know that Highways and Public Works has certainly sprung to attention when immediate work was required at the Klondike campground — the one as you come into Dawson — which last year suffered from two floods, I believe. It was almost like a mini tornado — but a significant wind event that included a washout of the access to the campground. I know that Highways and Public Works, the Department of Environment,

and likely other Dawson contractors worked — in teamwork there — to ensure that the Klondike campground could be operational as soon as possible.

I was also down in Watson Lake maybe the summer before and saw that there were potential flooding issues in Watson Lake as well. So, we're very alive to the issue that at Kusawa, Aishihik, Klondike, and other locations, there are significant concerns. I am just looking at correspondence that was sent to the Member for Kluane with respect to the Ethel Lake campground. That's from last summer. Highways and Public Works installed culverts and create ditches along the highway to protect the roadbed and surface from further erosion.

As I indicated, I am absolutely keen to keep the challenging access roads to Yukon campgrounds in the best condition possible, recognizing that, with respect to secondary roads that I am familiar with — like the Annie Lake Road, which can sometimes be one of the best roads in the Yukon and sometimes it can be very challenging — it can really just be based on certain weather events and the freeze-thaw cycles. I recognize that a good grading for a number of these accesses to campgrounds can certainly improve access rather quickly.

Just briefly in the brief time that I have left, for Yukoners, I just wanted to emphasize that since 2017, the Government of Yukon has invested in the development of 112 campsites across the territory. This includes 65 drive-in sites and 47 walk-in sites. They are broken down as: 63 sites at Congdon Creek, six sites at Five Mile Lake, eight sites at Little Salmon, 15 sites at Marsh Lake, seven sites at Grizzly Lake, three sites at Twin Lakes, and four sites at Wolf Creek. We have also added six more sites to Conrad.

As well, it is quite exciting that over the last three years — and I know that there is a strong budget for this year as well with respect to infrastructure improvements. We have completed multiple infrastructure projects to enhance Yukon campgrounds, including new playground equipment at Congdon Creek, Five Mile, Fox Lake, Marsh Lake, and Pine Lake.

This was really quite a large project — pleasantly surprised that it has been largely actualized. So, there was boat launch remediation and boat launch replacement at Aishihik, Dezadeash, Ethel Lake, Frenchman Lake, Nunatuk, Pine Lake, Twin Lakes, Otter Falls, Tagish bridge, Watson Lake, and Wolf Creek. Absolutely a shout-out to Environment staff and private contractors who made that happen. As well, just briefly, a new dock at Pine Lake, Squanga Lake, and Twin Lakes campgrounds and new trails at Twin Lakes and Conrad and trail improvements in the Tombstone Territorial Park.

The Government of Yukon will continue to work with our partners, including Yukon First Nations, to expand and enhance camping opportunities in the territory.

So, once again, thanks so much for all the dedicated tradespeople and teams who made this all possible.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the officials for being here and the ones listening on the phone; I really appreciate it. I am going to keep my questions pretty short today, so I am hoping that we can have kind of a quick back-and-forth to go through a couple of questions before we move on to other departments.

I want to ask about the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. I am looking at page 84.1 of the agreement, and it is about species at risk legislation. One of the objectives is to develop species at risk legislation.

This is in schedule A4-1, which lays out the Yukon's commitments to this agreement. It says, "Drafting instructions for Yukon species at risk legislation grounded in Indigenous support and understanding (with monitoring data that speaks to the cumulative effects framework and land use planning)" is the result that is expected, and Cabinet approval for those drafting instructions is supposed to be sought in fiscal year 2023-24, which wrapped up about a month ago.

I am wondering if Cabinet has given approval for those drafting instructions.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Government of Yukon has a responsibility and commitment to work together with Indigenous partners to protect our lands, waters, fish, and wildlife for generations to come. Under the nature agreement, the Indigenous-led conservation capacity fund has been developed to support Indigenous partners to lead in advancing their conservation interests. This will support knowledge gathering and data sharing and advance collaboration on conservation in the Yukon.

In January, a call for expressions of interest went out to Yukon First Nations and other transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to access this fund. We are currently working to establish a two-year funding agreement with the Council of Yukon First Nations to support capacity toward an Indigenous lens on management approaches, particularly with respect to species at risk.

Over the next two years, the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* will increase the Yukon's capacity to work collaboratively with other parties on a variety of species at risk matters. This includes, as the member opposite indicated, the potential to develop species at risk legislation in the Yukon and beginning to work on species at risk conservation with our partners in wildlife management, including Yukon First Nations, the Inuvialuit, and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, renewable resources councils, the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope), interest groups, and other government organizations.

The Government of Yukon actively works with Environment and Climate Change Canada on technical reviews, recovery strategies, and management plans for national species at risk that occur in the Yukon. The Yukon has an opportunity to benefit from lessons learned across Canada and the work to prevent the endangerment of species. Under the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, funding will support further surveying and monitoring of species at risk in the Yukon. Our efforts to ensure viable populations for species such as wood bison, woodland caribou, and grizzly bear are guided by management plans co-developed with Yukon First Nations, the Inuvialuit, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and, as indicated, the Wildlife Management Advisory Council (North Slope). While we explore potential approaches to

species at risk legislation in the Yukon, vulnerable populations are managed through our existing wildlife management tools.

The short answer with respect to the first question is that drafting instructions have not yet been provided, as we are still in the process of having detailed discussions with the various stakeholders, which I have indicated in my response, but certainly heartened by the fact that we have the additional resources that have been provided by the federal government to move this file forward. The member opposite has heard from me over the course of a number of sessions with respect to the protection that does exist under federal legislation, but I certainly understand the member opposite's concern or advocacy that ultimately there ought to be a Yukon species at risk act. One moment, please.

Yes, I think I will leave it at that for now.

MLA Tredger: So, two questions, and they are very specific questions, and that is really all I am looking for right now.

When does the minister expect to get Cabinet approval for those drafting instructions, and will the fact that this commitment has not been met affect the \$235,000 from Canada for that commitment in the current year?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: If the member opposite could just finish the last sentence of her question, which I don't think I quite heard.

MLA Tredger: It's their question. Yes. So, in schedule A4-1, it says that there is \$235,000 coming from Canada to complete this commitment in 2024-25. I am wondering, since the precursor step of Cabinet approval for drafting instructions was not fulfilled in time according to the schedule in this document, whether that will affect that \$235,000 that Canada is providing for the work.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will keep it short, subject to any follow-up questions. This is what I have from my officials with respect to the specific question, but we will continue to work with all the partners, which I have indicated in my prior response, to discuss approaches to managing species at risk before going to Cabinet. No, not meeting the schedule will not affect the funding.

We will first be reaching out, as indicated, to our First Nation partners to explore the development of species at risk management tools. Funding from the nature agreement, I am advised, is flexible and can and will be utilized until March 2026.

MLA Tredger: Thank you for that answer, and I will follow up again at the next Sitting to see how that is going.

I also wanted to ask — under schedule A4-2, one of the objectives is to complete a memorandum of understanding between Environment and Climate Change Canada and Yukon clarifying roles under section 79 of the *Species at Risk Act*. The date for that is March 2024, and the result is a signed MOU. I am wondering if that MOU has been signed.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised that there are active conversations with ECCC — the Department of Environment and Climate Change Canada — with respect to the referenced MOU in section 79 of the agreement. Work is progressing well,

but the MOU has not yet been signed. The MOU is expected to be completed in this calendar year.

