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HANSARD

Wednesday, May 1, 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
Wednesday, May 1, 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. Mr. Clarke: In honour of the tribute for the 80th anniversary of D-Day, please join me in welcoming to the House Corporal Retired Morris Cratty; Sergeant Retired Joe Mewett, our Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms; Kerri Scholz; Corporal Graham Stanley-Paul; Captain Andy Rector; Warrant Officer Andy MacLeod; Corporal Retired Brian Read; Captain Retired Cal Knowles and spouse, Louise Knowles; Major Retired Red Grossinger; and, no stranger to the House, Sergeant Retired Dave Laxton, former Speaker of the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Please join me in welcoming them to the House.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to help me welcome three individuals from the Canadian Bar Association, Yukon branch. We have the president, James Barsby. We have Lauren Wildgoose, the treasurer of the CBA, Yukon branch, and Riley Denny, executive director. Thank you for being here.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we have four of our incredibly hard-working Community Services policy staff joining us. I would like to welcome to the House Sunny Patch, Sarah Murray, Spring Huston, and Heike Fraser.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of D-Day 80th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the Battle of Normandy, a pivotal moment in history.

In the pre-dawn hours of June 6, 1944, Canada contributed significantly to the world's largest combined military operation, embarking on a three-month campaign alongside Allied forces that resulted in liberating Europe from the grip of Nazi Germany.

D-Day stands as an unparalleled display of coordinated bravery, marking a pivotal moment in bringing freedom to Europe. This anniversary serves as a poignant reminder of the

immense sacrifices made to safeguard the democratic liberties that we cherish today.

From the soldiers storming the beaches under a hail of enemy fire to the paratroopers dropping behind enemy lines, every individual involved demonstrated extraordinary bravery and commitment to freedom and justice.

On that historic day, more than 156,000 Allied soldiers participated in the Normandy campaign, achieving success at great cost. On D-Day, over 14,000 Canadian soldiers arrived in France either by landing on its shores or parachuting into strategic locations.

Mr. Speaker, supporting this massive operation, the Royal Canadian Navy deployed 80 vessels, while the Royal Canadian Air Force contributed 18 squadrons providing crucial air support directly linked to the assault efforts. The toll was heavy, with at least 12,000 Allied soldiers either killed or wounded — among them, over 1,000 Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice or faced injuries during the D-Day landings.

This momentous occasion also holds special significance for the Yukon because brave Yukoners were among those who stood united in the fight against tyranny and oppression. We remember with deep gratitude the Yukon soldiers who answered the call of duty. Their valour and sacrifice on the beaches of Normandy exemplify the spirit of Yukoners in the face of adversity.

The legacy of D-Day is also intertwined with the contributions of Yukon First Nation communities who played a vital role in supporting the war effort through their invaluable skills and knowledge. One heartwarming story is of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation — then known as the “Old Crow Band”— establishing a pen-pal connection with a group of English orphans. This touching correspondence began when the children wrote letters thanking the nation for the financial support that they received following German air raids.

As we reflect on this historic milestone, let us not only honour the memory of those who served but also reaffirm our commitment to upholding the values of freedom, democracy, and justice for which they fought so bravely. Their legacy continues to inspire us as we strive for a world of peace and unity.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: In just a few days, Mr. Speaker, on June 6, 2024, we will mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day. The Second World War was a defining event in Canadian history. Canada played a vital role in this conflict, contributing forces to the campaign of Western Europe beyond what might be expected of a small nation with only 11 million people. Between 1939 and 1945, more than one million Canadian men and women served full time in the armed services. More than 43,000 were killed — 4,000 of those during the D-Day invasion and thousands more missing or injured.

The war reinvigorated Canada's industrial base despite the tragedy that it incurred. It elevated the role of women in the economy, paved the way for Canada's membership in NATO, and left Canadians with a legacy of proud service and sacrifice.

During World War II, the Battle of Normandy, which lasted from June 1944 to August 1944, resulted in the Allied liberation of Western Europe from Nazi Germany's control. American, British, and Canadian forces landed on five beaches along a 50-mile stretch of the heavily fortified coast of France — Normandy region. It required extensive planning and collaboration.

By dawn on June 6, thousands of paratroopers and glider troops were already on the ground behind enemy lines securing bridges and existing roads. The British and Canadians overcame light opposition to capture beaches — code-named “Gold”, “Juno”, and “Sword” — as did the Americans at Utah Beach. By the end of the day, approximately 156,000 Allied troops had successfully stormed Normandy's beaches. As of late August 1944, all of northern France had been liberated, and by the following spring, the Allies had defeated the Germans. The Normandy landings have been called “the beginning of the end of the war in Europe”.

As a young Canadian soldier posted in Germany, I had the opportunity to visit Holland and France on many occasions — places where veterans' sacrifices have never been forgotten. Canadian flags and signs thanking Canada can still be seen lining the streets today.

Veterans who are here today and veterans across our country want Canadians to understand the price of freedom so that the memory of their sacrifices will continue and the values that they fought for will live on in all of us.

I want to quote, as I have done before in this Legislative Assembly, from Hansard on Monday, June 6, 1994 by the Hon. Bill Brewster, the MLA for Kluane at the time, who served with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles during World War II and landed in France on D-Day — and I will quote: “I hope we can now take a moment from our busy lives to honour and remember the wartime sacrifices made by Canadians overseas and at home so that we can enjoy peace today.”

Thank you, and lest we forget.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon NDP to recognize the important anniversary of the Normandy landings 80 years ago.

D-Day remains the largest seaborne invasion in history. The coordination, planning, and execution on that Tuesday in 1944 began the liberation of France and the rest of Western Europe and laid the foundations of the Allied victory on the western front and the end of the Second World War.

World War II was fought over issues that are still alive today, such as fascism, genocide, and injustice. It is important as we recognize this day that we do not give up the fight that we fought before. We remain grateful to all of those who sacrificed so much in the name of peace, democracy, and freedom.

Lest we forget.

Applause

In recognition of Law Day

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to recognize Law Day, a national event celebrating the signing of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* on April 17, 1982.

Informed by the 1948 United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the Charter was preceded by the *Canadian Bill of Rights* in 1960, which was limited in its powers. Twenty-two years later, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* integrated many of the *Bill of Rights'* underlying principles and fundamental freedoms in the Constitution.

The Charter protects freedom of religion, expression, association, and peaceful assembly as well as the rights to life, liberty, and security of the person, equality before and under the law, and equal protection and equal benefit of the law, without discrimination.

It has become a symbol of what is right and a constitutional reflection of our values as Canadians. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is the measuring stick against which we evaluate Canadian laws.

Since 1983, the Canadian Bar Association has celebrated Law Day to commemorate the signing of the Charter. Law Day is an opportunity for Canadians to learn about the law, the legal profession, and the legal institutions that are foundational to our democracy. It reminds us that our rights and freedoms — as we have heard earlier today again — are not free and we must strive to maintain and defend them. It is an opportunity to take pride in our *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and contemplate how fortunate we are to have secured inalienable rights as Canadians. The Canadian Charter is heralded across the world as an important document in democracy.

As Minister of Justice and Attorney General, it is my responsibility to work to create, amend, and maintain laws that promote fair, independent, and unbiased treatment for all Yukoners. Many Yukoners work to ensure that the justice system and our laws are administered well and fairly: our judiciary, members of the Yukon Bar, those who serve on independent boards, tribunals, committees, and commissions, and all of the organizations and advocates who provide legal information and services to the public. They all work to serve Yukoners, and thank you to them.

Lastly, I am pleased to remind Yukoners of the annual Law Day Charity Fun Run and Walk organized by the Yukon chapter of the Canadian Bar Association here in Whitehorse. I think it has been 32 or 33 years that this has been celebrated. This year, on May 3 at 11:45, this fun run and walk will start and proceed on the Millennium Trail. It will start behind the visitor information centre here in Whitehorse. This annual event promotes healthy living in the beautiful Yukon spring. It supports a local charity and reminds us how important our legal system and Canadian Charter are.

This year's funds will be donated to Blood Ties Four Directions. I encourage everyone to celebrate Law Day and participate in the fun run.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Law Day, an event in recognition of the proclamation of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter, signed in 1982, was built on the foundation of the *Canadian Bill of Rights*, which the government of Prime Minister Diefenbaker introduced in 1960.

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protects the rights of all Canadians, including the right to life, liberty, security of the person, the right to freedom of speech, the right to freedom of religion, equality rights, the right to fundamental justice, and the right to counsel. I would point again to the troubling omission in the Charter of a key part of Diefenbaker's bill of rights, which is protection of the right to own property. The lack of proper constitutional protection of property rights haunts innocent Canadians to this day, as the federal Liberal government plans to confiscate lawfully acquired private property from innocent people who have done nothing wrong.

That is the reason why today we have called our motion for debate urging the Yukon government to begin consultation and work on the development of a Yukon firearms act to protect the private property rights of innocent people who own firearms. It's important for everyone to remember the legacy of all those who have worked and fought for our freedom and rights of Canadians and to do our part to ensure that future generations have those same rights and their freedom protected.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the NDP to pay tribute to Law Day. Law Day is a national holiday that celebrates the signing of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. This makes it an occasion for people to learn about what that Charter means. Our Canadian Charter means that all of us enjoy rights to equality under the law. We are given rights to freedom of religion, expression, association, and peaceful assembly. Under it, we all have equal benefit and protection of the law, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, age, mental or physical disability, and sexual orientation.

This year, the run and walk will raise funds for Blood Ties Four Directions, with the theme of "Harm Reduction". Blood Ties plays a leading role in harm reduction in our territory. They provide a service based on the foundation of dignity, respect, and compassion. Their focus lies in relationships with community and emphasizes relationships they have built and maintained over the years with the population they serve.

Blood Ties does important work in terms of education, overdose response and prevention, and outreach across our territory. We are grateful to Blood Ties for the work that they do as they provide support to our families, our friends, and our neighbours. This Law Day, I hope that everyone will consider participating in the run or donating to Blood Ties and their work supporting dignity and human rights.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

In recognition of Hemochromatosis Awareness Month

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am delivering this one on behalf of everyone in this House, and, Mr. Speaker, this is a personal one. I am tributing a disease that I have — it is kind of counterintuitive, right? I should be cursing this ailment. Instead, I am here to inform others about this weird genetic disorder and its implications. May is Hemochromatosis Awareness Month. Hemochromatosis is a fancy way of saying that my blood retains iron and socks it away in all my joints, organs, and bones. Basically, I am an iron sponge.

I have been told that someone who is anemic has less than nine units of iron in their blood. When diagnosed in my 40s, I had more than 1,300. Today, my normal is about 50. My parents passed these genes to me. The downsides of this natural genetic experiment are clearer than the upsides. I suffer early-onset arthritis in my joints — specifically my knees and ankles — contributing to this brace that I am wearing. Organs swell and suffer damage, especially my pancreas and my liver. I suffer fatigue. As I said to the team at CS just moments ago, hemochromatosis can wreak havoc with your memory and give your skin a grey pallor. Some people become weak; others lose their sex drive. Sometimes called the "Celtic Curse" — my family is Welsh — hemochromatosis can destroy your liver; it can stop your heart dead. That is the bad news.

The good news, my doctor told me 15 years ago, is that it is relatively easy to treat. There is no cure, but it can be managed easily through bloodletting. After I was diagnosed, they pulled a litre of blood from my body every week for more than a year to mitigate future damage. In the last month, I have given a couple of litres and now I am good for a couple more months. Unfortunately, there is no Yukon blood donor clinic, but when I am south, I donate. Hemochromatosis is not contagious and Canadian Blood Services considers my iron-saturated blood excellent for those who need a transfusion.

I passed this gene on to my sons. If my wife passed the matching gene, they may inherit this hemochromatosis as well. It is the most common genetic disease in Canada, affecting one in 327 people. If your blood shows elevated iron or you suffer the symptoms that I have discussed, see your doctor. It could spur a simple genetic test that could save your life.

I would like to recognize the health care professionals who have shown me excellent treatment and care. These days, Dr. Jake Morash is overseeing my care, and since this is National Physicians' Day, I want to thank him for his professionalism, diligence, knowledge, and compassion. I also want to thank the incredible nursing staff at Whitehorse General Hospital who have looked after me for about 15 years now. Our nurses are exceptional. I daresay that many people have wanted to bleed me, but the nurses do it well and with incredible care and compassion. They have all been simply wonderful. You all know who you are. Thank you.

Applause

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling, pursuant to section 22(8) of the Yukon *Human Rights Act*, the 2022-23 annual report of the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I have today a legislative return regarding questions from the Member for Takhini-Kopper King on March 25 during Committee of the Whole debate.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development to the Parliament of Canada describing contaminated sites in the north.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I have a letter for tabling, dated April 29, to the Minister of Community Services regarding the recent complete tree removal in the new 44-lot subdivision, and it was cc'd to the Chief of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the MLA for Kluane, the Premier, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and the Leader of the Third Party.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling an e-mail from Chief Nicole Tom of Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation in support of today's motion.

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House:

(1) recognizes the incredible contributions of Yukon's dedicated physicians, who go above and beyond to provide extraordinary health care for Yukoners; and

(2) thanks Dr. Alex Kmet, president of the Yukon Medical Association, for his continued leadership and advocacy on behalf of Yukon doctors to promote professionalism in medical practice and promote accessible, high-quality health care for Yukoners.

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

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of the following documents that the Minister of Health and Social Services made reference to in debate on April 30, 2024:

(1) Yukon Hospital Corporation's January 2023 comprehensive plan to expand services, including an expanded surgical services wing and capital development needs; and

(2) Yukon Hospital Corporation's construction business case for the expanded surgical services area and other capital development needs.

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

THAT this House congratulates the Town of Faro on the 20th anniversary of the Sheep and Crane Festival.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Disaster financial assistance program

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, Yukoners are resilient. We've always lived with some measure of risk, whether it be the possibility of a flood, long-term power outage, or wildfire. We have gotten better at protecting ourselves and our communities. There are times, though, when even our best preparations are not enough to hold back the devastating effects of a natural disaster. As the climate changes and our population expands into wilderness areas, those preparations need to include how we help communities impacted by disaster.

Mr. Speaker, a Yukon disaster financial assistance program was something we committed to in our government's *Our Clean Future* plan. We are pleased to have recently accomplished that goal and met that promise. The 2024-25 disaster financial assistance program includes three funding streams to help people recover from a natural disaster. The funding streams are for households, small businesses, and farms. This assistance will be used for repairing disaster damage to primary residences and providing financial support for businesses and agricultural landowners with disaster-related property damage or losses.

Yukoners may receive financial assistance for their eligible damage costs to principal residences, personal possessions, farms, or small businesses with no deductibles up to a maximum of \$250,000 for homeowners or the real property assessment value, whichever is less, and up to \$500,000 for farmers and small business owners for eligible damage costs. The funding conditions align with the federal disaster financial assistance arrangements program, which supports provinces and territories with recovery costs from large disaster events.

Beyond the season ahead, we will implement a long-term Yukon disaster financial assistance program in step with pending changes to Canada's disaster financial assistance arrangements that will come into effect in 2025. The 2024-25 program, in the meantime, is in place for this season. It will allow the Yukon government to quickly and efficiently support recovery efforts should Yukoners need support in recovering from a disaster.

More details of the 2024-25 disaster financial assistance program can be found on yukon.ca. The Yukon government learns from every disaster event, and we know it's better to have a plan in place to roll out support before an event occurs. We will be ready, but at the same time, we also hope to never need to use this program. Mr. Speaker, we are prepared and ready to support Yukoners.

Ms. McLeod: I would like to thank the minister for the update. We are pleased to hear that there are three funding streams included in the disaster financial assistance program. As the minister just mentioned, those include households, small businesses, and farms. We are happy to see that the government will be helping Yukoners impacted by disasters; however, we would like to revisit recommendations we have been sharing since early 2022 and urge the government to take action to mitigate natural disasters before they occur.