MLA Tredger: I am going to turn now to the 2022 *Our Clean Future* annual report. I want to start by asking about action H11, which is to: “Assess options to provide financial support for actions to improve the climate resiliency of homes and buildings by 2023”, and this action is marked as “Complete”.

I was wondering what was found from that assessment and if there is a plan to provide some of that financial support.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Fires, floods, and permafrost thaw are already expected to continue impacting our infrastructure. In an effort to improve the climate resilience of existing homes and buildings, a research paper evaluating options for a program to provide financial support to homeowners for enhancing their resilience against fire, flooding, and permafrost thaw has been completed. I am advised that a contract has been completed. We are now evaluating options for a program to provide financial support to homeowners for enhancing their resilience against fire, flooding, and permafrost thaw. Next steps on feasibility and implementation are being explored.

I can certainly get more details, but I am also advised that this might be an EMR lead with respect to identifying appropriate funds for this program, but as a slight tangent, of course, with respect to our infrastructure, we are already in the process — through a lot of departments but certainly HPW — of letting contracts to improve the resilience of infrastructure. That is primarily within our 5,000-kilometre road network, our culverts, our bridges, and roads that have been impacted by permanent permafrost.

As we heard in Question Period today, there has been an 80-year challenge with respect to trying to keep the road between Burwash Landing and Beaver Creek in serviceable condition — also known as Shakwak.

That is obviously an ongoing issue, but it has been exacerbated by more pronounced freeze-thaw cycles. We have been fortunate enough to have started the process of funding being made available by the State of Alaska, but the State of Alaska is not the only level of government that is providing funding in that area.

That is certainly exciting news in that area of the Yukon where approximately just over \$42 million, based on today's exchange rate, has been made available from the Alaska state-wide transportation improvement fund in order to make that part of the Yukon's highway infrastructure more resilient and can combat the challenges of climate change and infrastructure degrading.

With respect to H11, the background work has been completed, and I believe that, generally speaking, EMR would be the lead for next steps on feasibility and implementation.

MLA Tredger: It is remarkable to me how often I ask about an item in *Our Clean Future* that's listed with Environment as the lead and it turns out that EMR is the lead. It's a weird trend and I don't know exactly what to make of it.

The minister and I have actually discussed this H11 at the *Our Clean Future* implementation meetings, and in the report from that — this is the report from the fall of 2023 report of the

joint implementation committee — it says, about H11, that a contractor is going to provide a detailed analysis regarding the design of a climate resiliency program for homeowners in the Yukon, set to be completed by January 2024. I'm assuming that this is the report that the minister said that he has now.

I guess I'm wondering: If he already has detailed analysis of the design of the program, what still needs to be done, and how long is that going to take?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: With respect to the *Our Clean Future* actions generally, in 2022, the Government of Yukon implemented significant climate actions, including implementing a better building program to offer affordable financing for energy retrofits on Yukoners' homes and buildings. Since 2020, the Government of Yukon has completed 62 *Our Clean Future* actions; 113 are in progress or ongoing, and three have not been started.

The Government of Yukon continues to consider innovative solutions to climate change while working with others to accelerate our emissions reductions. As I indicated, we have worked with an independent consultant to provide objective modelling and analysis of our climate actions to learn more about the steps needed to further reduce our emissions. Last December, I announced 42 new actions to be included in *Our Clean Future* that span seven key areas, including transportation, homes and buildings, energy, people and the environment, communities, and innovation and leadership. These new actions will strengthen our efforts on two key fronts: helping us to adapt and build our resilience to climate change impacts and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. I look forward to seeing these actions implemented to help us reach the goals committed to in *Our Clean Future*.

With respect to the specific OCF action, further research and coordination must be taken to determine how best to implement the program. We don't yet have an expected timeline on the program, but we look forward to implementing it alongside other programs designed to deliver low-carbon and resilient homes for Yukoners. I am advised that discussions are ongoing with Environment and Climate Change Canada with respect to that potential source of funding. Next steps include internal discussions and equity considerations, continuing to develop programs and administrative processes, and identifying funding for programs and approval for changes in authority.

Just briefly, building a green economy will help Yukoners take care of the natural environment. It also supports long-term jobs and economic activity. A green economy supports traditional and cultural activities and strong mental and physical well-being. We aim to support a green economy by supporting community-led energy projects, providing opportunities for people to capitalize on the transition to renewable energy, and adapting to the impacts of climate change.

Where we're at — in 2022, the Yukon was ranked sixth in Canada for emissions per person — and the most recent reporting year, as the member opposite has heard, in emissions per capita, per GDP, it was 18.8 percent, and emissions per capita was down to 13.6 percent compared to 2010. That's the

issue of — still representing a huge challenge, but obviously, the Yukon has had significant country-leading growth between 2016 and 2024. In consequence of that, notwithstanding — the commitment is for the absolute reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. When you decouple your emissions from population and GDP growth, that's a significant step forward. I know that my colleague the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources has referenced that previously.

So, I think I'll leave it at that.

MLA Tredger: That was four and a half minutes to find out that there is not a timeline. I'm going to move on and I do want to ask about some of the new actions in *Our Clean Future*.

Before I do that, I'm going to go back. I want to talk about wetlands, and there are both old and new actions that pertain to that. I'm going to just quote from the 2022 report from the *Our Clean Future* joint implementation committee about action P1, which is to: "Establish a standardized method to determine the health status of wetland ecosystems and complete a pilot study to measure the baseline conditions of various reference wetlands by 2022 to better understand future changes." The comment on that, from that meeting with the joint implementation committee, was that there is work underway to create a pilot study, including wetlands mapping and developing an understanding of how much carbon is released if peat is disturbed and then returned. Work on this pilot study is expected to be complete this year.

The *Our Clean Future* 2022 report did indicate that P1 is finished, so I'm wondering if there is updated information on how much carbon is released if peat is disturbed and then returned. I understand that the outcome of that study was supposed to be new wetland indicators for the Yukon that are supposed to be released in the state of the environment 2024, and I'm wondering if those are on track to be released in the state of the environment 2024.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have a lot of information about wetlands, but I will try to be somewhat succinct here. There are two separate projects. P1 is indeed complete, and I will provide some detail on that. The wetland pilot study has been completed and the report is being finalized. L21 is to complete an assessment of wetland soil carbon reserves within priority watersheds by 2021. As indicated, the Yukon wetlands health pilot study has been completed. We are looking to finalize a report.

Next underway is a project looking at carbon release. For that, we are partnering with the Wildlife Conservation Society. We acknowledge the importance of being responsive to new information as we continue to build our knowledge and improve our understanding of the Yukon's wetlands, including recognizing and respecting traditional, local, and scientific knowledge. We are preparing to launch a three-year wetland research project this summer with the Wildlife Conservation Society — WCS. The research looks at the effects of placer mining and reclamation activities on peat land, greenhouse gas emissions, and removals — also known as "fluxes" — in the Yukon.

We will continue to engage with other governments, departments, agencies, regulatory bodies, and external partners

to discuss specific aspects of wetland stewardship policy implementation.

With respect to P1, the study was completed this year. We are now considering the implications of the study. In addition, the results were presented at a workshop held earlier this year with YG and the Water Board. Other stakeholder discussions are planned for the coming months.

I have a lot of information about wetlands here, but perhaps — which is quite exciting, and I know that the member opposite has asked about this — but creating a broad-scale, territory-wide wetland inventory — in 2023-24, year 1 of the work, we have completed work on a tool for evaluating map accuracy, evaluation and methodologies for predictive mapping, and the compilation of existing wetland field information. We are also exploring options to collaborate with Environment and Climate Change Canada to advance territory-wide wetland mapping. We should have a working draft wetland map completed by 2024, but it will require further refinement before the map is suitable for wider use. So, that is certainly exciting news.

As indicated, there is a lot of information here, but I certainly understand the — anyway, I will leave it at that for now.

MLA Tredger: That is exciting to hear about the territory-wide wetland map. I imagine that has been a great deal of work by a lot of people, and I want to say congratulations and thank you to them.

I am concerned because I am reading from the public report on the *Our Clean Future* implementation committee — this is the July 2022 update — and it says — quote: "The Yukon government has shared with the committee that work is underway to create a pilot study including wetlands mapping and developing an understanding of how much carbon is released if peat is disturbed and then returned. Work on this pilot study is expected to be complete this year."

That is under the section "Action P1".

It sounds to me like action P1 never was actually about carbon; it was about wetlands mapping. I'm wondering if the minister can share why he provided inaccurate information to that implementation committee.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have absolutely zero intention of providing any inaccurate information. Certainly, if there is clarification that is required, I will certainly provide that clarification. I would have provided the information that was available to me at the time.

Just to be somewhat clear on this, action P1 is to establish a standardized method to determine the health status of wetland ecosystems and to complete a pilot study to measure the baseline conditions of various reference wetlands by 2022 to better understand future changes. Work on this action led to the development of L21, which was also informed by the CPAWS report, which, as I recall, was the question about the disturbance of mining.

We acknowledge the importance of being responsive to new information as we continue to build our knowledge and improve our understanding of Yukon's wetlands, including recognizing and respecting traditional, local, and scientific knowledge. As I indicated previously, we are preparing to

launch a three-year wetland research project this summer with the Wildlife Conservation Society. We remain committed to addressing wetlands stewardship and protection within land use planning discussions and project reviews.

The Government of Yukon committed \$1.68 million over two fiscal years — 2023-24 to 2024-25 — for the departments of Environment and Energy, Mines and Resources to begin jointly implementing the wetland stewardship policy. As indicated, the L21 action is to complete an assessment of wetland soil carbon reserves within priority watersheds by 2027. This action was announced in December of 2023, and work is underway to confirm project details for this action.

Certainly, I — and I believe the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources — have met with CPAWS. Intact landscapes, such as wetlands, forests, and grasslands, are some of nature's best carbon sinks, which we agree, meaning that they have the ability to store large amounts of carbon.

These intact landscapes could be a very effective tool in Canada's efforts to reduce its carbon footprint. They play a key role in regulating greenhouse gases and buffering the impacts of climate change. Peat lands such as fens, bogs, and swamps are especially efficient carbon stores due to the high amount of organic soil found within. That is from the CPAWS report, which we were privy to.

Once again, I can sort of review the timing of the messaging and the timing of our meetings, but when joint implementation meetings are had, we certainly have every intention of providing the most up-to-date information that is available to me or — I'm not speaking for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources — to him at the time.

As for the wetland stewardship policy, we are working to complete this within the five-year timeline. We are advancing, as indicated, territory-wide mapping, which is an essential information source for evaluating carbon reserves in the specific watersheds in the Yukon, which, of course, is a very positive development.

MLA Tredger: Regarding L21, which I understand is being done in conjunction with the Wildlife Conservation Society, has an MOU or a transfer payment agreement been signed with them?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised that the department has signed a TPA quite recently with Wildlife Conservation Society Canada to advance our understanding of carbon in our wetlands and how it might be impacted by disturbance. As I indicated, this information will feed into L21 to quantify carbon reserves in Yukon wetlands. Wildlife Conservation Society Canada will, of course, engage with impacted First Nations, with the mining industry, and with other interested parties as well. It is a three-year transfer payment agreement that has recently been signed with the Wildlife Conservation Society Canada.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I am going to switch gears a little bit now. I want to ask about the bison management plan. The consultation, I understand, has been done and so I am wondering where the process is at now and what the next steps to having a plan are.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Yukon bison technical team reviewed and provided updates to the 2012 bison management

plan for the Aishihik herd. We have completed our consultations with affected First Nations on the updated bison plan, which will provide management direction into the future, and expect to release the new conservation and action plan for the Aishihik bison — also known as, trivia question for this afternoon, Bison bison — population this spring.

The Aishihik bison herd is a popular source of wild meat for many Yukoners, and we continue to work with our partners to manage this herd while contributing to the national recovery efforts of the species. In order to meet the needs of Yukoners while ensuring the sustainability of the herd, the harvest management approach for bison in the Yukon relies on adaptive management measures to adjust harvest as needed.

I look forward to receiving that information shortly and will proceed with a recommendation as to how to proceed. I'm not going to speculate on this, but my recollection with respect to my general briefings is that the herd remains quite healthy. But, of course, the Yukon bison technical team will have some specific recommendations as to how harvest ought to be managed going forward.

Just to confirm, the plan is now complete and undergoing final review by the department. The department also consulted on the plan from September 2023 to January 2024 with Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Kluane First Nation, and White River First Nation. We should have more on this.

The Aishihik bison technical team, which includes all government and organizations with a role in bison management, have collaboratively drafted a new conservation and action plan for the Aishihik wood bison herd in southwestern Yukon. The plan provides a long-term vision for ecological and cultural restoration of bison to the land in balance with other species.

The new management plan seeks a better balance between bison control and harvest and managing the impacts of bison hunting on people, other wildlife, and the land. It also provides interim bison harvest guidelines. As I indicated, I look forward to receiving advice on this topic in the near future.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that.

I wanted to ask about avian flu and how many cases have been confirmed in the Yukon and if there have been any confirmed cases in non-bird species.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: A wide range of topics today, which is great.

The Government of Yukon is aware of the cases of the highly pathogenic avian influenza detected in dairy cows in the United States. The Canada Food Inspection Agency is monitoring the situation closely in coordination with the chief veterinary officers in provinces and territories as well as the Canadian livestock industry.

While there are ongoing cases of avian influenza in Canadian and US poultry farms, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has not detected the virus in Canadian cattle. The agency has advised that veterinarians and farmers remain vigilant and report any suspected cases to local veterinary authorities. In April of this year, the Government of Yukon sent a letter to stakeholders in the Yukon agricultural community to

inform them of clinical signs of avian influenza in cattle, reminding them of the importance of bio-security principles and encouraging them to avoid bringing new cattle into the Yukon herd at this time.

It will also be noted that pasteurization will destroy all viruses in milk or milk products and that all dairy products should be pasteurized before being consumed by people or animals.

Clinical signs of avian influenza in cattle included drop in milk production and thick colostrum-like milk, decreased feed consumption, loose feces, dehydration, depression, fever, general illness, and cows not coming back into milk production from illness.

Suspected cases of influenza in any animal in the Yukon are reportable to the Department of Environment's animal health unit by e-mail at animalhealth@yukon.ca or by phone at 867-667-5600. Farmers can also get veterinary advice for their livestock through the livestock veterinary service program by contacting the Yukon's animal health unit. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency is monitoring the Canadian situation closely. The Government of Yukon's animal health unit will continue to work closely with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency to ensure that guidance is updated regularly as the situation evolves.