In 2023, the Yukon Party issued a news release updating the recommendations to the government about their preparation for the upcoming flood season. I am wondering if the minister can tell Yukoners if the government has moved forward on any of the 15 recommendations. The recommendations include: identifying roads and other government infrastructure that would benefit from improvements early in the season; completing preventive groundwork on at-risk properties on Marsh Lake, Lake Laberge, the Yukon River, and the Takhini River; conduct an engineering study of flood mitigations for Carmacks and Mayo with a plan to support the construction of a berm or dike to be built along the river similar to that of Dawson City; complete an engineering study and mitigations for the McConnell Lake area; proactively work with the Town of Watson Lake and the Liard First Nation to ensure the assessment of areas prone to flooding to determine adequate protection. There are others that we don't have time to mention today.

In addition, the Association of Yukon Communities has passed a resolution since then that urged — and I quote: "... the Yukon Government create a territorial 'disaster financial assistance program' to help municipalities respond to natural disasters..." and the Yukon government "... better support municipalities with long-term mitigation projects to address the impacts of natural disasters and climate change on infrastructure..."

The minister responded in a letter that he was focused on the disaster relief fund he is discussing today, but we would like to hear if the government will commit to working with Yukon municipalities and rural communities on their mitigation efforts so that we can all prevent the need for this relief fund in the first place.

We note that major projects, like the potential realignment of Robert Service Way, are now being contemplated by the City of Whitehorse as part of this mitigation work. We do recognize that the government has taken some action since 2022, such as raising road levels, proactively providing better communication, and having more sandbags on standby, but more work is needed.

I hope the Liberal government will listen to the suggestions we have brought forward on behalf of Yukoners and Yukon municipalities.

Ms. White: The 2023 flood recovery funding program that was introduced after the flooding that occurred in the Klondike Valley area was complicated and not user-friendly. As I watched and supported folks navigating complicated and

unclear program definitions after a serious event like flooding, I can say that, despite best efforts of those receiving cries for help within Yukon government departments, the programs existed in silos and forced individuals to try to navigate a complex system not designed for mere mortals.

The three available funding streams — housing, agriculture, and small business — each had different criteria and subcategories. Housing funding was provided in four streams: grant funding for restoration of principal residences, loan funding for the restoration of principal and secondary residence outbuildings that are for personal use, grant funding to replace damaged possessions for property owners and tenants, and grant funding for temporary accommodation support.

If eligible, you could have applied for all four streams, but that was a hefty task to put on people who are possibly displaced and facing homelessness. The agriculture flood recovery program was a one-time funding program for farmers and agricultural producers to help cover the relief and recovery costs from the damage and loss caused by the 2023 flooding in the region around the Klondike Valley.

Again, we are not against criteria — and there was plenty of criteria — but for those applying, the process wasn't easy or straightforward.

The small business flood recovery program — a one-time program providing financial assistance to small business owners who were impacted by and incurred significant damage as a result of the 2023 flooding in the Klondike Valley — this funding could be used to repair a small business, and each business could submit one claim to recover eligible costs up to a maximum of \$500,000 per business. Sounds great, but also not easy to access.

In a February 15 statement on flood preparedness, the Minister of Community Services said that they are — and I quote: "... creating a Yukon Disaster Financial Assistance program to get money into people's hands sooner. This program will include funding streams to support households, small businesses, and farms." Well, it sounds familiar, right? Today, we are talking about this very program, but what lessons were taken away from the experience of those who applied for these same programs but under a different name last year? Did the department conduct interviews with applicants to see what did and did not work? How is the minister ensuring that the process going forward is less taxing on those applying for the emergency help?

So, although we are happy to see the support for individuals, what about municipalities that are feeling the very real physical effects of climate change? This is such a priority for municipalities that a motion was passed unanimously last May at the AYC general meeting that reads, in large part: "THAT the Yukon Government create a territorial 'disaster financial assistance program' to help municipalities respond to natural disasters; and THAT the Yukon Government better support municipalities with long-term mitigation projects..."

So, does the program that the minister is announcing today include funding for municipalities to respond to natural

disasters, and how will YG better support municipalities with long-term mitigation projects?

We look forward to hearing from folks who need to access this new program going forward that it is more responsive and easier to access.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I thank the members opposite for their responses this afternoon. A wise person once said that if you stay ready, you don't have to get ready. This quote can be easily applied to emergency preparedness. The disaster financial assistance program offers reassurance to Yukoners by ensuring swift aid during times of need and defining expectations regarding available supports. Providing support isn't just about being protected; it is about feeling protected, and that includes knowing that your government will be there for you.

We know that it is not enough to be safe and protected; Yukoners need to feel safe and protected. The Yukon government will determine whether to activate the program after a disaster based on eligibility criteria and parameters that are consistent with the federal disaster financial assistance program guidelines. Not all disaster events will be eligible. Generally, eligible events will have damages that are widespread, affect a large area where there are a number of residents, and are mostly uninsurable.

We are committed to supporting Yukoners in times of need and streamlining our support as much as possible. We all have a role to play. Having a 72-hour emergency kit ready to go is one way that Yukoners can stay ready. Having a family emergency plan and keeping your vehicle filled with fuel is a way to stay ready. Firesmartering your property is another important measure that homeowners and landowners can take to stay ready to protect themselves and those under their care and to ease the strain on other first responders. Having adequate flood homeowner and tenant insurance is another way to stay ready.

Our government is also taking steps to stay ready. In 2022, we launched the 2022 flood relief program to help residents in Carmacks, Cowley Creek, Dawson, Fox Lake, Ibex Valley, Lake Laberge, Liard, McConnell Lake, Old Crow, Pelly Crossing, Ross River, Tagish, and Teslin — those who were impacted by flooding. This program gave a hand-up to Yukoners whose homes and personal belongings were damaged by flooding.

In 2023, our government coordinated the 2023 flood recovery funding program for the Klondike Valley and the Klondike area, with three streams of funding for housing, agriculture, and small business. We have included a \$50-million contingency fund in budget 2024-25 to address climate-related emergencies. I hope that the opposition will find it in their hearts to support Yukoners by voting in favour of this budget.

We learned from flooding events in 2021 and 2022 that relief and recovery efforts are complex, can take considerable time, and that Yukoners rely on their communities but also on their governments to support them in times of crisis every step of the way. We are incorporating lessons learned from last

year's evacuations of Old Crow and Mayo, and we are considering what happened in Yellowknife and how we can ensure that evacuating residents are supported every step of the way.

This new disaster assistance program is another way in which the Yukon government is helping Yukoners. The program includes funding streams for households, small businesses, and farms. Our program mirrors programs provided by the Government of Canada. As Ottawa's guidelines change and as climate change impacts our communities, our program will evolve as well. We're getting ready, we're staying ready, and Yukoners can count on us in times of need.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: 5th and Rogers site development

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, last week, the Premier made an announcement about Northern Vision Development. Last Wednesday, he said, "Just this morning, I heard from Northern Vision Development that they want to start work on the 5th and Rogers site. They are about to invest a quarter of a billion dollars."

During the press conference on the sale of 5th and Rogers to West End Developments, the exact amount that NVD would invest was never detailed or shared. Can the Premier confirm that NVD told him that they would indeed be investing \$250 million to develop 5th and Rogers?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, what I was referring to is the total buildout of the project with all partners involved, which are Da Daghay Development, Ketza, KZA, as well as Northern Vision. The total amount that could be invested there — if you are looking at ten billion in the average building price — and what they have discussed with me is about a quarter of a billion. So, it's not just Northern Vision; it's actually a number of Yukon companies that have the confidence in the market to be looking to build out that level of project.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Premier clarifying his comments.

Last Wednesday, the Premier also shared that NVD would be — quote: "... making the biggest investment into rental housing in Yukon history..." During the announcement, the developers had said that they envisioned a mix of commercial and residential for the project, but the Premier's statements suggest that NVD told him how many rental units would be part of that development.

So, can the Premier now tell us how many rental units are part of the planned 5th and Rogers development?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, there's a mix of, actually, not just the potential for strata title but also for commercial. The zoning on the bottom one to two floors would be commercial, and then what the commitment was from developers was to do the majority of that into rental, taking into consideration that you have 10 buildings. Looking at what we saw the mix could be, we sat down with the architects early on. They thought probably 75 percent at least of the total stock. So, when you take that into consideration and you are up over 200, then that

would, of course, equate to the largest investment in one project in rental housing in Yukon history.

That was the mindset; that was the methodology that was used that supported the comments that I made.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, so, when we asked about this on April 10, the Premier stated that no further government funding would go into this development, and he has previously stated that there would be shovels in the ground and construction would begin this summer.

Can he confirm that this is still accurate? Can the Premier confirm that the company that bought this land for a dollar will not be applying for any further financial support from taxpayers, and will they break ground this summer?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, again, I'm happy to discuss this. We know that the opposition had I think, in their time, promised this piece of property to two or three organizations — never actually got it off the ground.

What I have been told through our officials is that in this year, in 2024 — I don't know if it's August or September, but I know that in 2024, this year, there will be work happening. The contractors have to do some demolition, so I said that there would be dirt moving this year. They do have some cleanup to do and that's work that would happen this year. They are focused on trying to ensure that the first building, again, gets moving this year. So, I want to commend all of those folks. I want to commend them for their focus on ensuring that we improve what we have for opportunities for rental housing.

I also just want to commend them on their commitment and as well on their confidence to be taking on a project of this size. This is a very significant project. We know that, in the past, no developers had the confidence to do this work; now they do, and we have certainly watched the maturity of our industry over the last number of years and I want to thank them for that.

When it comes to programs, we want to see market housing. At this point, nobody has come to us to look for any funding to offset their capital costs.

Question re: *Our Clean Future* implementation

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I have some energy questions for the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

The Yukon government along with federal and provincial counterparts, including Alberta and Saskatchewan, have signed on to Canada's small modular reactor, or SMR, action plan. According to the website smractionplan.ca — quote: "The Government of Yukon supports the vision for SMR development in Canada as laid out in the SMR Roadmap and action plan."

The SMR roadmap recommends that — and I'll quote again: "Provinces and territories that are interested in SMRs should develop public policy statements to explicitly include nuclear energy in climate change and clean energy planning and policies." So, has the Yukon accomplished this recommendation, and if so, when was it done and where can we find it?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. We have continued to work with the provinces that are taking the lead — for example, Ontario as well as

Saskatchewan, Alberta, and New Brunswick. Whenever we are at the ministers of energy conference, we talk about the Yukon being interested in being engaged on that topic. I think we put out a report recently about small modular reactors and what their feasibility looks like here in the Yukon. Of course, we don't have a regulatory regime here yet. These are typically very large-scale projects, even the small version of the word — "small", "modular", or "micromodular".

I do think that there is a reference to it in *Our Clean Future*. I would have to look back to find that specific reference and check to make sure that it's there. But yes, we are engaged.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that from the minister. We will have a look through *Our Clean Future* and the report that was put out.

On December 20, 2023, the ministers of Energy, Mines and Resources and of Environment introduced 42 new actions as part of *Our Clean Future*. One of those actions was to — quote: "Research a green hydrogen fuel demonstration project with a construction start of 2027 and operating timeframe of 2029."

Can the minister provide us with an update on this project? What is the scale, scope, and budget for this new hydrogen project, and where will it be located?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I will have to check in with the department. I know that this is more looking for opportunities. I know that I have sat down with a couple of groups that have expressed interest around exploring the notion of hydrogen. For Yukoners, I will just say that, typically when we are talking about hydrogen, what we are really thinking about is energy storage; it is not actually an energy source. Is this a way in which we can store energy?

We always — similar to the small modular project — watch what is happening across the provinces and we talk to other jurisdictions, including the National Research Council — if they are doing work to look to see if there are technologies that will be transferable to a jurisdiction like the Yukon, which has a growing economy and a very, very active economy and, at the same time, an islanded electricity grid. That is the sort of mix that we are looking for.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I was hoping to hear a little bit more about the plan and the budgeting, as we are only three years away from construction, according to that news release from December 2023.

Another commitment made that day in that news release regarding energy was to — quote: "By the end of 2025, an updated development plan and alternatives analysis for the Yukon-British Columbia grid connect project will be completed."

The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources has funding allocated to this project in the current budget year, but I am curious: What are the total estimated costs of this plan by the time that it is completed, and is the minister confident that British Columbia will have excess generating capacity to sell to us if or when this project is built?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I think that when I rose on the second question, I said that I would check back with the department. I apologize that I don't have all of the details

for all of these programs at my fingertips, but I will seek to get that information for Yukoners.

With respect to the grid connect, we do have some dollars in the budget for this year. I think that it is in the neighbourhood of \$800,000. I will have to check to be sure, but we have applied, under the critical minerals infrastructure fund, to seek tens of millions of dollars to do the planning work. That work would take a couple of years.

When we applied on the critical minerals infrastructure fund, we got a letter of support from the Government of British Columbia. The Premier himself has met with Premier Eby and they have spoken about this project several times. I have met with my counterparts, and they have been very supportive of the project.

There are always questions about electricity and electricity demand across the system. It is true and, as I gave in my response to the petition yesterday, everyone is seeking to expand their electricity grids. We are all seeking to modernize; we are all seeking to invest in our energy grids — in particular here in the Yukon because our population is growing, because we have been looking to address climate change, and because mining has been growing.

Question re: Confidence and supply agreement commitments

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, in 2021 and again in 2023, this government committed to completing a number of the Yukon NDP's priorities in exchange for our support of their budget. We have dutifully held up our end of the bargain so far, but have they?

As part of the CASA, this Premier committed to ensuring that people seeking fertility treatment and surrogacy would have financial support. Since February, we have been promised a briefing on this issue. A briefing has been scheduled three times, and each time it has been cancelled.

So, it doesn't feel like the government is very committed to making this happen in a timely way and Yukoners continue to reach out to us asking when it will become a reality. For those considering pursuing costly fertility treatments, these continued delays are heartbreaking.

So, will the Premier or the minister provide Yukoners with a clear timeline on when they will be able to access the financial support for fertility treatments and when those treatments will be included in medical travel?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, this is certainly something that our teams have been working on together — in particular with respect to the reorganization of some meeting times. My recollection is that the last meeting was delayed as a result of some conversations that needed to take place and some work that needed to be done in order to finalize the passing of Bill No. 38 through this Legislative Assembly. I think the last request from me was to have that meeting delayed, I believe, until next week or the week after. I don't have it at my fingertips, but I think it has been scheduled or is in the process of being scheduled — all of which is to say that it is clearly still a commitment of this government. We are working on the

medical travel regulations that need to go through the Cabinet process.

Maybe members on the opposite side of this House don't understand that, during the legislative Sitting, the matters that need to proceed through Cabinet are prioritized for the purposes of the legislative agenda as well as the legislative counsel office resources.

This is a strong commitment by our government; we continue to work on it. I look forward to continuing the work with the New Democratic Party.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister doesn't know how much this issue really matters to me and to Yukoners, which is why I'm bringing it up. By my count, just 13 of the 29 commitments this Premier made to us are completed or are on track to be. What I fear is that this government isn't really honouring the agreement that they signed. I know many Yukoners will know what that feels like, especially those needing in-centre haemodialysis in the Yukon.

It has been more than four years since the *Yukon News* ran an article with the tragic headline about my friend Terry Coventry — quote: "Without hemodialysis option, Yukon man returns home to die." We have heard from many Yukoners facing the same impossible choice between leaving their home and territory or not having access to life-saving treatment. That's why we agreed to a working group to consider the Northwest Territories' model. Unfortunately, that work hasn't happened either.

When will we see real progress on in-centre haemodialysis in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, again, the member opposite and I sit on a subcommittee for the CASA purposes of working on the haemodialysis issue. We have recently received a video from the Northwest Territories, because frankly, our schedules did not permit us to go there physically and view the system that they have in place there. Our partners in the Northwest Territories have been gracious enough to provide us with a video of their system and their centres, the purpose of which will be for us to view that. I think that there is also another meeting scheduled for us to be able to come up with questions. Then we will be having a virtual meeting with those in the Northwest Territories, which is the — I think, fully aware of the facts of that situation.