So far in 2024, there have been zero detected cases of avian influenza in any species in the Yukon.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that; that was really interesting, and among other things, I did not know that cows could get depressed and now I know, so that is cool.

That wraps up my questions for today, so thank you very much to the minister and to all his staff. I know that there are a lot of people who work to make these exchanges happen, so I really appreciate it, and I look forward to talking again in the fall.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment?

Seeing none, we will proceed to line-by-line.

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$55,615,000 agreed to
On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$6,613,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$62,228,000 agreed to

Department of Environment agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Committee of the Whole will now come to order.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 15, Department of Health and Social Services, in Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Health and Social Services

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much to Deputy Minister Tiffany Boyd and Assistant Deputy Minister Paul Payne, who have joined me here this afternoon. I look forward to answering questions. I do have some opening remarks with respect to being here this afternoon to speak to the 2024-25 main estimates for the Department of Health and Social Services. I would like to start today by thanking the deputy minister, the assistant deputy minister, and their teams for developing this budget, which is designed to support the health and well-being of Yukoners and staff now and into the future.

I'm very pleased to share this update regarding the Department of Health and Social Services budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year and to discuss the important steps that we are taking to support Yukoners. I look forward to questions. If we don't currently have the answer, we will endeavour to provide that in a timely manner, but I think we have been quite successful in providing answers on the spot.

Before we start, I would like to take the opportunity to recognize everyone at the Department of Health and Social Services. Our dedicated staff go above and beyond to support the health and well-being of Yukoners, and they have particularly done so in the last year.

In the three years since I have been in this position, our dedicated staff certainly are the core of the work that comes before this Legislative Assembly and, perhaps more importantly, the core of the services provided to Yukoners. We owe our gratitude to all of our front-line health and social care providers and our service-oriented staff as well, from the social supports and the Family and Children's Services team to Continuing Care, Mental Wellness and Substance Use services, to our nurses, our care providers, our custodial teams and policy staff — those are just to name a few. I am very pleased to take the opportunity to thank them.

I spoke with the media yesterday, and I spoke at that time about being acutely aware that, when I have the honour to stand in this Legislative Assembly and represent the people who stand behind me, I am the person here; I am the person, for instance, with the health authority bill who is the mover of the motions, the person who is happy to address the questions and provide the debate in this Legislative Assembly. During that time and every minute of that time, I am acutely aware of the hundreds of people who stand behind me.

In relation to a bill or to the main estimates and the budget that will support Health and Social Services and the activities and the services provided to Yukoners over the next fiscal year, I am acutely aware of standing in front of thousands of people who do this work and do it every day on behalf of the benefit of Yukoners.

As we rise to meet the challenges and the opportunities ahead of us, I would also like to express thanks to all of our health and social system partners for all that they do to support Yukoners.

I will focus now on the budget. The 2024-25 operation and maintenance budget for the Department of Health and Social Services is \$594.37 million. This represents a 16.1-percent increase over the 2023-24 main estimates.

We are presenting a capital estimate of \$9.39 million for the department, which is an increase of 41.1 percent compared to the previous fiscal year. This budget reflects our commitment to continuing to work toward a health and social system that Yukoners deserve today and for many years to come.

Some of the work includes addressing health human resources challenges, improving access to health care services, investing in health infrastructure, and enhancing social services. In 2024-25, there are 1,616.4 full-time equivalent positions in the department. This represents an overall increase of 43 FTEs, or full-time equivalents, compared to what was 1,573.4 FTEs, which we had in 2023-24. This year's FTE count reflects increases that will support Yukoners in areas including: the substance use health emergency, six positions; supervised consumption site, 3.5 positions; the walk-in clinic, eight positions; managed alcohol program, 5.5 positions; *Putting People First* and health system transformation and health human resources will have 22.5 positions; congenital anomalies surveillance is one person; and Canadian Partnerships Against Cancer is two positions.

With respect to the initiatives that we are presenting through this budget, the increase of \$82.37 million in operation and maintenance funding enables the department to develop and deliver on key initiatives that meet the needs of Yukoners. I am pleased to highlight some of those now.

Insured health services has been provided an increase of \$29 million to continue to respond to the growth in the delivery of our legislated programming. This includes funding for out-of-territory hospital claims, physician claims, the pharmacare program, medical travel, and the collaborative care program. This fiscal year, an additional \$550,000 will support medical travel subsidy increases to mitigate the impact of cost barriers in accessing care. There is also an increase of \$4.35 million to advance support for Yukon First Nations in the development

and implementation of land-based mental health and substance use treatment initiatives through the land-based healing funding program announced last November. The land-based healing funding program encompasses a total of \$9 million in funding over three years. The funding is provided to Yukon First Nation governments and Yukon First Nation-led organizations for eligible projects.

I am also pleased to share that there is an increase of \$1.27 million for the launch of the managed alcohol program, set to begin taking patients this spring. This program aims to reduce harms related to alcohol use among people living with severe treatment-resistant alcohol use disorder. We continue to recognize the health risks associated with alcohol use and are deploying a variety of public awareness strategies to promote responsible alcohol use to keep all Yukoners safe and healthy.

We have also provided \$5.07 million for the completion of the mental wellness unit at the Whitehorse General Hospital. This new unit will provide 12 additional beds for those who need them.

I am really happy to share that there has been an allocation of \$750,000 in capital funding to redesign the courtyard at Whistle Bend Place. This exciting project will aim to make the outdoor space more accessible and increase the level of care and quality of life for all residents but with particular emphasis on those living with moderate to advanced stages of dementia. Upgrades will include handrails, raised garden beds, and functional seating areas — all to make their lives more pleasant.

The *Putting People First* report recommendation 1.2 raises the establishment of an arm's-length health authority to improve the delivery of health and social services to Yukoners. This is referred to as Shāw Kwā'ą/Health and Wellness Yukon/Santé et mieux-être Yukon. We have had a lot of discussion about that in this Legislative Assembly this Sitting.

The increase of \$8.56 million is dedicated to advancing the work to stand up Shāw Kwā'ą. Working in partnership with Yukon First Nations and health service providers, the health authority will serve as a catalyst for the transformation of the Yukon's health care system.

This spring, we have taken the important step of tabling the framework legislation enabling the development of the health authority. This work is in its early stages. We are committed to working with the Health and Social Services workforce, health system partners, Yukon First Nations, and other partners as we move toward the development and operationalization of a health authority.

I certainly was pleased that Bill No. 38 passed the Legislative Assembly yesterday but was very disappointed that it did not have unanimous consent. It is unfortunate for Yukoners that the Yukon Party could not see its way clear to supporting the partnerships that were evidenced by Bill No. 38 and were debated here in this Legislative Assembly. The work that has preceded the Bill No. 38 — *Health Authority Act* — legislation coming here is extraordinary and it is designed to have a health authority that is person-centred, is integrated, and is built with our partners across the territory with a key value being to remove racism and discrimination in the health care

system — all extremely important values and a focus for Yukoners as we go forward.

Yukon is experiencing the effects of a local, national, and global shortage of health care providers like all jurisdictions in the country. Health human resources challenges continue to be a pressure on the Yukon's health and social care system. We are working collaboratively with other levels of government, partners, and stakeholders from across the sector to address these challenges in the short, medium, and long term.