To the Leader of the New Democratic Party, I don't think for a second that these are not important issues. I truly wish that there were more than 24 hours in a day, to be quite frank with you, because some of these, in particular, scheduling problems have been on the basis that other priorities have overtaken on occasion the meeting schedules and our schedules together.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, another issue we hear about frequently in our office is the lack of space at the territory's detox facility, also known as "withdrawal management". In very real terms, this means that people needing support are being turned away. The lack of space was not because there were not enough beds but because there was not enough staff to support the patients.

The confidence and supply agreement committed the Premier to solving that problem by hiring additional licensed

practical nurses. The Yukon NDP has spent a lot of time pushing this government to do more on harm reduction. Providing safe options and supports for people going through withdrawal is part of harm reduction, and it saves lives.

This government has not done enough to ensure that these supports are available when people need them — especially in the middle of a substance use emergency.

So, can the minister tell Yukoners how many of these additional LPN positions at withdrawal management have been filled, and what has been done to increase available beds?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think it is critical that Yukoners understand the importance that we have placed on addressing issues of the substance use health emergency here in the territory. As a result, our government has worked very hard to make sure that partners came to the table and that ultimately a *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* was completed. It was necessary in order for that strategy to be broad, for it to be specific, and also for all of our partners and parties to see themselves in that, including First Nation governments and individuals with lived experience as well as the folks who work at the Department of Health and Social Services.

In August 2023, that strategy was released with the Yukon Council of First Nations in response to many of the things. In that strategy, we have: developed Car 867; we have increased opioid treatment services; we have increased access to safer supply, expanded methods of consumption available, and extended the hours of the supervised consumption site. We have held mental wellness summits; we have initiated paramedic response unit downtown, and we have increased access to beds. We have worked to hire additional staff, and I understand that two LPNs have been hired for the program that the member mentioned.

Speaker: Order.

Question re: Government support for hospitality industry

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear from businesses in the hospitality sector that are struggling to get by in this current inflationary, high-cost environment. Over the past year, we have seen several prominent bars and restaurants close, and we have seen others temporarily close while they restructure their business to adjust to the current climate.

One solution that has been raised with us is the idea of modifying the liquor pricing structure to create an additional level of support for licensees. Is the government currently considering using the liquor price structure to better support Yukon businesses?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, what our government is doing is taking responsibility for promoting responsible drinking and also reducing alcohol-related harms very seriously. The corporation is very mindful of being able to balance the health and well-being of Yukoners, while also supporting local businesses that contribute to a strong economy. The profits that come from the corporation go into a general revenue fund, and then those are reinvested into a wide

variety of government programs and services that support Yukoners.

Prices in liquor specifically — to the member opposite's question — they can fluctuate based on pricing changes from vendors and shipping and warehousing costs. These fluctuations are like other retail products that consumers purchase. Vendors change their prices according to their internal pricing strategies. I know that, during hard times of challenge, this government has been there to support businesses. I know that, through Economic Development and other initiatives for small businesses in the Yukon, being able to support small business is something that we take very seriously, including making sure that their taxes are zero and supporting them through very troubling times, such as the pandemic.

Ms. Van Bibber: In the minister's briefing note from last fall, it says that the Yukon Chamber of Commerce food and beverage committee had made a request of the minister for some form of rebate or price structure change.

Can the minister tell us what discussions have been made between the corporation and this committee of the Yukon Chamber of Commerce and whether or not any changes are being contemplated as a result of those discussions?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions with the Liquor Corporation and the minister but also directly with me, in the role of Minister of Economic Development. I think that it is important to note — and I think if you reflect on the first question from the member opposite, it was talking about the hospitality industry as a whole. One of the things that we have said in our discussions with chamber representatives is that we think it's important to have a fair approach to ensuring that not just establishments that sell liquor but also establishments that are in the hospitality industry and working hard to provide services as well would have supports if we're going to do that. Considering that, you really want to ensure that, whatever policy decision you make, it has the largest scope possible, so that is the discussion we have had with the chamber.

We know that the Yukon chamber has been doing a bit of work. In the short run, I think we have a commitment to go back to the table with those chambers.

I will note for the House that one of the things that I have constituted over the last year is opportunities to have breakfasts or meetings quarterly with all chambers where we have a chance to discuss this or any other topics. It was just about two weeks ago that I had a chance to attend meetings on a Friday with the Whitehorse Chamber, the Yukon Chamber, and other representatives from the business community.

Question re: Yukon River crossing at Dawson City

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, Yukoners learned that the Yukon government redirected \$52.5 million to the Nisutlin Bay bridge project that was originally provided by Canada for a new bridge in Dawson. This came to light following surprising statements made by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons. The minister has now confirmed that

the Prime Minister had old information, but he also confirmed that it was true.

The minister told the Legislature that the Yukon had applied for and received \$52.5 million for the bridge in Dawson in 2021. My question is simple for the minister: Why did the Yukon government apply for and receive \$52.5 million for a bridge in Dawson City without ever consulting with or informing the community of Dawson?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question. With respect to consulting — well, that is interesting. The Department of Highways and Public Works empathizes with the residents of West Dawson with respect to public — to crossings, but with respect to public engagement specifically, the Department of Highways and Public Works and Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in chief and council met in September of 2022 to begin discussions on community engagement and the future of the river crossing in Dawson. On March 15, 2023, department staff travelled to Dawson City, and Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in Elders Council hosted and invited Highways and Public Works to attend an engagement session with Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in citizens. On March 16, 2023, Highways and Public Works hosted two engagement sessions for Dawson City residents. These sessions focused on what is important to residents when planning for the future of the crossing. The sessions were well-attended, and we received a lot of helpful feedback — 462 Dawson City residents responded to the public survey, and approximately 120 residents attended the open houses. A follow-up survey was sent to Dawson City residents in June of 2023 to request further feedback.

I certainly look forward to continuing to discuss this engagement which we are doing with all Dawson City residents with respect to a future —

Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hassard: So, in the minister’s words, “it’s interesting”, and it is, because in January of this year, the government released the results of a 2023 consultation with Dawson residents about options for a bridge in Dawson. Despite conducting this consultation, the Liberals confirmed that there were no plans to build a bridge. They consulted on options for a bridge in Dawson when they had already ruled out building a bridge in Dawson, yet they applied for and received over \$50 million from Canada in 2021 for a bridge in Dawson without ever consulting with the community. It seems a little backwards, Mr. Speaker, so maybe the minister can explain it.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The ongoing engagement continued. A “what we heard” report was shared with the public on Friday, January 12, 2024. The report provides valuable feedback that will serve as a resource for Government of Yukon staff and guide discussions on the future of the Yukon River crossing in Dawson. Many residents had ideas for what the future of the crossing could look like. Ideas have included a vehicle bridge but also included a pedestrian bridge, an energy-efficient ferry, a cable car, and a gondola.

Department officials will be meeting with Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in chief and council this spring to discuss the findings of this report.

The department has heard and valued many ideas for river-crossing alternatives to the ferry and ice bridge, including through the Dawson City Yukon River crossing public engagement conducted in 2023. We are continuing to evaluate potential alternative options for the Dawson City Yukon River crossing. No decisions have been made to this point, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to infrastructure, I certainly recognize that the Nisutlin Bay bridge was an absolutely strategic part of North American infrastructure. I know that our Alaskan neighbours also appreciate the fact that we are maintaining our portion of the Alaska Highway to an appropriate standard and that bore fruit in the Shakwak agreement.

Question re: Wildlife management

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, in late November of last year, the Minister of Environment announced that he would be consulting First Nations, outfitters, and stakeholders on options to address concerns with the population of thinhorn sheep in several areas of southwest Yukon. Since that announcement, there have been several organizations and groups in the wildlife management community that have expressed concerns about the Liberal government’s use of what they call “adaptive management”. In many ways, the use of adaptive management has begun to undercut the process of the wildlife management that is outlined in chapter 16.

My question for the minister is: Will he reconsider using this new process of adaptive management and stick with what has served Yukoners to date: the regulation change process set out in chapter 16 of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to the member opposite’s question is yes. I could sit, but in any event —co-management partners and stakeholders shared their desire to re-establish the wildlife regulation amendments intake process under chapter 16 of the First Nation final agreements. This intake process was initiated by the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board in 2019 and has been paused since the COVID-19 pandemic.

To help come to a consensus on what conservation methods and management tools should be used for the conservation and management of sheep in southwest Yukon, department officials held a workshop with the Kluane First Nation, White River First Nation, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the Dän Keyi and Alsek renewable resources councils, and the Parks Canada agency, Kluane National Park division, on March 6 and 7, 2024. The workshop discussed conservation concerns on a sheep management unit, population-by-population basis and options for a broader suite of management tools for sheep while considering options that can be implemented in the short term to protect these vulnerable populations.

The partners concluded the workshop by drafting a memorandum of understanding to express the consensus on conservation concerns and management options. The memorandum of understanding will be finalized this spring.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that there have been serious environmental factors that have been causing issues for the sheep population in this region. In a news release that the minister issued in November, the minister stated that the management tools he is considering include permits, permit-hunt authorizations, registration hunts, and closures. I think this list is too limited and that the minister should consider other management tools that have worked both in the Yukon and in other jurisdictions.

Will the minister also consider management tools like habitat enhancement, predator management, education, and other methods to promote recovery — other than just reducing resident harvest?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the question from the member opposite and thank you as well for the fruitful conversation that I had with the member opposite and with the Member for Whitehorse Centre in Committee of the Whole yesterday. Certainly, I am listening to ideas from the members opposite and will confer with my officials with respect to any other conservation tools that can be provided to enhance populations. I am certainly always open to those discussions.

Just briefly for Yukoners listening, thimhorn sheep are an iconic species of Yukon wildlife and are economically and culturally significant. Recent aerial sheep surveys conducted by the Department of Environment noted that sheep population declines existed in several management units across southwest Yukon. The results of the 2022 and 2023 aerial surveys conducted by the department were published on www.yukon.ca on November 2, 2023.

Similarly, other government wildlife agencies have also observed low sheep population counts and low lamb survival rates in British Columbia and Alaska in recent years. This past year, Parks Canada also observed the lowest number of sheep in Kluane National Park and the reserve since the surveys began in the 1970s. We are providing the resources necessary to gain the data to make the appropriate conservation decisions.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, in the November press release about this issue, the minister committed that any updates regarding conservation actions in the affected sheep management units will be made public at the head of the 2024 hunting season. We know that several groups wrote the minister about these plans, and while some of those letters were made public, we haven't seen all of them yet.

Will the minister commit to sharing all the letters he received about this consultation, and also, when will he be releasing a "what we heard" document?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member opposite for the question and I will certainly get back to the member opposite with respect to that specific topic, but what this is really about is conserving sheep in the southwest Yukon.

Due to these conservation concerns, the department initiated consultation with co-management partners on proposed accelerated amendments to the regulation, but as indicated, the pushback was that the process under chapter 16 of the First Nation final agreements should be engaged.

As I indicated, the department also engaged with affected stakeholders, which included affected outfitters, the Yukon Outfitters Association, the Yukon Fish and Game Association, the Yukon Wild Sheep Foundation, the Yukon Conservation Society, and the Wildlife Society Canada, Yukon chapter.

Co-management partners and stakeholders have generally agreed that sheep populations in southwest Yukon are in decline and that intervention is needed; however, as the member opposite in fairness did indicate, there is no consensus on what conservation methods and management tools should be used.

I am certainly heartened by the fact that these workshops have occurred and that they will continue to occur. I will receive briefings on them and I will make the best decisions possible with all available data.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed. We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 982

Clerk: Motion No. 982, standing in the name of Ms. Blake.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Hon. Mr. Streicker: My apologies, Mr. Speaker, but isn't this the motion —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Okay, I'm wrong. Thank you very much.

Speaker: On the point of order, Official Opposition Government House Leader.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order, yesterday we identified 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. As members will note from today's Order Paper, those are listed as number 2 and number 3, and the motion from the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin is the first motion on the Order Paper.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to conduct a review of all programs operated in Yukon by Connective Support Society, including the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, Housing First, and the supervised housing and reintegration program, to determine if these programs should continue under the same operator.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to this motion. The NDP's motion is intended to prompt a review of all the programs operated in the Yukon by Connective Support Society, including the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, Housing First, and the supervised housing and reintegration program, also known as SHARP.

Minister McPhee spoke to the *Yukon News* in May 2023 about the need to gather information about the emergency shelter, emphasizing the importance of understanding and awareness. The minister stated that the government could not enhance or improve what they did not know about. I agree with this concept, which is why we are asking for a review of all the programs offered by Connective Support Society.

Our intent is to determine if these programs should continue under the same operator. Our goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of the people who access these programs while ensuring that quality supports are in place for those who access services.

Significant concerns were highlighted throughout the recent coroner's inquest around safety at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. There were notable gaps in policies, services, and supports provided by Connective. Given that there have also been a number of fatalities at the Housing First building and significant concerns by participants in SHARP around safety, we feel that it is critical that all programs delivered by Connective Support Society are reviewed in-depth. I'm going to discuss each of these programs, outlining our concerns with their operation.

Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — when Connective took over from the Yukon government, they removed a number of safety-related policies. For example, Connective scrapped a policy on bathroom checks, a policy that was specifically implemented by the Yukon government after the deaths of Cassandra Warville and Myranda Tizya-Charlie. After Connective had taken over the shelter and dropped this policy, another woman overdosed and died in a washroom in December 2023. She was not a part of the inquest, nor was she named. There have been additional deaths at the shelter that were also not a part of the inquest either, and we have no information about what happened to these people.

Another concerning example is that Connective scrapped a policy on when to call Emergency Services for a person accessing services. They also made it routine to place intoxicated clients into a wheelchair and then into a bed without calling for assistance, with limited documentation processes being followed.

Under Connective's leadership, staff have not been trained to use basic first aid techniques like the recovery position. A policy on first aid like this, as well as a policy on bed checks, might have made a difference, yet the inquest revealed that laying people on their stomachs was a common practice. Connective had initially drafted a policy for bed checks but later scrapped this too. During the inquest, Connective was also unable to answer questions about their response to sexual assaults against people staying in the shelter.

I will also point out that during the inquest, most staff testified that the provided cultural safety training was not sufficient. Meanwhile, many front-line and senior staff noted that written policies did not always reflect the reality of working in a shelter.

I want to quote from something that Gigi McKee, the regional director for Connective Yukon, said during the inquest. This was also quoted in a CBC article from April 25: "We do not have clear guidelines ... we have a lot of grey (areas) in the program."

The Connective director, Chris Kinch, testified that nothing had been done to provide more training for staff. The NDP hears repeatedly from people who stay at the shelter and do not feel safe. Many of those we hear from choose to sleep in tents or vehicles or on couches because they do not feel safe staying at the shelter. All of these raise red flags and certainly the need for a serious review.

For Housing First, a number of individuals have died at the Housing First building under the operation of Connective. This building is monitored 24/7, which makes these deaths highly alarming. Any death at all is extremely concerning, yet the fact that we have very little information about what happens internally or within Connective's processes or policies in the aftermath of a death is equally concerning. We have also heard multiple stories of concerning experiences at Housing First, including residents having to go without toilets for multiple weeks or having no locks on their doors.

For SHARP, we have heard concerns from previous staff and participants as well as current participants about substance use within the facility, including the selling and distribution of substances by both staff and participants of the program. We hear from people — either former staff and participants or people currently part of SHARP — who feel so unsafe due to substance use and dealing at SHARP that they consider trying to get back into the Whitehorse Correctional Centre just to feel safe or to gain access to meaningful and consistent support. This is an alarming thought and, even if nothing else, someone needs to be able to look into this situation and resolve any issues of safety or substance use or drug dealing happening within SHARP.

Considering the facts that have been shared and brought forward into the public eye by the inquest, there must be an in-depth review of all the programs run by the Connective Support Society.

Even just having the need for an inquest should be enough for this government to take immediate action to review all programs operated by Connective. This includes evaluating their effectiveness and ability to not only adequately run or deliver programs but to do so while providing supports to those who access in a safe and meaningful way that does not cause harm or lead to the loss of life.

We need to remember that people are not disposable. Any life lost is one too many. All of these deaths were preventable and two of the women who passed at the shelter are from the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. People deserve to be treated with dignity and Yukoners deserve to have access to supports and

services that feel safe while also knowing that their physical safety will not be compromised.

Mahsi' cho.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand today to speak to this motion. I will have some comments to make, but by all accounts, what is being asked for here is, of course, standard practice with respect to transfer payment agreements and other MOUs and other types of agreements between non-governmental organizations and the Government of Yukon to provide any programming whatsoever, because it is incredibly important that we evaluate those kinds of programs for the purposes of determining if they are: first, achieving their objectives; second, having the appropriate funding; and third, achieving value for the money being spent on behalf of Yukoners — Yukoners' taxpayer dollars that are providing these items or services — and I am now primarily talking about through NGOs — and whether or not Yukoners are achieving value for money and, most importantly, whether or not the programs are serving Yukoners in a way that they absolutely deserve to be served.

I am just going to find the wording of the motion that is before the Legislative Assembly. I think it's important.

What is being requested is a review of all of the programs operated by Connective Support Society. It mentions the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, the Housing First program, and the supervised housing reintegration programs — there are two, one for men and one for women — that are being operated by the Department of Justice or through the Department of Justice by Connective Support Society.

It then goes on to say: "... to determine if these programs should continue under the same operator." So, without mentioning the coroner's inquest — although it was much of what was said earlier to support this motion by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin — this alleges or appears to allege that this is about the coroner's inquest, but it doesn't talk about it being about the coroner's inquest. The reason I make that point is that the recommendations from the coroner's inquest were released at around 6:00 p.m. last Thursday. Today is Wednesday afternoon — so not quite a week. There are specifically eight of those recommendations — very critically important — that we learn from that process — that we learn what the thoughtful jury that was there for every moment of the testimony determined to write about — what they heard and the importance of those recommendations going forward.

Now, we have, of course — properly so — made a statement that we will evaluate those very carefully and that we will undertake a plan of how they will be implemented. I want to note that the respect for the families of the individuals who lost their lives and were part of the coroner's inquest evaluation and investigation through that process must be, first and foremost, those whom we are dealing with and respecting. We must also, as noted in some of the recommendations, respect the First Nation communities from which those women have come and the leaders of those First Nation communities for the purposes of determining how to go forward with

implementation of and discussion about those recommendations.

As a result, I have reached out already to chiefs of those organizations. We are talking about the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation — sorry, I am missing the name of the third — Chief Tom, Chief Nelson, and Chief Frost — in order to sit down with them and say to them: What does your community need? What does your community want? What is your vision of how we should respond? What work do you want to have as partners going forward to determine what is best for the people you represent — your communities, your citizens — and how can we better serve the community? It's necessary — and the necessity of serving them — in these programs and in particular with respect to the coroner's inquest with respect to 405 Alexander — I think that is what I want to convey today as the appropriate method of respecting their work. I certainly don't want to prejudge anything about what they will say about this process. I want to be open to the conversations and to their guidance as we go forward.

Following the conclusion of the coroner's inquest into the tragic deaths of four members of our community at 405 Alexander, I truly want to express my gratitude to everyone who was involved in the diligent and very difficult examination of the heartbreaking incidents that occurred there. We have sent expressions of thanks to the family members and the friends who testified about the loss of their loved ones — and for those who were involved in those processes — for coming forward and providing the information needed to improve how services are provided to this important community and how individuals in our community can be properly supported.

I did also express my condolences to the family members, because it was clear that they have wonderful memories of their loved ones — their mothers, their sisters, their aunties, and friends — that did not come out as part of the evidence through the inquest because that is not the inquest process. I appreciated how difficult that must have been.

We worked through the public statements to recognize the staff and the witnesses who testified about their experiences and participated in the inquest. I did express a special thank you to the jury, which came, paid close attention to the inquest, and provided their thoughtful recommendations about bringing forward change. Those recommendations need to be properly assessed. They need to be properly spoken about with the families — about their view of those recommendations and about what that might mean.

I appreciate that the wording of this motion — and I have taken the time to mention this here because I am concerned that this is about reviewing the Connective Support Society programs and how they are managing those programs. I guess I am concerned that this motion is a bit of a back door because it doesn't mention at all the recommendations of the coroner's inquest, which have to be foremost in our minds when reviewing the work of Connective.

Let me say that, with respect to 405 Alexander and with respect to the programs that are run by Connective through Justice — which are all extremely important to providing

service to the community — we have in our transfer payment agreements provisions for review and assessment, provisions for evaluation, and provisions for reporting, and those things are a regular activity of government. They happen to be in particular paid attention to by the Yukon government with respect to the program operation not only because of the things that came into the public knowledge through the coroner's inquest but because that is our job. It is incredibly important that we make sure, as I have said, that the services are being provided pursuant to the contracts that are put in place and then ultimately to provide the services to Yukoners that are necessary.

I think that I have expressed my concern about the way that this motion has been brought forward and what has been put forward in order to support it. I will speak in a moment about the individual assessments.

I'll speak in a moment about Justice and I'll talk about the SHARP separately, but let's talk about 405 Alexander.

In the winter of 2024, not too many weeks ago, Connective and the Council of Yukon First Nations — which, we must remember, is a partner with Connective in the operation of 405 Alexander — put out a 405 Alexander report to the community. It is a multi-page document for the purposes of telling the community — and meeting some of the criticisms that have been the case around the fact that individuals in the downtown community may not know what's going on at 405 Alexander if they are not people who go there for services or who happen to work there or work with the community of individuals who go there — and the opportunity to better communicate with the community, which is one of the goals that the Premier and I have both had for the last many, many months and years while we have been ultimately responsible — and I have been — for Health and Social Services and the services that are provided at 405 Alexander.

But we have taken an opportunity to speak publicly, to answer questions, to have public meetings — all about the services that are provided at 405 Alexander — for the purposes of having better understanding, for our communities to have better understanding of the services that we provide there and the individuals and their needs, because when we are better informed, we make better decisions and better support for our most vulnerable individuals as a community.

Let me just say this: I understand that the reports to the community by Connective and the Council of Yukon First Nations will continue on a basis of — it may be seasonal. This one is marked, as I said, “winter 2024”. It includes a welcome to the fifth edition — winter 2024 — of the 405 Alexander report to the community, remembering that the Council of Yukon First Nations and Connective only took over 405 Alexander last year. The months since the last update have flown by, as they note, and there are a number of very important pieces of information.

I won't, of course, read the entire report, but I think it's important to know — and this is all part of a review. At no point am I as the minister — or the department — or as the Minister of Justice — and the four programs that are mentioned, three of which are run through the departments that I work with —

saying that a review of Connective and the work and the approach that they take are not to be done because, of course, they are to be done. We have that legal obligation; we already are working to do that.

But I think that it is also important to remind Yukoners that Connective has — not in defence of them. These are simply the balance of the opportunity for people to learn about what is happening at 405 Alexander. Some of the front-page information includes the fact that 159,960 meals have been served as on-site dinners or meals and takeaway dinners — meals, breakfast, lunch, and takeaway dinners and dinners hosted there. That is almost 160,000 meals.

It notes also that 20,614 stays in the 54 emergency beds have been hosted by Connective and the Council of Yukon First Nations at 405 Alexander. They distributed over 14,000 harm-reduction items from condoms to Naloxone kits — also, drug-testing kits are available. At this time, in the winter of 2024, it notes that 50 overdoses were averted through Naloxone administration. We also know that other overdoses were avoided. The numbers are higher than that now.

The operation of 405 Alexander is critical to our community. It is critical to making sure that we have a place for our most vulnerable individuals, that we have a place for them to have service at that location, and that we have a place for them to learn about other places that can support them — the supervised consumption site, the outreach van, or other services that can be provided. The Connective staff have been responsible for those numbers. They talk in this newsletter and report to the community and the public about the hand-made table centrepieces that were done at their Christmas dinner, their holiday dinner, that they served to people who were staying at the shelter or who came to 405 Alexander.

They also speak extensively on the second page about the Safe at Home program and about the Council of Yukon First Nations and the outreach that both of those organizations have taken with respect to broadening the food services that are available throughout the community.

We have heard in the past that particularly women and children were feeling unsafe at times. Again, another organization stepped up in our community — the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition — and coordinated a document that is all over town and indicates where you can get free food in Whitehorse. It's a partnership between the food bank, the Anti-Poverty Coalition, and a number of other organizations that provide food and services: the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Sally & Sisters, the Aboriginal Women's Council, Safe at Home, the warming centre, Mary House, Boys and Girls Club of Yukon, and the Council of Yukon First Nations family preservation unit. There are many opportunities, of course — and, of course, at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — the opportunity for people to know about where they can get food in Whitehorse if they need it.

Perhaps it doesn't go without saying that, in all of those locations, there is also staff who can support an individual if they need help, if they are looking to get services other than food. Where can I go to be safe in this way? Where can I go to learn about that? Where can I go? That's the purpose of what

we have focused on for downtown Whitehorse — having different places for people to connect with services, different places for people to connect with opportunities to make different choices or improve their lives if that is what they so choose to do.

There is also an article in this newsletter about what they call the “community spotlight” on the Moccasin mobile outreach van. This is an exciting opportunity supported by the Council of Yukon First Nations and other partners. The Council of Yukon First Nations launched the Moccasin mobile outreach van, offering culturally safe support and connection to those in Whitehorse in the downtown core. The goal is to meet people where they are and where they might need support and the services to help reduce barriers for Yukoners facing challenges. That is what we have been working very hard to do — well said by the Moccasin mobile outreach van. The pilot project is funded by the Yukon government and will operate until the end of March, but I know that this is being extended.

There is other information here. In particular, there is notification about who to call and when to call if you’re looking for support or community well-being support. We have a number of ways in which individuals can access care, support, and programming, all with the goal of providing what people need and all with the goal of providing what our individuals with lived experience have informed us about.

I will speak for a few moments about the community warming centre that has been in this building for the last six weeks or so. What we have learned from that pilot project and the folks who have come here to use the computers and the Internet if they didn’t have access to that — and perhaps be in a quiet space. We have games and puzzles. Individuals who are coming have been connected to job resources and housing resources or other individuals they might meet there. I think it’s fair to say that there have been over 700 people coming there to seek services over the last weeks that it has been open. It has provided sort of a completely different option for individuals. Sometimes people have come who have been otherwise engaged at 405 Alexander and, on other occasions, individuals who have come are people who have not been engaged anywhere else. There are some students from Yukon University; there are some newcomers to our community, and there are opportunities for them to be connected in a way that didn’t exist before. It’s just one more option for people. I think that’s what we are trying to say. It is the response that we have taken and the opportunity we have taken.

With respect to some of the information about Connective, the transfer payment agreement with Connective for the purposes of running 405 Alexander is its third and final year. It is signed — sorry, I might have said “last year” when they took it over and I meant the year before. I apologize for that.

It is signed by the Minister of Health and Social Services and it is due to expire in 2025. We will make a decision, of course, following the review of the recommendations from the coroner’s inquest — by all of the information, by our partnerships with Yukon First Nations and what they have to say about this process going forward and how we can meet the recommendations and meet the challenges that exist at 405

Alexander and how we can continue fostering the partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations. A decision will be made regarding how the transfer payment agreement will be supported to continue the services at 405 Alexander.

Required changes to operations have, of course, been documented and, where possible, integrated into existing policy documents. If and when we work to renew the transfer payment agreement, any operational expectations, anything that has come as a result of the coroner’s inquest — and the family collaboration and the engagement with families and supporting them as best we can not only in their communities because of these horrible tragedies but in particular through their collaboration with their Yukon First Nation — we want to respect all of that process. Those are things that must be implemented in the future.

In the past year, senior staff of the Department of Health and Social Services have met with Connective regularly — monthly at a minimum — to discuss ongoing and current operations and issues. Specifically in the past eight months, the monthly meetings have been used to address a number of operational changes or challenges, including things that we have — the Premier and I and others — spoken publicly about with respect to how to address the challenges of 405 Alexander and the challenges of our downtown residents and downtown community businesses and how so many people have come together to support the efforts and the services that are provided at 405 Alexander for our most vulnerable individuals.

We have spoken to them about day-to-day operations and policies. We have spoken to them about expanding food service, which is evident in our community. We have had ongoing discussions about defining barrier access for the operations and eventually policy. We have talked about incident reporting and improving that process. A new process for incident reporting is now in place — remembering that the coroner’s inquest viewed what was occurring at a specific time. Again, not in defence of any of that, because I did not sit through the coroner’s inquest and hear every word — what we will do is work with the families and the First Nations on how they want us to proceed with respect to giving life to the recommendations, but there have been improvements and changes — enough? I couldn’t say. Will we review that? Absolutely.

There are managers reporting now following any incidents and obviously different approaches to video footage. There continues to be video footage of public spaces and other spaces. There has been the opportunity to put motion detectors in the washrooms there. We have worked with partners and neighbourhood engagement has taken place. We have defined expectations that are included in the transfer payment agreement around engaging with neighbours and engaging with the community, and outcomes from this were the newsletter that I have mentioned and then further participation in community meetings and working with the RCMP and with the Department of Justice more closely.

Connective has strengthened their working relationship with the RCMP through better responding for requests for information, but that needs to continue to be an important

opportunity. There has been improved security through our conversations with them and our reviewing of expectations. We do continue to urge the City of Whitehorse to come to the table for participating in those conversations. That has been difficult. There have been improved communications, improved food services, and improved cultural programming.

Then, of course, the information that has been learned from the inquest is to be respected.

I will speak just for a couple of moments about the SHARP, or the supervised housing and reintegration support program, run by Connective. It is funded by the Department of Justice, in this instance. I want to say that some of the submissions made by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin today were conveyed to me in a letter that I received this morning and that I immediately checked with the Department of Justice to determine whether or not they had heard any of the same complaints. There are some very serious allegations in that letter which need to be followed up on immediately. They had not been made aware of any of those allegations, whether they be from staff or from individuals who spend time at those housing and reintegration programs. I'm very concerned about the allegations — very concerned about all of what is occurring with respect to the care that we provide and the services that we provide for Yukoners through these programs that happen to be managed at this time by Connective. But in particular, those allegations are brand new. I immediately called the department to determine whether or not they had heard of such things or if those complaints had been brought to them; they had not. That concerns me as well, so I will be following up with the member opposite to determine whether or not she has more information so that we can review her allegations.

I should note that the Connective Support Society does operate two separate programs at the Department of Justice for a supervised housing and reintegration program at two separate facilities, one for men and one for women. The facility for women just opened last year at Takhini Haven as the first of its kind in the north. It was operating as a pilot program. The men's program operates out of a separate wing of the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. I should say that the women's program operates on the grounds at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre. That's the building known as Takhini Haven — quite separate from that of the Correctional Centre but near there.

As part of the current funding agreements, Connective Support Society provides quarterly reporting to the Department of Justice on its operations and finances. An evaluation is already planned for the pilot program, for the women's program, to inform long-term decisions on the need for and the design of that program. Again, are we achieving what is in the planned expectations in the transfer payment agreement? Are we achieving what we need — the services that we need — for Yukoners? Are we achieving proper value for money for Yukoners whose tax dollars are being spent to provide these important services for Yukoners?

The Department of Justice has recently decided to expand the scope of the planned evaluation. I should say that it was prior to this motion being tabled. I think it was tabled maybe two days ago in written form. Prior to that, we had discussed

some opportunity to expand the scope of the planned evaluation to include the operation of the men's supervised housing and reintegration program as well. Again, terms in the transfer payment agreement allow such evaluations, but at this time, we want to take a look at both programs and see how they are operating either in concert or with similar policies — or is there a difference between those? If so, are we meeting the objectives of the programming?