Back in December 2023, the *Health Human Resources Strategy* was published with emphasis on five key pillars: retain, recruit, plan, innovate, and learn. It's an extraordinary document developed by an extraordinary partnership here in the territory of decision-makers, individuals, and organizations that can truly affect our health human resources going forward.

To support the work being done to advance the strategy, we have budgeted \$2.83 million to enhance the recruitment and retention of health care professionals across the Yukon. This funding is spread across key initiatives as follows: \$1.48 million to support hiring additional human resources; \$711,000 to support work with Yukon University to develop a medical office assistant diploma program, a social worker degree program, and a licensed practical nurse to registered nurse building program — all very exciting — and \$440,000 for travel and health professional development, including a pan-territorial health conference and out-of-territory educational opportunities. This funding represents a part of the significant work being undertaken by our government and health system partners in response to the health human resources challenges that we are experiencing today.

We also recognize our partnership with the Yukon Medical Association and all the work that they do. We have budgeted an increase of \$120,000 to continue supporting the physician recruiter position. This increase will help ensure Yukoners' timely access to primary health care services and foster a strong and healthy community of physicians. In working collaboratively with First Nation governments in the territory, other levels of government, and non-governmental organizations, we believe that the Yukon can become one of the most desirable places for health human resources staff in Canada.

Since 2018-19, the Yukon hospital services O&M budget has increased by roughly 62 percent. We are pleased to continue building our partnership with the hospital and working with them to meet core funding needs and to introduce new programs and services. We applaud the hard work of everyone at Yukon hospitals as they connect Yukoners with timely, culturally safe, and excellent care. This fiscal year, we have provided an additional \$15.35 million for Yukon hospital services operation and maintenance budget. In addition to working closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to address our shared priorities and meet funding needs, we are also exploring new ways to support Yukoners.

We recognize that the Yukon Hospital Corporation has been facing pressures related to staffing constraints, increased growth, and demand for care, such as medical imaging, chemotherapy, and surgical services. We will continue to work

with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to identify funding needs and ensure that we're providing the services and supports that Yukoners need to access safe and excellent hospital care.

I want to take the opportunity to reiterate my gratitude to all members of the department and all of our health and social care system partners for their ongoing commitment to serving Yukoners. While we continue to experience challenges, we are also meeting these challenges head on and have a budget that enables us to not only expand on existing services but also to set the groundwork for an innovative, person-centred health and wellness system with the introduction of legislation to support Health and Wellness Yukon.

The passing of Bill No. 38 yesterday in this Legislative Assembly is monumental and will take us on a road of providing better enhanced services for Yukoners. Our government is guided by the priorities and the voices of Yukoners. Whether it's improving access to care, making life more affordable, or supporting the staff who make services possible, we are putting people first. We are putting Yukoners first.

I look forward to answering any questions about this particular budget for Health and Social Services for the fiscal year of 2024-25.

Mr. Cathers: During the Liberal government's first term in office, the Yukon Hospital Corporation presented a surgical services plan to the government. That plan was aimed at expanding operating room capacity and significantly increasing the number of surgeries done at Whitehorse General Hospital. The minister should recall this from her briefing books previously.

Can the minister begin by confirming what year the government received that plan from the hospital? Was it in 2017 or 2018?

Next, on the same topic, during the 2021 election campaign, local media reported that the president of the Yukon Medical Association said: "... there's an 'urgent need' to upgrade the surgical services at the Whitehorse General Hospital. ... he said the surgical services area was built in 1996. Right now, there's an insufficient number of operating rooms, day care spaces, recovery room beds and staff facilities for the current population. 'The population is growing and our operating rooms have not,' he said. Warshawski said the hospital also needs the ability to do more surgeries in Yukon so it doesn't have to send people to B.C. for procedures that could be safely and effectively done in territory."

Just for the reference of Hansard, that is from a CBC article from April 2021.

So, the YMA president called it an "urgent need" to upgrade the surgical services area. It is more than three years after he made those remarks. What has the government done regarding that, if anything?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: With respect to surgical services planning, certainly there is no question that surgical services have increased. Prior to 2017, there was no orthopaedic surgical program available here in the territory. It is something that we introduced and it is something that has grown steadily, providing a much-needed service for Yukoners.

Back in 2012, the Yukon Hospital Corporation developed and followed a strategic master plan, and that plan included some expansions and improvements to its surgical services facilities, so there were discussions about it as far back as 2012. The Department of Health and Social Services is working on health infrastructure planning for the entire health system, including but not limited to the Whitehorse General Hospital. It is incredibly important as we consider the transformation of the health system that infrastructure planning be a part of that.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation completed a needs assessment with the support of a physician consultant and is taking steps with the Yukon government to support and expand surgical services capacity to meet the growing needs in the territory. We are also keenly aware of the new mental wellness unit and the impact on the hospital infrastructure for that, and it is anticipated to be operational in the fall of 2024.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation delivered a report on the comprehensive plan to the Department of Health and Social Services in January 2023. I think that is what the member opposite is asking about. The comprehensive plan is to expand services. Its recommendation is to expand services in priority order to meet current and future service needs. It speaks about improving efficiency in service delivery and patient safety and to ensure placement of expanded services — that they do not hinder future development of other services.

The plan identified capital development needs through to 2035, including a new emergency department and expanded surgical services wing. Surgical services planning includes a needs assessment and greater orthopaedic surgical capacity as a construction business case. So, that is all information that has been brought together and will be reviewed as we continue our work on an infrastructure review of the health services that are needed. The intention of attracting a most suitable vendor who can provide a comprehensive analysis is something that is being looked at with respect to phase 1 of that opportunity to — hang on one second. I shouldn't touch computers; they don't really like me.

The Yukon population, of course, is growing and our opportunity is to make sure that we are looking forward to services and what those might look like in the future. It is the responsibility of Health and Social Services to be working in consultation with the Hospital Corporation and to develop a request for proposal for a health system infrastructure plan. That will be done in no less than three phases.

I don't think the question is asking about that, but certainly it is work that the Minister of Finance spoke about in the introduction to this budget this year and it is work that will be undertaken, as I said, in the phased-in approach. We will look for expertise to provide us with that sort of work and information going forward so that we can properly assess, in the system entirety, how to best respond to the growing needs of health infrastructure in the territory.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate the minister indicating that there is a 2023 plan that had been developed. I would appreciate it if she could share a copy of that so that we can see that infrastructure plan done for the needs of the hospital.

But the surgical services plan that I was referring to is not the one from 2023 — nor the needs assessment from 2012 to which she referred. This is something that was presented to the government during the first term. Again, I'm not 100-percent certain whether it was 2017 or 2018, but that plan had been developed and referenced by the Yukon Medical Association in a CBC article from April 5, 2021 entitled "Yukon doctors lay out list of priorities ahead of territorial election". I made reference to specific quotes from that, including the president at the time indicating that there was — quote: "... an 'urgent need' to upgrade the surgical services at Whitehorse General Hospital."

The minister's own 2021 Fall Sitting binder confirms the existence of that plan presented to them in their first term, stating after a part — actually, I will just read a couple of brief excerpts here: "The Yukon Hospital Corporation has started planning for the future of Surgical Services at Whitehorse General Hospital, to bring their services in line with modern surgical services standards." "A long-term surgical services plan has been developed." It then goes on to talk about the plan itself. It says: "This plan includes improvements to meet modern clinical standards as well as the future operating model, including service needs and volumes, staffing models, equipment, and physical space."