Evaluation is an objective assessment on whether a program is efficiently and effectively meeting the desired outcomes. The results of the evaluation will help the Government of Yukon make evidence-based decisions to continuously improve our programming.

I guess as a way to summarize, I take no issue with the idea of reviewing the programs that are operated by Connective. In fact, there are legal implications of us not reviewing those and there is, included in the transfer payment agreements, the authority for these organizations to run these programs and the opportunity to do such evaluations and to do such reviews. It is our responsibility to do so, so I take no issue with that whatsoever.

I want to be clear that, while the motion is asking for a review of Connective — again, I don't have any trouble with that — I am concerned that it is somehow making an allegation or alleging that the recommendations from the jury in the coroner's inquest would not take precedence over such a review or would somehow be separate from such a review. It is critical, when we do reviews of these kinds of programs, that they are comprehensive, that they are complete, and that we absolutely, in this situation, have the benefit and the important information that has come from the coroner's inquest that absolutely must be part of the review for Connective.

However, let's be clear: This motion is not talking about the coroner's inquest, although the submissions made in support of this motion do speak about those recommendations almost exclusively. Some people may argue that this is a distinction without a difference — it isn't. With respect to the recommendations that have come from the coroner's inquest, respect must be given to each and every one of those individually. Respect must be given to each and every one of those on the basis of what and how they are seen by the family members and by the Yukon First Nations of which those women were citizens. That must, in my view, be given priority.

With respect to that, I will commit that we will do such work. I will commit that — I guess the best and clearest I can say it is that work had already been contemplated, had already been started, in relation to some of these programs and in relation to the one at 405. We were properly awaiting the coroner's inquest recommendations. We have them. We will prioritize our relationships, our partnerships, with Yukon First Nations. We will remember that Connective is responsible for the services provided in partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations. We will respect that relationship, and we will work to improve and make the improvements necessary through any review that is completed as a result.

I take no issue with the motion other than what I have noted, because as I have said, this work is underway. It is being

done. It will continue to be done. It is the responsibility of this government, when we have transfer payment agreements with non-governmental organizations to run programs — which are also incredibly important. Government cannot take on every service. We are not experts in the field; despite our very talented officials and staff throughout government, across the Yukon government in all departments, we are not the only individuals or the only organizations that can provide services, nor should we be. We often turn to non-governmental organizations and their expertise in a particular area for the purposes of providing services.

We will continue to do that, but we will make sure that our government is ultimately responsible and is ultimately reviewing and improving at all times how those services are delivered and making sure that those services are delivered within the expectations of the agreements that we have and that they are, first and foremost, achieving what is in the best interest of Yukoners who need those services.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I just want to add a couple of points to this. When we talk about concerns that we have within the Yukon government, we talk about direction and we talk about the top of the pyramid. When we talk about Connective — and we're talking about Connective today — it's not the folks on the ground who are doing the work; it's the top of the pyramid. Like to know that, in Health and Social Services this year, Connective is getting a nearly \$6-million transfer to operate programs for some of the most vulnerable — like Yukoners — in some of the most vulnerable situations, I think that government would want to review the policies. I think that they would want to ensure that the Yukoners accessing those programs had the best support that they could. I would think that the minister would want to ensure that employees had the most support and that, in times of crisis, that she would be confident that employees would be offered, for example, counselling or that employees were offered adequate training or appropriate training or that, when employees brought forward concerns, that they were met with policies to work through and figure out what should be actioned and how it should be actioned.

We're not just talking about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — we're not. There was lots of discussion initially when Housing First was set up, and it was decided to go under the similar agreements under the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* — so, rental agreements. We were told at the time that there was no way that any provision could be put in — that if there was a safety concern, that someone's apartment could be entered.

But, Mr. Speaker, my friend Hazel, who I have moved into Normandy — well, we gave permission — we signed a clause that said that if there were concerns about her safety, they could enter her apartment.

So, when we talk about policies and we talk about this one organization that has taken on all of these programs in the territory which now can use their experience here as they go south to say that they have experience running these programs, what we're asking about is just to ensure that what they say they

are delivering, they are delivering and that they are supporting their staff, that they are training their staff, and that they are supporting clients.

So, I do very much appreciate the recommendations from the coroner's inquest, but there are other parts of it. It is asking that, within six months, Connective do its own review. I think that's fine, but I would hope that, at this point in time, with the fact that we just had a coroner's inquest around the death of four people and understanding that there have been other deaths, that instead of waiting for six months, the Yukon government would want to ensure that all of the items listed in the recommendations — for example, for a policy review — are currently being met and that those policies exist. When we ask to do a policy review, it's going to be challenging if the policies don't exist. If we're saying that it's fine that the Yukon government waits six months before they take a look to make sure that everything is in place, that's a concern that I have.

There is no part where we're saying the government is the only expert, but I can tell you that, in our community, there are experts. There are experts, and there were other applications for those different facilities, those different programs. Other experts had applied with proven track records.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. White: I appreciate that the minister, off-mic, has told me that this is not true. I have had conversations with folks who were interested in applying, then; let's say that. I appreciate the correction off-mic.

I looked at the recommendations from the coroner's inquest. In some cases, I would hope that these things will be done by Connective much sooner than the timeline that they have been afforded, but when we get to recommendation 4 of the evaluation that says that, in six months, the Yukon government, through its transfer payment agreement provisions, will evaluate Connective Support Society for compliance with recommendations 1, 2, and 3, the question that we have is: What have they done so far, the Yukon government? Again, it's \$6 million this year. Last year, it was close to \$7 million.

It's not the money. Again, it's the dignity and the way that we treat people — both clients accessing those services and those delivering on the front line. I cannot imagine how that staff feels in each of those facilities right now having gone through this inquest. How would you feel? What supports are being given to them by their employer?

Really, what we are asking is that Yukon government ensure that the money that they are spending — nearly \$6 million this year — is doing what we anticipate it to do, that it is supporting people in the way that they deserve to be supported, that we are ensuring people's dignity, and that we are ensuring that the staff who are working in these facilities aren't going to be going to the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board because of issues of PTSD because of what they have been left to deal with on their own.

So, today, we are calling on a review of those programs across the board. We think that it is reasonable, and we think that it is responsible. We have heard back from the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. The chief is currently

travelling, but she said to please view this as support of the motion. I had conversations yesterday with the Chief of the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun who indicated the same and unfortunately wasn't able to get back in writing today.

What we are asking for is — we are just asking for an extra layer of accountability. My expectation is that, in this process, there are interviews with both clients and staff, right? What works and what doesn't work and what needs improvement? I don't know that waiting for six months is an acceptable answer right now, which is why the motion has been brought forward today.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, over the course of the past several weeks, Yukoners have been shocked and startled at the revelations that have come out about the operation of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter by Connective. As well, in addition to those, we have heard a number of concerning reports of other programs that have been operated by Connective as well, so I am glad that the MLA for Vuntut Gwitchin has brought this motion forward, and we will be supporting it.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am pleased to rise today to speak to this motion. I would like to take the opportunity to speak about ongoing efforts to protect and support some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

Connective is one part of a large and diverse network of organizations that are working to support marginalized Yukoners. The NGO sector and government are working together to address the root causes and provide support to ongoing challenges of poverty and violence.

I always hold my hands up to these people on the front lines for work that they do every day. I certainly spent a lot of my life and years working on the front line, and I know how difficult it is. I worked very closely, of course, through my whole time on the front line — but I am thinking about the work that I did at Jackson Lake and establishing that centre, working closely with Yukoners there. That was very important work, so I absolutely know how difficult it is to work and how rewarding it is all at the same time.

I would like to focus my response to this motion today on the work being done to prevent gender-based violence in our territory, because I believe that the deaths of the four Indigenous women at 405 Alexander are connected to broad systemic issues that have their roots in colonization and the history of residential schools. I really believe that.

The same root causes that led these women to be in a vulnerable and dangerous position are the same root causes underlying the ongoing crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. These deeper systemic issues are the same ones behind the deaths of too many of our sisters, daughters, mothers, friends.

So, Mr. Speaker, how is the Government of Yukon working to make systemic changes? A key way we do this is by providing both operational and project funding to many non-governmental organizations. In turn, these organizations provide a wide range of crucial services to those who need them the most. Through the Yukon's bilateral agreement with

Canada on the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*, our government is targeting additional funding to address all forms of gender-based violence.

The national action plan's four-year implementation plan includes many new programs that will reach underserved and at-risk populations. Through the plan, we are supporting 13 equity-seeking organizations for funding to bolster existing programs and develop initiatives that support victims, survivors, and their families. The following 13 non-governmental organizations have received funding for 2023-24 and in the main budget for 2024-25: the Dawson women's shelter; women's transition home; Help and Hope for Families; Yukon Status of Women Council; les Essentielles; Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre; Queer Yukon Society; Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society; Yukon Aboriginal Women's Society; the Yukon Women in Trades and Technology; Skookum Jim Friendship Centre; and the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition.

This is a diverse group of organizations supporting a wide range of people and they are addressing gender-based violence in different ways across the territory. Together, these organizations make up a network of services, programs, and advocacy to support people who are at the greatest risk of experiencing gender-based violence in our territory.

I would like to highlight the work of a few of these NGOs. There are three transition homes that received funding through the national action plan: the Dawson women's shelter, the women's transition home in Whitehorse, and Help and Hope for Families in Watson Lake. These organizations offer a safe place to live for women, gender-diverse people, and their children who are needing to flee violence. They also provide in-house programming, support and advocacy, and referrals.

Another organization that our government is proud to support is the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre. They provide an emergency shelter for youth from ages 17 to 23. This is in addition to rich programming they offer, including programs for men and boys that aim to prevent gender-based violence as well as other skill-building programs.

Also, Queer Yukon Society offers safe spaces in Whitehorse, Watson Lake, and Dawson City where 2SLGBTQIA+ Yukoners and their loved ones can access resources, supports, and online and in-person programming. They also offer education and training to the broader community, which has been bolstered by the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* funding.

The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition works to eliminate poverty in our territory through awareness, advocacy, and action. Although their mandate does not directly target gender-based violence, it does target housing insecurity and poverty, which are underlying factors that contribute to gender-based violence and intimate-partner violence. They have received additional funding to focus on gender-based violence prevention as well as support for victims.

There are many more organizations actively working to address gender-based violence. I could definitely go into detail if I had more time. There is incredible work happening around research advocacy, women's empowerment, cultural

revitalization, programming for boys and men, gender-based violence and sexualized assault victim support, family health initiatives, and many other essential and often life-saving services. We are incredibly lucky to have such a robust and diverse gender-based violence sector in the Yukon.

I would like to acknowledge our partnership with the federal government under the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. The *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* marks a major accomplishment in our country. Yukon's agreement with Canada will see about \$4 million per year in federal funding flowing to Yukon for four years. This is a 10-year initiative, so we look forward to continuing to work with Canada on this national action plan. We are now entering year 2 of this four-year agreement, and the Government of Yukon is cost-matching the federal funds. This initiative, with its additional federal funding, has a real opportunity to make change in our territory.

The vision of the national action plan is a Canada free of gender-based violence, a Canada that supports victims, survivors, and their families no matter where they live. As I have told this House many times, the rates of gender-based violence in the north are some of the highest in the country. We also know that Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people living in the north experience violence at much higher rates than our non-Indigenous counterparts.

Through the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* and the Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit+ people strategy, the Yukon government is committed to working with community organizations to prevent and address gender-based violence. We are creating meaningful change through community-led solutions. I would like to share a few more details about the plan with my colleagues now.

The five pillars of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* are: support for survivors and their families; prevention; promotion of responsive legal and justice systems; support for Indigenous-led approaches; and informed responses, social infrastructure, and enabling environments. Under the plan, 25 percent of federal funding must be directed toward gender-based violence prevention. The Yukon's implementation plan has dedicated more than 40 percent of the funding to increasing prevention efforts. Contributions are based on a 50/50 share split, and the Yukon's 50 percent can also include in-kind and existing contributions. The Yukon's implementation plan includes 16 actions; three are existing Government of Yukon initiatives, including the sexual assault response team, the prevention of violence against women fund, and implementation of Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy; 13 are new, and six of the 16 actions are focused on prevention efforts. This includes four new and two existing initiatives.

I would also like to highlight how the national action plan is supporting work in the Department of Justice and the work that they are doing. This includes enhancing many programs such as improving transportation between Yukon communities for victims of gender-based violence, criminal and law navigators to support victims of intimate-partner violence of all ages, multi-disciplinary response for children and youth who

experience or witness gender-based violence, culturally integrated justice programs for the therapeutic court, integrated restorative justice, community-based and First Nation government-led diversion programs that will strengthen the justice system's response to gender-based violence, and culturally relevant programming to address gender-based violence for women in territorial custody.

The Women and Gender Equity Directorate is also working with our partners in the sector to conduct a program review. This will include stakeholder engagement that will identify opportunities and gaps to ensure that no one is getting left behind. The program review will offer a chance to discuss not only what is working well in terms of services offered by equity-seeking organizations but where the gaps remain. I think it's so important that we do that work.

The Yukon Women's Coalition will be a key part in ensuring that the review is successful. The program review will help us identify priorities for years 3 and 4 of the national action plan bilateral agreement. We will use the results of the review to guide us as we invest in meaningful actions to address gender-based violence in the territory and support the work of equity-seeking organizations.

As we work together to implement the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*, I want to recognize the strength of the Yukon Women's Coalition. When many organizations in the sector work together toward a common goal, they can accomplish more. The coalition has been clear with me about the pressures they are experiencing. They have also been clear that they want to be more involved in implementing the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. I was pleased to meet with the coalition on April 5 to discuss this. We agree on some solid next steps toward the shared goal.

As we implement the national action plan, we must monitor data results to ensure that we're on the right track. Women and Gender Equality Canada, with input from the provinces and territories, has created an expected results framework that makes us part of an agreement with the federal government. This framework is available online to the public along with Yukon's agreement, and I'm pleased to share that the results of every jurisdiction's implementation plan will be made public in an annual report.

This report will track the national progress toward the objectives of the national action plan and the outcomes identified. An expected results framework monitoring the results will help us chart a new course in the future.

Mr. Speaker, this brings me, of course, back to the lives lost at 405 Alexander Street. The recent coroner's inquest was very difficult for many people, especially families and friends who were grieving the tragic loss of these four women. I want to thank all of the folks who were involved in the inquest and those who provided essential services and supports. A special thank you, of course, to the jury, which paid such close attention throughout the inquest. I know that we also had members of the women's organizations there to hear all of the inquest and all of the evidence that was given. I want to say thank you as well to the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council,

which organized the walk in downtown Whitehorse on Friday. The significant turnout reflects just how deeply this community cares. There is strength in unity. I again hold my hands up to all of those who are doing this work on the front lines.

I am very hopeful that the recommendations from the inquest will bring the help that — just to ensure that such tragedies never are repeated. Together, we strive to honour the memory of those we have lost by committing to meaningful changes that protect and uplift every member of our community.

I want to, of course, thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for bringing forward this motion today and having this discussion in the Legislative Assembly. With that, I will conclude my comments for today and turn it over to others who may have thoughts that they want to share.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I am speaking today really from my perspective as MLA for Whitehorse Centre. My riding of Whitehorse Centre is where a number of the programs that are run by Connective are — specifically the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the Housing First residence. So, I am going to primarily speak to those two programs, although I know that this motion goes beyond — to the SHARP program — and I think that the review of that program is also very important.

The people who live at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the Housing First residents are my constituents, and I am proud to represent them. I am proud to live downtown and to be part of a neighbourhood and community where we support each other when we need it. I am proud to have an emergency shelter and a Housing First building in my riding, but I have heard many concerns about the management of these programs — both from people who access those programs and from the wider community.

I have heard many concerns about safety from the people who access the services and from those who live and work nearby. There have been many concerns raised to me about these programs, but what alarms me the most is when I hear from my constituents who need the support offered by the emergency shelter and the Housing First program, but they don't feel safe going there. I know there have been fatalities in both buildings, and this deeply concerns me.

I have heard from constituents who have resorted to living in tents or on couches because they don't feel safe at the shelter. What we heard at the inquest about the ways that people living at the shelter have been treated deeply concerns me. The lack of policies regarding key safety issues deeply concerns me. These are essential programs, and again, I am proud to have them in my riding, but it is not clear that they are currently meeting their mandates.

A point that has been raised by some of the other members of this Legislature is that we just went through an inquest about some of the deaths that happened at the emergency shelter, so why would we need another review now? Why would we have this motion now?

The goal of this motion is not to ignore the recommendations of the inquest or to redo the inquest but to go

beyond the scope of the inquest, beyond what it could address, and we need to do this to ensure the safety of the people accessing these programs. The inquest was very specific to the four deaths involved. That is the point of a coroner's inquest, and I don't critique that; however, we have heard of much larger concerns that reach much further, and concerns from the inquest only further highlight the need for a review. Again, this not a criticism of the inquest. Their scope was very specific, as it should be, but there is a lot to follow up on, and there are a lot of possible recommendations that could apply to these situations that were out of the scope of the jury to recommend.

For example, the inquest does not consider the other programs run by Connective, but we have heard concerns about them. When we hear about the gaps in policies at the emergency shelter, we wonder if there are those same gaps in other programs run by Connective. There is no reason for this to take precedence over the recommendations of the inquest, and we support the recommendations of the inquest, but these concerns go beyond that scope. We know that there have been fatalities that were not part of the inquest.

We also gave very careful consideration today to the impact of discussing this yet again immediately after the inquest and the potential impact on people who are affected. Ultimately, with the support of people such as Chief Nicole Tom of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, we concluded that it was crucial that we talk about it and that it is crucial that we raise issues that are affecting Yukoners every day. We have heard concerns from program participants, from staff, from former staff, from neighbours, from family members, and from community members. These cannot be ignored; a review is needed.

I also heard the Member for Riverdale South question the part of this motion that specifically speaks to addressing whether these programs should continue under the same operator. The reason we included that is because running programs like this isn't easy. Typically, programs like this are run successfully when the operators combine experience with local knowledge. Unfortunately, especially when it comes to the emergency shelter, Connective doesn't have either of those things. They are not a local organization, their management is outside of the Yukon, and they have very little experience in the territory. Of course, we know that the Council of Yukon First Nations provides cultural programming, which I have heard has been quite successful, but CYFN is not involved in the management of the shelter, and they are certainly not responsible for safety at the shelter. We support CYFN's continued involvement in the shelter.

Connective also has very little experience running emergency shelters. They actually only are involved with one other emergency shelter that has a very different model and is only open seasonally. Even with that, they have only been running shelters since 2021, so three years or less.

I met with Connective when they first took over the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. At that time, it was being run by the Yukon government, and things were not good. Changes were very sorely needed. Connective told me that they needed some time to get their feet under them and to make some

changes. That's a reasonable request, and we have given them that time. Now it's time to assess the changes that have occurred. There are reasons to believe that at least some of the changes have compromised the safety of the people involved. I have not heard from my constituents that things have improved on other metrics, but I understand that I'm hearing from some people, not everybody, and I think it's important that we have a review to get a full picture of what changes have occurred and whether they have improved things.

As the Yukon government does this review, if this motion passes, and if the Liberals choose to respect the will of the Legislature — we know that they have not always done that in the past — but if they do, they'll be doing this review, and I want to speak a little bit to our hopes for how this review is done. I imagine that part of this review would be considering various options for the operation of the shelter to determine if the current situation is the best one. As that's done, I really encourage the Liberals not to be considering: Is this the cheapest option? Not to be considering: Is this the easiest option? But: Is this the best option?

You know, we heard earlier today from the Member for Riverdale South about investigating whether we are getting good value for money. We are talking about people who need support and situations that are potentially fatal and have been fatal when that support is not provided in a way that is needed. So really, the question that they need to ask is: Is this option for running the shelter and the Housing First residence and the SHARP program — is this the option that provides the most safety for the people who need these services and the best supports for the people who need these services?

I also want to talk about my hope for what would happen after this review, should it occur and this motion pass. To really assess whether Connective is the best operator for these programs, the review must be done by people who are experts in the field, experts in emergency shelter operations, and experts in harm reduction. I urge the government to bring in outside expertise for this, and to allow the outside experts to do their best work, this review should be independent.

If this motion passes, this review will have been ordered by this Legislative Assembly and should return to this Legislative Assembly to guide decision-making going forward, but more importantly than that, it should be shared with the people who need these services and use these services and with the wider public who supports them. So, if the government plans to respect the will of this Legislature, should this motion pass, I hope that they will communicate a plan for sharing the results of that review.

I want to close by reiterating my support for these programs and my pride in being a neighbour and a representative of the people who live at the emergency shelter and at the Housing First residence. These programs are essential in our community, and because they are essential, we have to get them right, and that is the goal of this motion.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to start today by acknowledging the coroner's inquest again that has taken place in the Yukon over the last several weeks. It has been an

incredibly difficult time for many Yukoners and especially difficult for those families who testified about the loss of their loved ones. I would like to thank those families for their strength throughout the process. The work carried out by the inquest contributes to the ongoing efforts to protect those most vulnerable among us — again, one life lost in a substance use health emergency is too many.

I think that it's important to note as well that, during the period of time the inquest covered — in 2023, there were also a lot of other families in the Yukon who were affected at that point in time. I think it's important to note that this opened up a lot of pain with those families, and it is important that we note that. There were a lot of different discussions about the scope of this work by the coroner, and we know that there were First Nation governments that we have spoken to — as well as non-governmental organizations — that had wanted to see a larger conversation because of individuals who were affected. That is something that should be noted in Hansard — and that, as a government, we're aware of that.

I want to make a note very quickly here today to say that, listening to the interventions and the speeches from the NDP today, there was a lot of — in the last one as well saying that, if this is passed today, that will support this work.

I have to clarify very quickly today that the commitment was made already last week to do this work. We had a meeting on Friday with — we had a retreat. All First Nation chiefs in the Yukon were invited. The majority of Yukon First Nation chiefs were in attendance. My comments can be validated by the Third Party, by the NDP, if they would like to have a more detailed conversation — if the Chief of the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun is comfortable, whom they had noted they were in contact with.

I do appreciate the letter that was tabled today from Chief Tom. Chief Tom did plan to be in attendance on Friday but I think was pulled away. We did communicate a bit around this, and Chief Tom had given some great comments and advisement, because we wanted to ensure that the retreat that was going all day also gave respect to the march and the walk that happened at lunchtime.

So, when building the agenda for the retreat on Friday, we did take advisement from Chief Tom earlier on in the week and we ensured that, after we completed our morning session at Jackson Lake, we did transport Cabinet and chiefs together to take part in the walk, in the march, to show solidarity to the community and the support to the families and to show as well that there's a definite commitment here from us.

I will let First Nation leaders speak on their own behalf, of course, on that — I would never — but I know that they felt it was very important to be there. Then we came together again. We made sure that the organizers were aware that we wouldn't be there for the sacred fire because we then gathered and went back to Jackson Lake to complete our work for the day.

During those conversations, the leaders who first and foremost had citizens who were affected and who were part of the inquiry requested — and this government made a commitment through the Minister of Health and Social Services that there would be a committee that would work on this.

I want to say for the House today that the work that is being requested here was committed to on Friday, and now we are just looking at building out what the structure will look like for that. The Grand Chief was also there on Friday. Of course, it is very important for us — and I will go back through a little bit of history just to understand that there is a significant relationship between the Council of Yukon First Nations and Connective. Chief Smith was there as well, and I think that it is important to note that the largest number of folks who use the shelter are also citizens from Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

The Government of Yukon — I will go back through a little bit — assumed operations of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter at 405 Alexander Street in January 2019. In October 2022, Connective — formerly the John Howard Society Pacific — assumed operations at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. They did so in partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations, which they worked with to submit a joint proposal meeting the criteria outlined in an expression of interest issued by the Government of Yukon.

Again, given the scale and complexity of operating such a service, government was pleased to see the Council of Yukon First Nations and the John Howard Society partnering — first to assume the operations at the Housing First residence and then later of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

There were a lot of comments that were made today by members opposite that I agree with deeply. I think that there is, of course — when we think about what Connective is doing — when we look back, they came to the table with over 30 years of experience providing programs and services with essential support to vulnerable and marginalized community members, including those involved in the criminal justice system and experiencing homelessness, employment barriers, problematic substance use, mental health challenges, and developmental disabilities or spectrum disorders. Connective has also worked with Indigenous partners to identify and fill the gaps in the support needed and provided for Indigenous peoples.

The John Howard Society has a long, long history. I think that I can tell the House that there was a long history of wanting to see the John Howard Society play a role in the Yukon. I can remember going back to I think 2006; I can still remember having a proposal that sat on an orange floppy disk that I was asked to do for Yukon Learn when they had a small office behind Northwestel. It was a submission for funding to see if there was an opportunity to bring the John Howard Society to the Yukon. It was really to support the work that was being done with vulnerable populations at that point at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre but also Yukon Learn. Their leader at that point, Debbie Parent, felt that this would be a great organization to bring to the Yukon because of their track record in working with folks. So, there's a long history of that organization and the roots of that organization doing a lot of work on the west coast. I don't know about the entire country, but I think that they have played a role in other areas in this country.

We are keenly aware of the complex challenge involving providing services to Yukon's vulnerable population. I will say to the House that we finished here just before Christmas for the

year. I took an opportunity to — I thought it was appropriate, as all of this conversation was happening, to ensure that I had first-hand knowledge of what was happening. I was lucky enough to put a hoody on and a ballcap, be escorted in, and have a chance to walk through on the afternoon of December 23 into 405. I wanted to see exactly, without folks really having an understanding of my role, what was happening there and to take a look at what was happening on all three floors. I wanted to see what was happening with the food services, I wanted to see what was happening with policy delivery, I wanted to see the cleanliness, I wanted to understand how people were being treated there, I wanted to see how our EMS services were interacting with the population, and I wanted to see if there were deep conversations that were happening between Health and Social Services staff and our social workers and case managers.

Having worked in different areas in our community, whether it be with FASSY or vulnerable youth, or having a chance to see some folks who still have challenges in their lives and being able to sit down with them, whether it be in the cafeteria area or other areas in the centre and actually have a discussion directly with them — also to have a conversation directly with staff —

So, the Council of Yukon First Nations provided me that opportunity, and walking through and having a chance to see it, I would say that there are a lot of very good things happening there. That's not me just speaking in the House at Question Period — like walking in, actually talking to EMS and to the folks doing social work and to folks who are using the centre.

Not to say that there's not — and I agree today that there is not an opportunity to do immense improvement. I will also note that, for clarity and accountability to the Assembly, that is just a moment in time. That is just the experience that I saw when I was there. Of course, you have the testimony of all those individuals who have worked with Connective and their thoughts about policy development or gaps in policy and the appropriate training.

I will say, as noted in the House today, what a tremendous amount of pressure anybody would have working in that environment. Again, I was there in the afternoon, but there were almost 60 people staying there the night before — 64 people, and then, of course, the top floor had permanent residents. I have really wanted to focus on that as well — understanding that it is low barrier — and is that the right thing that should be in place? I can say that the policy review started — at least with my work and the minister's work — before the inquest even began.

I will say to the House that I have gone through and requested the TPA. I have gone through it with our team. I sat down with Health and Social Services as well to look at what the deliverables have to be in ensuring that folks are supported in that centre.

Our government does have a duty of care, of course, to ensure the safety and well-being and dignity of all individuals under our care and those under the care of partner organizations. My colleague the Minister of Health and Social Services has already outlined the changes her department has

worked through with Connective regarding their operations, incident reporting, partner engagement, security, and beyond.

I also want to say something that we really have to do collectively here in the House is to continue to educate ourselves on who the people using 405 Alexander are and who seem to be — there are increases in population from time to time, and I can say that — I think it's about three weeks ago now — the Moccasin mobile van — I did go out for an evening with the Grand Chief, and we had an opportunity to really interact with folks.

During that, I had a chance to see kind of what the state of affairs was in the downtown core, understanding who was accessing services, and there continues to be a bit of a transient population coming into the Yukon. It's not necessarily Yukoners from the city or from our communities who have come in but people from outside of the Yukon — in some cases, outside of Canada — who we were ensuring had clean socks, toiletries, food, or water. The busiest spot that I experienced with the van was right outside of 405 with folks who were coming over in the parking lot next door to access these services.

To be open with the House, I was shocked in some cases about who was coming to the van just because it wasn't my expectation. I thought of folks who definitely have come from out of territory to the Yukon and have done that without the proper safety nets in place, and now, of course, that becomes part of our obligation. Again, it's something for us to watch.

In our meetings as well around 405 Alexander, in those discussions, we pulled together an oversight committee, and during those discussions, there was some dialogue — and I'll reflect on the comments from the director of Bylaw for the City of Whitehorse — and it was really around what they're seeing. They are seeing a younger population, very transient, sometimes — cases where violence can erupt much quicker — from outside the territory.

In our discussions with leaders from adjacent provinces or territories, we have brought this up — the fact that we have to be aware of this — and that's leading again to some of the challenges in the downtown core, in our communities, and also around 405. Again, that's why we've continued to support additional investment with the RCMP. It's really important that we have the proper resources there.

I have personally met with Connective to discuss their operations, and I did this before the coroner's inquest. I requested that the CEO and others — and said that we are doing a significant review of their deliverables, understanding that the current relationship contract that's in place goes to this fall. Decisions have to be made.

I visited again, as I said, 405 Alexander and have spoken with individuals who work there and live there. As a government, we will continue to have the expectation that the services provided to Yukoners are focused on safety, care, and dignity, and I appreciate those comments today.

I did have an opportunity to speak with three of the four families that had to be witness to those proceedings. Again, it was heartbreaking. I know that there are Members of the Legislative Assembly who were very close to those families. I

want to say that I'm sorry for whatever you had to go through in the last couple of weeks, because I know that it was not easy for anyone. In my case, there was one person who was a student. I really respected my relationship with that individual, Josephine Hager. I want to say her name here today because I think she was a very special person. I had a chance to spend time in land-based activities with her. She attended a class that I oversaw and had an incredible sense of humour. I just think back to what was said, and it's heartbreaking. I also know that I had an opportunity years ago to be involved with a hockey school — great memories — and, of course, having Miranda who was — again, there is a hockey coach and being there to support young individuals from Old Crow — I just remember the most positive things — seeing her come into the rink and support kids and help as one of the team members helping youth in the Yukon.

As a government, we understand that this is not a process that would usually be directed through the Legislative Assembly. I appreciate the way that this has been brought forward today. But this work and this relationship requires feedback from Yukon First Nations directly as well as Connective's partners and the Council of Yukon First Nations. Last week, it was: This has to start and let's move on it with direction from our chiefs.

As we go forward, I think that it will be very important to work with all of the many groups that were identified today. As my colleague the Minister of Health and Social Services has stated, we will continue to process the findings. That timeline that was identified today is the maximum timeline, but this work is starting right away and it will be important. I think there were some strong points made today that can be added to the work that has already been committed to, and that is: Do we bring in some experts from other areas who can help with the work that we have been committed to? But again, of course, we are here today to support this because it is something that we have already started.

We respect the direction that we had on Friday from First Nation leaders, but we do also have an obligation to sit down and have a more significant conversation with the Council of Yukon First Nations. As was stated today by members of the Third Party — and I think it was right — and by my colleagues, there are so many leaders in our community, and if we are really going to tackle these big challenges overall as well as improve the services that are delivered, it is going to be very important for us to take feedback and knowledge and advice from so many areas in our community.

With that, I will take my seat. Thank you for bringing this forward today and amplifying a commitment to the work that has been started already — understanding that this is extremely important and that is the way that we went into our days after things concluded with the inquest last week.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, she will close the debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking my colleagues for speaking to this motion. I have spoken this afternoon about many of the issues that we hear are taking place in the programs and buildings operated by Connective Support Society. I have also highlighted our concerns with the programs, services, and policies that Connective Support Society is providing. We have heard the concerns and experiences of people using Connective Support Society programs and services. We are concerned about the safety of people and about the quality of care that those who access services are receiving.