It does sound like very little, if anything, has been done regarding that plan. What is concerning is that the minister seems to have forgotten that it existed at all, despite it being referenced in the briefing binder that she had the first year. Again, if she isn't able to provide that information here today, perhaps she can come back with a legislative return for the end of the Sitting. But the question is — the surgical services plan referred to by the then-president of the YMA in a CBC article and referred to in the minister's own 2021 session binder confirms the existence of this plan that was presented by the hospital to the government sometime in their first term. Will the minister commit to finding that plan, sharing a copy of it with us, and also, importantly here today, letting us know what year that plan was presented to the Liberal government by the Yukon Hospital Corporation?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. We do not have a copy of that plan — if that is what it is called. I certainly appreciate the references to it in the CBC article. We will look at that. I can't say what year at this point because I don't have it in front of me. We will look into that. There is some speculation — which I don't want to make any further — on this side that the 2023 plan might have been an updated version of that, but I think suffice it to say that conversations about health infrastructure are incredibly important with the health system transformation. In addition to that, they are an important part of the work that we do and will continue to do with the Yukon Hospital Corporation and ultimately, of course, for the benefit of Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I acknowledge that the minister indicated that she doesn't have the information right now and what year that was presented. I would appreciate it if she could get back to me with that, as well as a copy of both the current 2023 plan

and the 2017 — I believe it was 2017, or it might have been 2018 — plan presented by the hospital.

I am going to move on to a couple of other areas since time is short here in this Sitting. In the area of hospital funding, I want to ask a few questions about specific pressures in program areas. A briefing note for the minister last year said that the hospital was funded for only 3,200 surgeries in 2022-23 but did 3,841 — 641 more surgeries than it was funded for. The minister herself confirmed that number of 3,841 in Hansard on March 27 during debate on the supplementary estimates. At the time, she also said that 4,000 surgeries were expected to be completed in the fiscal year that just wrapped up.

My question in that area is: How many surgeries are planned for this year, and how many surgeries is the government funding for the hospital covering this fiscal year, recognizing where it was previously?

The next specific question for the hospital funding is — we understand from officials that the O&M funding for the mental wellness unit is not included in the budget because it had yet to be approved by Management Board and we would be seeing that at some point this year for the expected fall opening of that. Can the minister please tell me what the current cost estimate for operating the mental wellness unit is for this fiscal year and what the annual anticipated cost for operating that facility is?

Last but not least, during debate on the supplementary estimates, I asked the minister a few questions about wait times and whether services, including mammography, CT, X-ray, and ultrasound, had been restored to previous levels. In November, the CEO told us that they were anticipating an increase to the mammography wait time — up to 35 months. On March 27 during debate on the supplementary estimates, I asked the minister about mammography wait times and specifically the number of exams being done per week. As I noted at the time, we understand from information given to us in November that the capacity is 120 exams per week. The minister at the time said — quote: "... we are trying to find out the per-week number. If we can't do it today, we will get back."

My final question there is if she could provide me with that information now on the number of mammography exams being completed per week at the hospital.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the questions. The projected surgeries to be completed at Whitehorse General Hospital for 2024-25 is 4,400. That is included in the transfer payment agreement for core funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. The funding being provided to the Hospital Corporation this year for core funding in the main budget totals \$110 million. It is not broken down by sort of per surgeries — that sort of thing — but there is a budget provided through that budget to the Yukon Hospital Corporation to cover the costs necessary for the estimated 4,400 surgeries.

I think the next question was regarding the funding for the O&M for the mental wellness unit. I can tell you that this work is ongoing. We expect very soon to bring some figures to Cabinet, but I don't have those. What I can also indicate is that the mental wellness unit is being built with 10 appropriate beds. There will be eight available to start when the program opens. The estimate at this time is for that to happen in

November 2024, and we look forward to that. That will, of course, have patients who require those kinds of services who are currently looked after in another part of the Whitehorse General Hospital to have access to the mental wellness unit. That will also alleviate some costs with respect to those other beds in — sorry, did I say something different from that?

Oh, sorry; I might have said something wrong, so I will come back to that. That, of course, will free up some costs associated with those beds and also free up those beds in another place in Whitehorse hospital. Just to be clear, if I did not speak properly, the mental wellness unit will have 12 beds in total — 12 rooms for individuals to have care — and there will be eight to start when that opens, hopefully in November 2024. And that cost estimate for the fiscal year of some five months or so will be presented to me and then to Cabinet in the pretty near future. It will also include an estimate then for the annual O&M costs — working very closely with the Hospital Corporation to determine what those figures are anticipated to be.

What I can say as well is that the costs associated with opening the mental wellness unit will be the operation and maintenance costs of front-line care to provide the best possible care at the mental wellness unit based on the highest standards of care for Yukoners.

With respect to the wait times of the mammography, specifically is what is being asked about — let me just back up for a moment to say that the Whitehorse General Hospital is seeing growth in all service areas, leading to higher patient outcomes and volumes, increased patient needs, and increased complexity of care and acuity. These are very real challenges and real facts that are the responsibility of the Hospital Corporation and also the Department of Health and Social Services in working together with them. The Yukon Hospital Corporation expects these trends to be sustained through this next fiscal year which we are discussing here today and beyond.

Safe and excellent care continues to be the priority for the Hospital Corporation, with a focus on preserving access to specialized acute care services, such as emergency, critical care, surgical, and maternity care — all services that Yukoners deserve to have the highest quality.

The Yukon Hospital Corporation has experienced sustained growth across services year over year — also supported by the 62-percent increase in the hospital's overall budget, which I noted earlier in my remarks today. The following are some specific examples of areas of growth. Between February of 2023 and 2024 — so, a year — February of each year — 16-percent growth in in-patient days at the hospital; hospital occupancy pressures rising from 87 percent in 2023 to 101 percent occupancy in 2024; two-percent growth in emergency department visits — which is an interesting figure in that I think that, if you spoke with most Yukoners, they would think that was probably a much higher number; five-percent growth in the number of surgical procedures completed; nine-percent growth in laboratory requests and visits; 35-percent growth in the chemotherapy services, which is critical and important to assessing the Yukon Hospital Corporation budgets; 24-percent growth in demand for medical

rehabilitation services; and an increase in overall total imaging exams.

Weekly volumes — which is what is being asked about here — vary based on patient needs, of course, and staffing requirements. Imaging volumes over the past three months, I can say, or four months — I think the question specifically was about mammography — the highest was in January 2024, with 321 tests completed that month — approximately 80 per week. In the most recent month, March 2024 — this has to be confirmed; at this point, it is projected — was about 300, which would be approximately 75 per week.

The Yukon hospitals follow national guidelines for breast cancer screening, and during the 2022-23 fiscal year, Yukon hospitals completed 2,400 mammograms. Yukon hospitals are on target to complete 3,600 mammograms in the 2023-24 fiscal year. That is to be confirmed as to the actual number, but that was the target. This represents a 50-percent increase in exams completed this fiscal year or the fiscal year that we have just finished compared to the one before that.

Breast cancer screening wait times are exceeding national targets, which does not make anybody here pleased.

Mr. Cathers: Moving on to another issue here, we are pleased; we have urged the government for years to develop a new health human resources strategy, as the minister knows. I am pleased to see that they have developed one — the high-level document — and work is underway.

I want to ask about some specific areas that have been discussed previously with regard to increasing the number of doctors, nurses, and other health professionals, including the issue of the potential of allowing doctors, nurses, and potentially others trained outside Canada a faster path to full licensure. There are other jurisdictions, as the minister will recall from previous debates, that have taken steps to speed up that licensing requirement. In the case of Nova Scotia in particular, beginning with doctors trained in the United States, Nova Scotia was the first province in Canada to offer medical licensure to physicians who have completed their American board exams as well as board-certified surgeons.

So, we know that the government developed a memorandum of understanding quite some time ago with Nova Scotia about potentially learning from the approaches that they have taken, but so far, we haven't seen any indication that the government here is going to follow the lead of Nova Scotia in allowing doctors who are trained, certified, and in good standing in the United States and potentially other countries, such as the UK, Australia, and New Zealand, to practise without delay in their jurisdiction.

Can the minister tell us: Is the government working on this? Are they prepared to follow the example of provinces that are allowing US-trained doctors to practise here without jumping through hoops?

The next question that I would just move on to in the interest of time here is — the area of doctor payments is an area that has come up as a topic of concern in the past. During previous debates last spring, the minister acknowledged how late they had been in paying doctors for fee for service. At the time, we also suggested that they follow the example of

jurisdictions such as Alberta and that, instead of going through every doctor's claims every time in a manner that might be compared to an audit every billing cycle, they go to a model such as what Alberta and others have used where there is more of a random audit, but they save the cost for both government and the physician clinics and the time involved for reviewing everything all of the time. Instead, the government has gone down the path — according to the minister in March, on page 4954 of Hansard, she indicated that they had two more physician claims assessors hired last year. While we do welcome doing something to speed up the payments to physicians that, as the minister will recall, were in some cases in the hundreds of thousands of dollars beyond 90 days for individual doctors — the question is whether the government is considering moving toward a model for fee-for-service claims assessment more similar to jurisdictions like Alberta that saves a lot of administrative costs to both government and to physicians submitting those claims.

I think that in the interest of time here, recognizing that the minister usually uses the full time allotted, I am just going to touch on the questions of the hospital bed capacity. Can the minister confirm how many beds are being added in the area that currently houses the secure medical unit, which will have its contents moved to the new mental wellness unit? What is the government doing, if anything, as far as planning for additional bed pressures, recognizing that the hospital has often been overcapacity?

Secondly, in the area of continuing care overall throughout the Yukon, could the minister answer questions about the three communities that continuing care facilities are in? First of all, with regard to McDonald Lodge in Dawson, is there space available in that facility, or is it full? Also, with regard to Watson Lake's long-standing request for a continuing care facility, can the minister indicate whether the government is prepared to agree to that request and begin planning of that facility, and can she confirm what the timelines are for the two-bed solution that the government re-announced recently for opening two continuing care beds at the Watson Lake hospital and Whitehorse as well? We understand from officials that, as of the briefing, there was a wait-list of eight people for continuing care in Whitehorse, so Whistle Bend Place is now full — at least as of that briefing. Can the minister tell us what is next in Whitehorse? Are they going to build a new continuing care facility or add a second phase to Whistle Bend Place?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the questions. I should note that on perhaps one occasion I have taken the eight minutes that I am allotted, but there are several questions that I want to give as much detail as possible on in the answers. Let me start by working with the question regarding foreign-trained physicians — whether that be in the USA or in other — I think the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand were mentioned. These would be individuals who would be trained in medical school outside of the country. There is a MOU between the Yukon government and Nova Scotia. The Yukon Medical Council currently requires physicians — in order to be licensed to work here in the territory — to be already licensed to work in some other jurisdiction in Canada. If individuals are

licensed to work in Nova Scotia — regardless of how they are properly qualified in Nova Scotia or assessed to be properly qualified there — once they have that licence, they are permitted, and properly so, to work here in the Yukon Territory.

Not to be a roundabout way, but the question was I think: What has to be done in order for doctors from other jurisdictions to work here in the territory? And that is, at this point, a possibility. There is nothing to be done other than for them to qualify with the Yukon Medical Council.

I can also note that internationally educated health professionals have historically played an important role. As our response to health human resources challenges, we are exploring ways to better support internationally educated health care professionals to enter health professions here in the Yukon, so that's in addition to physicians.

I can also note that the letter of intent with Nova Scotia was signed on July 26, 2023. We have agreed to work collaboratively on health human resources issues. Nova Scotia has adopted some innovative strategies to create new opportunities to address recruitment and retention. Officials from both jurisdictions have developed a comprehensive set of issues on which to partner and share information. Meetings continue with a working-level delegation to identify topics for an in-person meeting, perhaps in Nova Scotia, in the coming months.

I can note that the next question was about doctors' fee-for-service and the requirements of assessing fee codes. In the fall of 2023, a total of 20 fee codes were modified by the Yukon government to allow for auto-payment. The number of claims going to manual assessments at the Department of Health and Social Services for physicians to be paid has decreased from 30 percent to 20 percent as a result. This is an average of 600 claims per week that are no longer being manually assessed by default.

Work is also underway to update how the system addresses patient names. Currently, claims are validated using a patient's full name and date of birth to match to their health care card, and once the new system is implemented, the system will adjudicate using a last name, first initial, and date of birth to reduce additional need for manual assessments. We continue to work with the Physician Payment Advisory Committee to identify and determine additional opportunities to decrease processing times, which we are pleased about.

I will move on to the questions regarding the long-term care wait-list. The long-term care wait-list is organized into four different levels of care, so they change quite regularly. There are four different levels of care provided to long-term care clients. There is dementia care, extended care, intermediate care, and personal care. In March of 2024, wait-lists showed five or fewer Yukoners waiting to access the following long-term care services through the Yukon: dementia, extended, intermediate, and personal care.

I can also say that there is — I understand — we think that it is a total of 10 beds at McDonald Lodge, but I can confirm that. There are currently four beds available for individuals to access at McDonald Lodge in Dawson City.

I can also indicate that there is a bit of work to operationalize the Watson Lake long-term beds in the hospital, but I would say that there is not too much actual capital work to be done. We do want those rooms to feel homey and perhaps less clinical than a hospital room, but we are working to determine staffing for those rooms so that they can open.

To be clear, I can correct: There are 15 total rooms available in Dawson City for long-time care at McDonald Lodge — thank you very much, Paul — and to confirm, there are four beds available. I think those are all the answers.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the answers, and I'm just going to squeeze in one last question, and then I will hand the floor over to the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin here.

So, the two parts to my question are — we are hearing from a growing number of Yukoners who are giving up on waiting for tests and surgeries in the Yukon health care system and are travelling Outside for procedures and tests at private clinics, including MRI exams and hip and knee surgery. Others are leaving the country to seek treatment in countries including the US and Mexico. My question is whether the department is tracking how many people contact the department seeking care and then choose to give up waiting and seek care at a private clinic down south or out of country and if the minister could clarify this: Does the government fund any part of the cost of any of the procedures at private clinics in Canada or out of the country or any of the travel?