In regard to spending time in spaces that are operated by Connective, I do, in fact, spend a lot of time at 405 Alexander because we have a high population of Gwich'in people from Yukon and NWT who frequent the shelter and we also have a high number of folks who are of Gwich'in ancestry who stay at Housing First and hang around that space. So, I do devote a lot of my time outside of work hours being on the streets, checking in on people, buying plane tickets for people to get home, and stuff like that just to try to support people through my role. I see what is happening and I see the hard work that is being done by the folks who work on the front line and provide service delivery through their roles as employees of Connective. I see the challenges that they experience while they are on the job, especially at the shelter, and the risk to safety that sometimes unfolds in those spaces. I do see it first-hand.

The intent of this motion is to ensure that not only the folks accessing services but those who work in that system with Connective are supported and protected and able to do their job in a manner that enhances the quality of services that are being delivered.

It is up to this government to initiate an in-depth review of all the programs, policies, and services of Connective Support Society. It's also up to this government to ensure that Connective is working appropriately to care for the people who are accessing all of the services they operate. We are looking for a commitment to review all Connective programs from this government. And again, thank you to my colleagues for speaking to this motion, and I hope that everyone here votes in favour of this motion.

Mahsi' cho.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Table Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 982 agreed to

Motion No. 775 — adjourned debate

Clerk: Motion No. 775, standing in the name of Ms. McLeod; adjourned debate, the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am very glad that we have the opportunity to come back to this motion. The comprehensive municipal grant is extremely important to our municipalities. To recap: Under the Yukon Party, when I was a city councillor, the funding did not increase. When we came in as a Liberal government, we renegotiated the grant, and from 2017, the grant began increasing. In fact, since this motion was first debated last fall here in the House, the comprehensive municipal grant has increased by over 10 percent.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today to Motion No. 775 and to the good work and relationships that this government has invested into our Yukon communities and with the Association of Yukon Communities. I do, as noted by my colleague earlier on — we do remember those days — I can remember the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin sitting across from me in Haines Junction and hoping — as he was a councillor for the Village of Teslin — that there would be an increase to the municipal grant, hoping that we would see proper funding — again, not really seeing an escalator put in place until after 2016 when this government was elected.

Our government has established and maintained quarterly meetings with the Association of Yukon Communities to advance and discuss priorities and initiatives that the association would like to bring forward on behalf of the mayors across the Yukon and to focus on and prioritize matters of mutual interest. What I would just like to touch on today, as we talk about sustainability and the healthiness of these communities, is the significant work that has been done over the last while. Over the last year, I know that I have personally met with most of the mayors and councils in each of the municipalities, and so has our Minister of Community Services. We remain committed to going out to communities and to having productive conversations on the priorities and initiatives that they would like to bring forward on behalf of their citizens.

In meeting with the mayors, with the Association of Yukon Communities, increases to the comprehensive municipal grant, of course, has come up. It is always a key conversation point, and this is something that we seek to reach agreement on through the appropriate process, as outlined through conversations between the Government of Yukon and the communities. The comprehensive municipal grant provides unconditional block funding each year that supports the municipal delivery of core services together with municipal property tax and other revenues.

Thanks to escalators built into this existing comprehensive municipal grant formula — which was led by the previous Minister of Community Services and a former councillor — understanding the importance of having this financial support to our municipalities and also considering the high inflation that we saw in 2022 across the country or the world, we realized that the grant payments at that point of 6.8-percent inflation would be realized in the grant payments to be provided in 2024. So, think about that — very significant.

I would have to go back and see if we have seen an escalator taking into CPI — an escalator at any point that was that substantial — very important to note for Hansard today the really significant positive impacts for revenues for municipalities over the last number of years, again also understanding the challenges that come with running a municipality. Payments to 2024 will result in a \$2.3 million increase for Yukon municipalities, with overall contributions of over \$24.5 million for the fiscal year 2024-25.

We look forward to passing our budget tomorrow. For all members of the House, they know that the most significant and important thing they can do to support Yukon municipalities and, in some cases, the municipalities that they represent as ridings will be to pass the budget tomorrow and vote for a budget tomorrow so that we can get that \$24.5 million into the hands of municipal leaders so that they can support their communities.

I would like to commend AYC on their work as well with First Nation governments and municipal governments, standing up with the Chiefs and Mayors Forum. In October of last year, AYC hosted this forum with much success, fostering a space for First Nations and municipalities to come together to strengthen relationships, foster open dialogue, and align on priorities. I think it was incredible to see. I think back over the last 20 years. I know there was early work done by, at the time, the Chief of the Kluane First Nation, Math'ieya Alatini, which I believe was the first time we had a First Nation become a member of the Association of Yukon Communities with that spirit of making sure that First Nations and municipalities could work together. I know that Teslin has always been a great model of that partnership, coming into something tangible, which was their community corporation.

Over the years, there has been historic investment into our community infrastructure in our work to create economic opportunity and long-term sustainability to promote healthy communities. We have increased housing supply and lot development across the Yukon, invested in a wellness centre in Old Crow, built or upgraded fire services facilities, recreation

facilities, road upgrades, and upgrades to water facilities, to name but a few.

I will always remember having an opportunity with the previous Mayor of Mayo, who was a long-serving municipal leader, saying that he had never seen this level of investment. He actually said: As a government, why are you not here celebrating and advertising all the work that you've done in Mayo? We've never seen anything like this. Of course, there is time to do that, but when your head's down continuing to do more work, sometimes that's the focus.

As we have built housing across the Yukon for families to raise their children in their communities and to meet the housing demands across the housing continuum; improving road access and infrastructure to improve connectivity and day-to-day travel within each home community; advancing the work to address the substance use health emergency, which we talked about earlier today, along with our partners in municipal and First Nation governments and organizations to have a collective response to this emergency that has impacted all Yukoners; improving access to important elements like clean water, emergency services, and clean energy — these have also been a focus and are part of our 2024 budget.

I will just quickly go through a few different projects to bring Yukoners up to speed on things. Of course, we have invested in a 10-unit project, mixed housing unit complex in Old Crow. On that particular project, I think we have folks now moving in. I just saw an announcement there that individuals are starting to move into that. Again, that is very significant.

In that building, there are four one-bedroom and six two-bedroom units. Three units are allocated to Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation staff and citizens. The remaining seven units are allocated to the Government of Yukon staff who deliver essential services and supports in the community; this includes six of the Department of Health and Social Services and one of the department of highways.

Again, the health and wellness centre replacement has been completed, and we are doing an official opening over the summer with the Department of HPW, Community Services, the Yukon Housing Corporation, and the Vuntut Gwitchin, and we are focusing on a new public works facility.

In Dawson City, we are excited about the tendering that we will be working on for the Korbo project. That's a 34-unit community housing project — the most significant investment that we have seen from Yukon Housing in decades in Dawson City. We went through a consultation with community partners, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Klondike Development Organization, the City of Dawson, and Chief Isaac Inc. as well on conceptual design and functional planning for the project. We have a duplex building in Dawson City as well, which will be completed this summer. It will be a place for a few families in need to call home.

Progress is underway on the design for the lower Dome Road lot development. The municipality has chosen a site for the recreation centre at the bottom of the Dome Road, which is planned to be adjacent to a new serviced subdivision that will have up to 55 mixed residential lots. The tender for the first phase of the subdivision, which includes 15 serviced lots — six

townhouses, four duplexes, and five single lots — is targeted again for summer 2024.

So many different pieces — we all know that the Dawson City recreation centre is long overdue. I will have to go quickly because there are so many different items here for each community. I know we want to get to a vote on all of these motions today.

In Mayo — I think it is important to look at some things to note for the record: the reservoir replacement, the underground and road upgrades — over the years, being there and seeing lots of local folks doing the work and contributing to their community with the resources that have been able to be provided — the water treatment facility upgrades, Yukon Housing work on a duplex in Mayo that was completed last summer — hopefully, we will have a chance to go out and spend some time there. We had to rearrange the opening of that because of fires last summer — and, of course, the triplex that was opened in Mayo in 2022 — so, a number of things. Looking on the out-years for Mayo, a 10-unit building was identified in the five-year strategic plan that we tabled from Yukon Housing.

In Keno, a new fire hall water services upgrade, and in Pelly Crossing — Selkirk First Nation — the early childhood development centre and road upgrades.

In Faro, another duplex was completed earlier this year and is now being tenanted. I checked with our team yesterday on that — great to hear.

In Ross River, I met with chief and council last year in May — fast-tracked, making sure that we had a three-unit mobile home delivered. We will be speaking more publicly once we get through this week about some other engagements and agreements that have been put in around housing with Ross River Dena Council.

In Carmacks, we opened an accessible duplex last year — I was very happy to be there for that opening — and, of course, the rec centre, which is the pride and joy there in Yukon's hub, in Carmacks — such an incredible building. Most of us had an opportunity to be there for the opening — what a beautiful centre. Again, the new fire hall was opened in September last year — a modern fire hall that features fire apparatus bays, which are designed areas within the fire station where firefighting vehicles and equipment are stored and maintained as well as Emergency Medical Services space, a training room, a business centre, and support — a facility that helps to ensure that firefighters in the Village of Carmacks have the appropriate resources to continue providing vital firefighting services in surrounding areas.

In Beaver Creek, lagoon work, a solar farm project — incredible. White River First Nation, of course, now with their community hub — beautiful to see. I had a chance to spend some time there. They are so proud of that building and we are proud that we had an opportunity to work with them on it. Now they are looking at recreational facilities. They are looking at an upgrade on the ball field, and there is another road outside of town where they are looking at some seniors housing.

In Burwash — construction of a new boat launch for the community and, of course, the new school that everybody is

excited about — 100 years in the making — and the Kluane First Nation wind farm project, started many years ago but important to get that done.

In Haines Junction — biomass district heating system and underground and road upgrades. Of course, there has been a lot of talk lately — with some sensitivity, but isn't it great to see, after all those years, lot development and up to almost over 40 lots? And again, a sixplex on the horizon for the community.

In Teslin — energy retrofits in the government buildings, work on the Nisutlin Bay bridge getting done — a vital piece of infrastructure to their community, to the Yukon, to Canada, to the north — just incredible — and again, another sixplex on the horizon.

In Carcross — community schools repairs and upgrades and now we are working with the community there to find the spot where they want to build their housing sixplex.

In Watson Lake, of course, an incredibly significant tenplex that will be completed within this year — Frances Avenue lot development — the first of its kind, having the First Nation and the community go out to develop the most significant, I think, lot development that we have seen in decades and decades in the community of Watson Lake — underground and road upgrades and ventilation upgrades to three government buildings.

In Whitehorse — of course, the Ryder apartment — you have seen that come down. We think we need to build something, and we're going to be moving on that — 45 units. There are safety improvements and energy projects. Range Point Road — we just met with Kwanlin Dün this week. They are excited about having 400 more units. We have done, of course, something very progressive in helping with a debt instrument to help with more — I think there are almost hundreds of lots in Copper Ridge. We have the Whistle Bend school opening up; we have more lots coming out in Whistle Bend. We have the tank farm finally going and getting the planning on that. We have the new gymnastics gym that is going to be opening with the climbing wall and almost a quarter of a billion dollars' work on the international airport.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things happening. A working group has been formed. When we talk about the comprehensive municipal grant with both organizations to work through this work, the members had their first meeting in November 2023 and have additional meetings planned for 2024 to further conversations around the comprehensive municipal grant funding formulas, which will inform future decisions on the municipal grant for 2025 and future years. This work and negotiations are still underway.

I think it's appropriate to say too that we are going into municipal elections in the fall of 2024. We know the leadership who have already vocalized that they are going to be stepping back from their roles to do different things or seek different opportunities. We know that we are going to see some new leaders.

I think that there has also been a change on term limits from three to four years in some cases. Folks who will be coming in — we know that there is a federal election and that will mirror — and there will be new infrastructure programs launched at

the federal level. It will be very important to understand how your comprehensive municipal grant increases. The negotiation on that can help you support the implementation of your O&M to support the infrastructure and new infrastructure.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, we feel that it is appropriate to bring forward an amendment to this motion before us today.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I move:

THAT Motion No. 775 be amended by deleting the words “in response to the analysis and report conducted by the Association of Yukon Communities in July 2023” and replacing them with the following: “following the successful negotiations between the Yukon government and the Association of Yukon Communities”.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Premier:

THAT Motion No. 775 be amended by deleting the words “in response to the analysis and report conducted by the Association of Yukon Communities in July 2023” and replacing them with the following: “following successful negotiations between the Yukon government and the Association of Yukon Communities”.

The amendment is in order.

Motion No. 775, if amended, would read:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure the financial and long-term sustainability of Yukon communities by amending the comprehensive municipal grant following the successful negotiations between the Yukon government and Association of Yukon Communities.

Is there any debate on the amendment?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I have just a few more things I will add before we have an opportunity to see what the response is on the amendment.

First, I want to just note today that I absolutely look forward to attending this year’s annual AYC conference being held in Dawson City from May 9 to 12. I was happy to provide a letter of success and support for their community development fund application for \$20,000 for funding this year’s conference. It will go to complement their guest speakers. They have done a phenomenal job. There are political speakers and different municipal leaders who will be there. I am sure it will just be a fantastic weekend. This conference sees a boost to the host community’s economy with over 100 attendees coming to stay, eat, and be in the community for the time. It bolsters engagement and facilitates presentation sessions for sharing knowledge and information while providing a space for open communication and relationship building.

There will be a lot of new members whom we will see next year in attendance, as we know lots of folks are taking on different challenges or are looking at contributing in different ways to the territory. We look forward to continued work with the municipalities, with AYC. I would urge members today — we have another motion today which I think we want to get to — 905 on firearms. We want to get that to a vote today as well,

so I urge folks in the House today to move through this one so we have a chance to vote on the amendment and the next one.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I can’t imagine why the Premier would want to remove reference to the analysis and report conducted by the Association of Yukon Communities. That report I think was an excellent one, and it certainly informed our understanding of the CMG and helped us understand why the original motion was so important.

I certainly feel that the amendment proposed by the Premier takes away from the original intent of the motion. I think that removing reference to that report would take away from this work, and it would take away from all the hard work that AYC has put into developing that report.

Shortly after it was completed, the Association of Yukon Communities had a chance to brief my colleagues and I about the report. That briefing and our understanding of the CMG based on that report was largely what drove my colleague to bring this motion forward and why my colleagues and I will be supporting the original motion. So, we will be voting against this amendment because it takes away from the original intent of the motion, and we look forward to getting back to the debate once this amendment is defeated.

Ms. White: In looking at letters that were sent to the Minister of Community Services, going all the way back to December of last year, municipalities were fairly clear that they supported the comprehensive municipal grant review that was done by the AYC. So, looking toward Faro, Whitehorse, Dawson City, Teslin, and the Village of Haines Junction, each of those municipalities wrote in support of the review that had been done by AYC and urged the minister to start negotiations with the AYC CMG working group.

My concern is that, by having this motion go forward, there is no timeline for negotiations. We haven’t heard from the minister as to what those timelines for negotiations would be, but again, knowing that municipalities have offered their support for the AYC comprehensive municipal grant review and have asked for that as a starting point I think is important to take into account here. With that, we will not be supporting the amendment.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon to speak to this amendment. We are making it because the original motion, stretching back oh so far to last year, is stale-dated. It was originally brought to the House in November. Since then, affairs have progressed so far that it renders the original wording of the motion obsolete.

Shortly after the debate started in November, the president of Association of Yukon Communities and I met to discuss the comprehensive municipal grant, the negotiations, the terms of reference, and the whole bit. We agreed to de-politicize the discussions, to keep it out of the Legislative Assembly.