The second question I had is regarding safe supply. There was some discussion earlier today in Question Period. The minister knows, of course, that this was an announcement made in the fall of 2021 jointly with the Third Party entitled "Government of Yukon expands safe supply program", and it referred to — quote: "... a medically prescribed safe supply of opioids..." Can the minister clarify what drugs are being provided under safe supply, specifically the types of drugs and the number of clients as well as what measures may be in place to prevent the diversion of those into the black market?

With that, I will conclude. After the minister responds, I will hand the floor over to the Third Party for their questions.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. I can't provide a number with respect to tracking surgeries that someone might seek here in the territory and ultimately decide to have in another jurisdiction, unless that surgery takes place through the medical travel program and a publicly funded health care facility. That is what is permitted by our legislation. The individuals who might receive care or surgeries outside of the Yukon Territory at publicly funded facilities will be assessed based on criteria like the level of urgency and the complexity of the care that is needed. Of course, those are done by medical professionals and, upon recommendation, an individual might seek care with their medical professional and the support of insured health services here in the territory to have some surgery outside of the territory. That is, of course, post-COVID and also based on the challenges that exist in other locations in the country and their own issues of having patients being able to access care becoming a challenge in that some of the facilities — they are all still supportive of taking Yukon patients based on the assessment of complexity of care and

level of urgency, but they are not as readily available as they may have been in the past due to their own wait lists, and that makes sense as well.

What I can also say is that services that are provided at private clinics in other places in Canada or outside of Canada are not supported by the legislation here in the territory to be covered either for the financial costs or for the travel for surgery with respect to that, with the exception of gender-affirming care, for which members will know that there is an exception.

I will move on to the question regarding safer supply. There was a question about numbers of individuals who are accessing the program.

What I can say with respect to that is that, in the 2023-24 budget, we provided an increase of \$279,000 for an additional two full-time equivalents to support the safer supply program, and these two people were a social worker and a medical office assistant. They were filled last year. This increase also reflects carry-forward amounts for other individuals who help with this program: two outreach practical nurses, one peer outreach worker, two registered nurses, one registered nurse supervisor, and one social worker.

Between January 1, 2023 and December 31, 2023 — that calendar year — there were some 206 clients registered with the opioid treatment services programs, with an average of 239 appointments per month, so that is safer supply programming. In 2023, there were 547 clients supported through the Referred Care Clinic, with an average of 750 appointments per month. Opioid treatment services can be accessed by telephone, and they are open daily.

The Referred Care Clinic and the opioid treatment services programming is how safer supply is delivered here in the territory. The *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* includes providing safer supply medications as harm-reduction intervention. To further expand the scope of safer supply, the department is working with an addictions medicine specialist in British Columbia to develop and provide clinical training and prescribing guidelines for physicians here in the territory. We are improving access to safer supply with more personnel and providing wraparound services to help ensure that the clients accessing safer supply through opioid treatment services do have the supports that are required to hopefully have them no longer use drugs of any kind. The safer supply program currently offers hydromorphone tablets and fentanyl patch programs as safer supply of opioids. Expansion of safer supply is being considered by the department in exploring options to provide safer supply of other illicit substances.

I can also confirm that physicians and nurse practitioners who have trained with Mental Wellness and Substance Use services may prescribe evidence-based opioid agonist therapies such as methadone, Suboxone, Sublocade, and Kadian to prevent withdrawal and reduce cravings for opioid drugs.

I think that there was an additional question about protocols and how we avoid diversion of the drugs named in the answer to this question to inappropriate individuals. There are standard protocols. It requires duplicate signatures. They are often only given in daily doses, instead of in larger amounts, to control and limit access to those drugs and any possible

diversion of those drugs into the wrong hands. There is coordination and monitoring through the Referred Care Clinic and through outreach. I can also note that often some of these drugs are provided on a daily basis at pharmacies, where the individual takes that actual drug there.

We have followed up with the RCMP regarding the diversion of drugs, and there is no indication of any of this in the Yukon Territory to date. I know that there have been allegations of such things in Alberta, but I think that they were thefts from places where these drugs were being held, which, of course, could be any pharmacy at any time, but we don't have any information that this has occurred here in the territory.

Ms. Blake: I would like to start by welcoming the officials here today.

I guess I will just dive right into the question I have with regard to safe supply and withdrawal support. I just recently returned from a visit to my riding of Vuntut Gwitchin, and one of the primary concerns that has come up in numerous households that I spent time in — so, in the community of Old Crow, we are seeing an increase of drug use in the community. We are seeing an increase of hard drugs being available in the community. From sitting with a lot of the folks who use drugs on a daily basis, they asked about what supports are available from the local health centre in the community for withdrawal support. There have been a few folks who asked if safe supply is available in Old Crow and, if citizens can't access it in the community, what are the options to gain access outside?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you for the question. Initially, I must say that safer supply is managed primarily here in Whitehorse through the Referred Care Clinic and other opportunities to try to expand that — also through the Mental Wellness and Substance Use unit at the Department of Health and Social Services and through Community Nursing.

I can also say that the medications I noted earlier are most often provided through a prescription written by a physician or a nurse practitioner and filled at a pharmacy that would be outside of Old Crow.

Community Nursing has a small number of medications that are for urgent or emergent use that are only dispensed under strict policies and protocols in a community like Old Crow.

Old Crow residents who would like withdrawal management services can complete a planned admission allowing them to book a bed by self-referral, and while at withdrawal management, community clients are offered medical, social, counselling, and aftercare plan supports to address substance use. Now, that doesn't take place in the community because withdrawal management should be carefully managed within a location that is close to a hospital for reasons that are to protect the individuals. Of course, the Mental Wellness and Substance Use services in the Dawson City catchment area also includes Old Crow, and a mental health support worker travels monthly to Old Crow and the community counsellor travels to the community every two weeks and is available by phone in the interim.

Lastly, Mental Wellness and Substance Use services staff collaborate with the Vuntut Gwitchin Government throughout each visit to provide responsive and relevant programming to

the community. I know it is something that we are focused on expanding into communities. Safer supply expansion I think is focused on communities and, as I said earlier, the opportunity of working with the BC withdrawal expert and addictions expert for the purposes of expanding safer supply so that more physicians in the territory have the ability and the confidence to work with these drugs and to work with individuals so that safer supply could be more broadly administered and more broadly available to Yukon communities. We hope and expect that proper training through Community Nursing will also allow us to expand safer supply and that the mental wellness substance use services that are available currently in Whitehorse but ultimately help communities and individuals who feel like they cannot leave their community for the purposes of withdrawal management — of course, accessing safer supply and withdrawal management are two different things. I'm answering both here, but I think it's very important that we support individuals who want to come to Whitehorse for those services, and certainly medical travel would support individuals who are properly diagnosed as benefiting from those care services that would be here in Whitehorse.

Thank you very much for the question, and thank you to the deputy minister and the assistant deputy minister for being here and supporting me today and helping us to provide as many answers as possible.

Deputy Chair, seeing the time, I will move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Riverdale South that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Deputy Chair, I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

May the House have a report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 213, entitled *First Appropriation Act 2024-25*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report from the Deputy Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled April 30, 2024:

35-1-132

Additional response to Petition No. 23 re: electricity costs (Streicker)

The following document was filed April 30, 2024:

35-1-252

Closure of funds for the Yukon environmental community, letter re (dated April 16, 2024) from Hon. Nils Clarke, Minister of Environment, to Chris Pinkerton, Executive Director, CPAWS Yukon (Clarke, N.)