In light of that, I’m sure that the association’s president and executive director will be disappointed to see last year’s motion unilaterally resurrected this week when progress on this file has been so great. Like me, I know that the association just wants

to push on with the negotiations to ensure that municipalities are financially sound and that the comprehensive municipal grant meets the needs of our communities into the future.

At Community Services, after reviewing the Association of Yukon Communities report, we hired an accountant, because while the report provided a decent starting point for negotiations, it missed or failed to account for some of the supports the Yukon government provides to municipalities.

For example, the association's report notes that we are using the municipalities to deliver the Better Buildings program and that performing this service is a cost to municipalities. The report does not, however, seem to credit the generous cost recovery fee that we are paying municipalities to deliver this service on our behalf.

Similarly, it mentions that municipalities are taking on more responsibility for developing housing, but it doesn't talk about the investment and support that the Yukon government is providing to help plan and develop housing across Yukon municipalities. There is no mention of the investment that we are making in rural landfills or recycling. Recently, we have offered the City of Whitehorse \$2.4 million to underwrite a curbside recycling system. This, of course, is not part of the association's report — it happened after that report — but it is a windfall on the table to help the municipality deliver vital services to its citizens.

As our offer is a maximum contribution based on the service being provided over the next two full fiscal years, every day that a decision is considered will reduce the subsidy available to citizens. Because of that, I hope that the Whitehorse council makes a prompt decision on this to avoid a gap in recycling services in the city.

While the association's report does talk about the cost of climate change and how that is impacting municipalities, there is little if any recognition of the historic investment that we have made in rural Yukon over the last several years, which my colleague just recited quite extensively a few minutes ago and which has made communities more resilient and more efficient.

There is also scant mention of the money that we are flowing in response to disasters in communities.

I am noting all this simply to highlight the importance of our amendment, which recognizes the need for a negotiation to better understand the association's costs and future needs and to recognize the impacts that some of our investments, support, and policies are having on the finances of our municipalities. As part of our work understanding the broader financial health of our communities, we have now built a funding tool that assesses their financial situation. This tool is very similar to others currently used in Canada and helps to put our financial assessments of our municipalities on the same level as municipalities in other jurisdictions. This tool will be assessed and calibrated as part of the negotiations that we are talking about.

The financial supports are changing. We have been working with the Association of Yukon Communities on terms of reference for the negotiations, and in fact, in the coming weeks, we expect to announce those terms of reference

alongside the Association of Yukon Communities. They will participate with this.

As well-intentioned as the Official Opposition was in bringing this motion to the Legislative Assembly in November, many, many events have rendered the wording too narrow to capture all of the work that we are doing together. Time has passed the original motion by, which is why we put forward this amendment this afternoon.

We recognize that the comprehensive municipal grant is the cornerstone of the financial support that the government provides to Yukon municipalities. This unconditional block funding provides the necessary resources for municipalities to fulfill their obligations under the *Municipal Act* and other legislation for providing essential tools to — essential services to its citizens. It represents a significant portion of municipal revenue, especially in rural communities, and helps municipal governments to keep property taxes and other municipal fees and charges, like recreation fees, within reason for residents.

That said, municipalities also have an obligation to raise revenues to pay for services that they offer to citizens, and there must be a reasonable balance between government transfers and own-source revenue. Negotiations and reviews of the grant have a long history, and it's important to remember that. The annual funding was created in 1991, and it has evolved over the years with a set of guiding principles, including fairness, transparency, predictability, and a prescribed formula to calculate the grants each year. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of that revitalized formula is that it made the comprehensive municipal grant more clear and easier to explain to officials, staff, and residents. The formula contains a base amount per municipality and factors in population, number of homes, infrastructure assets that provide services, and the municipality's own revenue-generating capacity. It also has inflationary factors built in. It provides a small contribution to municipal governments to assist with costs associated with providing services to people living outside their municipal boundaries.

The grant was again reviewed as part of this in 2017-18, and this work resulted in several important changes to factors within the grant formula. These innovations included the establishment of a funding floor, ensuring that municipal grants would not fall below the 2017 levels. This review also made permanent the \$50,000 contribution included in 2012 for supporting municipal fire department operations. The changes were made to recognize the significant costs that municipalities incur for regulatory compliance in areas like solid waste, structural fire, clean water, and waste water. This led to increased grant payments for 2018 to 2024, and it is expected that the grant will continue increasing into the future.

The current formula includes lagging indicators that will result in increases to catch up to inflation. In lay terms, the grant keeps pace with inflation, but any increase is seen the following year. The grant grew 10 percent in 2024 — 10 percent. It rose from \$22.2 million in 2023 to \$24.5 million in 2024. The 2024 comprehensive municipal grant amounts and the recently introduced carbon price rebates were transferred to

municipalities on April 2, 2024 — that's right; we transferred the carbon price rebates to municipalities as well.

The details of those transfers are clear and they go on — it is millions of dollars. In sum, the comprehensive municipal grant in 2024 was \$24.5 million for the Yukon communities and the carbon price rebate cheques — that is the money that we are refunding to municipalities because of the price that we put on carbon — were \$1 million. So, municipalities benefited from the carbon rebate to the tune of \$1 million last year. That is money that helped to defer costs to citizens. This is an important contribution to municipal coffers and we know the impact that it has on their budgets in keeping life affordable for residents.

With that in mind, in 2019, the Yukon government agreed to further review the comprehensive municipal grant with the Association of Yukon Communities. This work has been ongoing for a long time. A working group was formed and met many, many times, although the review deadline was extended from 2020 to 2022 while the Yukon responded to the pandemic. During that period, municipalities were also provided with \$3.85 million in additional municipal safe restart funding. This was another windfall to municipalities that they did not expect during a pandemic.

The working group eventually concluded its work in July 2023, with the Association of Yukon Communities submitting a report to the Yukon government for consideration. We actually helped pay for that report. We helped pay for that report and we certainly do take its content seriously, but as I said, there are things that we have to discuss to arrive on the same page because there are some discrepancies in what we are providing the municipalities and what the report considers.

In the fall of 2023, AYC assigned three representatives to work with Yukon officials to implement changes to the comprehensive municipal grant funding that were identified in the report. The work has included additional due diligence in clarifying how much investment is required to ensure long-term financial sustainability of our municipalities. Since receiving that report, the AYC and the Yukon government have transitioned from a review process to begin negotiations.

A working group has been formed with representatives of both organizations. The members have met to discuss process and details. The department engaged an accounting firm, as I said earlier, to inform our collective understanding of the state of municipal financial positions and operations. The department is also reviewing all revenue sources available to municipalities, including self-generated revenues, government-to-government transfers, and capital funds available through territorial and federal sources and have conducted an analysis of municipal transfer funding nationally. This is all information that will help inform and make sure that our communities are sustainable into the future.

It is also a lot of information that was not captured by the report. This is important due diligence for us and it helps inform our collective understanding of the state of municipal finances and operations.

We need to understand the full fiscal landscape while determining how much Yukon government funding is required

to supplement municipal budgets. We need to understand how municipalities are using their financial resources and how that spending relates to support for Yukoners. The work is necessary to assess the appropriate balance of Yukon government funding and municipal own-source revenue necessary to ensure that municipal governments can deliver and maintain the vital suite of programs and services offered to their citizens, including water, waste water, solid waste, snow-clearing and road maintenance, transit, land planning and development, recreation, waste removal, and more.

As you might appreciate, this issue comes up whenever I meet the president of the Association of Yukon Communities. It did again at our last meeting, as I said, where we directed the working group to formalize the terms of reference to guide negotiations and work of the group. That work is on the cusp of being announced.

On April 25, the comprehensive municipal grant review committee working group met again. The task force's collective goal is ensuring the financial sustainability of municipalities within our territory by working together to identify challenges, explore solutions, and develop recommendations that reflect the needs and priorities of municipalities and the government.

The task force will comprise three Government of Yukon reps and three representatives named by the Association of Yukon Communities representing the Village of Teslin, the Town of Watson Lake, and the City of Whitehorse. The group will explore different approaches, strategies, and combinations of adjustments to achieve the desired outcomes of financial sustainability of municipalities for the renewal of the comprehensive municipal grant regulation. They will provide final feedback and recommendations for the Government of Yukon to consider. The task force will be guided by the principles developed during the previous comprehensive municipal grant reviews: adequacy, certainty, equity, minimal bias, transparency, and accountability.

The term of the working group has already started and will meet as needed in the year ahead. In the context of this motion, it is important to note that the approach I just described was what we developed alongside the Association of Yukon Communities together. It didn't require a motion of the House to set up. This approach keeps us in the same room and doing the critical work of ensuring that the comprehensive municipal grant remains relevant and meets the goals we have set for it. It is important to recognize that tweaking the comprehensive municipal grant has been our collective work for years. We know that it needs to be revised regularly; so does the association, and that is what we are doing. We are taking a responsible approach.

In the meantime, we should not lose sight of the fact that the comprehensive municipal grant is still doing the job that the Yukon government and the Association of Yukon Communities originally designed it to do. Thanks to the escalators built into the formula, the high inflation seen in 2022, which was 6.8 percent, was accounted for in the 2024 grant payments and it is providing important revenue for our communities.

In closing, I want to just say to the Leader of the Official Opposition and to the Leader of the Third Party that we are making progress on the negotiations. It is important that we sit down and come to an agreement about what the comprehensive municipal grant needs to go forward. It's important that we capture as many of these supports and financial tools available to our municipalities so that we don't make any mistakes.

While the Association of Yukon Communities report was great and has formed a foundation and a basis for these negotiations, there is still a lot more work to be done. That is what we plan to do over the coming months — making the deadline for the coming budget negotiations so that we can actually sit down, get that in the budget, and make sure that our communities are whole going forward.

Our block funding is part of the equation, but so is substantial investment in community infrastructure projects and much more. We are respecting the jurisdiction of our municipalities to make their own financial decisions about the provision of services and collection of taxes and fees to offset those costs for the benefit of the entire community. That has been my mantra from the beginning. I want to respect municipal boundaries, but I want to make sure that they are healthy and whole. I have had these conversations with mayors across the territory since I took office. My colleague has been instrumental in improving the comprehensive municipal grant, building the escalators in to make sure that the communities are whole.

As a former councillor, my colleague knows this full well, as does the Premier. We want to make sure that our communities thrive. The Premier has outlined just recently all the investments we are making to make sure that happens. That is our primary goal and we are going to continue that goal going forward. I certainly encourage the members opposite to reconsider their quick decision and support the amendment this afternoon.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the amendment? Are you prepared for the question on the amendment?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: Disagreed.

Speaker: I think the nays have it.

I declare the amendment defeated.

Amendment to Motion No. 775 negatived

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief in my comments.

I think that it's important to note — and I appreciate the comments made by the Minister of Community Services. He did say that this was initially brought forward last November and lots has changed, but I'm under the impression that negotiations actually haven't started with the Association of Yukon Communities on a comprehensive municipal grant review. The reason why I highlight that is that it's a concern — if the minister is saying that we don't have to worry about it because we have moved on since last year, then it makes me question why municipalities — like the Town of Faro sent a letter on January 15 to the minister that said: "The CMG review

of the CMG formula completed last summer highlighted those areas where the existing formula falls short, at least in our opinion, and should be the starting point for a review. A resolution passed during the AYC board meeting in September 2023 included a letter to you requesting that the process begin to address the shortfalls of the formula used to calculate each community's CMG. I'm told that a successful negotiation is one that neither party is totally satisfied with the outcome. Fiscal year 2025 is a year away but it would bring peace of mind to all concerned to know what the outcome of those negotiations will bring for future years."

So, again, the minister said that there was no need to have this conversation, that this was outdated, and that we should move on, but this letter from January 15 indicates that there are some concerns.

The City of Whitehorse, on January 11, sent this letter: "By way of this letter, I am writing to encourage the Government of Yukon to immediately commence negotiations with the Association of Yukon Communities CMG Working Group.

"The AYC Working Group has been in place for some time now, has undertaken research, and submitted a report for YG consideration. Unfortunately, months have passed and YG has yet to initiate negotiations with the Working Group, despite the Working Group standing ready for the commencement of negotiations.

"I cannot stress enough how important the Comprehensive Municipal Grant is to the City of Whitehorse, and how the Grant has failed to evolve in a way that reflects the current strains being faced by Yukon municipalities. The 2024/25 CMG inflationary adjustments derived by the application of the legislated formula offer minor relief to the City of Whitehorse, but they do not address the long term financial sustainability of municipal governments.

"The City of Whitehorse is committed to AYC's CMG Working Group and has an appointee on the Working Group. The City of Whitehorse believes that negotiations between the AYC CMG Working Group and Yukon Government representatives create the best opportunity to bring about improvements to the Comprehensive Municipal Grant."

Again, that was in January. I don't know that it has changed.

January 28 from the Village of Teslin: "I encourage you to direct YG staff to initiate negotiations with the AYC CMG Working Group on improving the CMG in the short and long term. I believe that our respective staff can develop solutions that provide short-term wins for YG and Yukon municipalities while laying the groundwork for longer-term municipal financial sustainability discussions and solutions.

"The respective realities for the Yukon Government and municipalities have changed significantly since the CMG was initially introduced. The cost of living is one factor, but so are municipal-related costs, such as more complex environmental regulation regimes and increasing public service expectations as the Yukon and our communities evolve and modernize. The CMG needs modernizing as well to keep pace."

From the Village of Haines Junction: "We agree with the conclusions of the AYC review that the formula used to

calculate the CMG needs to be modernized to better represent ever increasing operational costs to Yukon municipalities.

“We urge the Government of Yukon to accept the recommendations contained in this report in advance of calculating the 2025 CMG.” That was dated December 21, 2023, so that’s still a post-November debate.

January 29 from the City of Dawson: “The City of Dawson, like other Yukon communities, faces financial sustainability challenges, particular in maintaining and operating the infrastructure essential to our community. The financial burdens of these tasks are continually escalating due to many factors, which include: increasing public service expectations, rising expectations of our citizenry, increasing regulatory requirements, and last but not least, the amplified effects of rising inflation in our remote region. This situation has led to a growing gap between our operational costs and the funding available to us. As critical infrastructure gets replaced, operating and maintenance costs also increase in tandem with these increases in capital investment.

“In light of these challenges, the City of Dawson strongly supports the recommendations put forward by the AYC CMG Working Group, calling for a significant update to the CMG funding formula. This recalibration is critical to more accurately reflect the rising operational and maintenance costs faced by Yukon municipalities.

“We urge the Department of Community Services to work collaboratively with the AYC to negotiate a new formula and implement these necessary changes.”

So, that’s just a snapshot from some municipalities. The one thing I would say when we talk about the comprehensive municipal grant is that it was in place in a different reality. Things have changed significantly. I appreciate that the Yukon government paid to have the report done.

I also benefited from a briefing from the folks from the comprehensive municipal grant working group as well as the author of the report. So, because of the factors including the letters I have just read off from municipalities and the fact that negotiations haven’t started, we are going to be voting in favour of this motion in the hope that municipalities can get the support that they need.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, she will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, this motion, of course, aims to ensure that the comprehensive municipal grant, or the CMG, is financially sufficient and will provide long-term sustainability to Yukon communities into the future. Ultimately, it is about listening to the requests and recommendations from our communities.

We understand that the CMG is intended to supplement municipal finances and not intended to fully fund the operations; however, the CMG should provide predictable and adequate funding to help municipalities plan effectively, and it should have the ability to grow and change as municipal costs continuously grow and change.

Due to concerns regarding municipal funding, the Association of Yukon Communities commissioned a third-party study on the CMG, and this third-party review confirmed the need for changes by stating — and I quote: “The need to review and adjust the grant every 5 years is more of a catch up than keep up mentality...”

This study found that, over the last 10 years, the grant grew by 17.5 percent; meanwhile, inflation grew by 20.8 percent. With that being said, I hope that the Minister of Community Services will respect the recommendations from AYC and the third-party review to amend the comprehensive municipal grant.

Now, I would like to thank executives and the board of directors at AYC, the government staff, and municipal staff, because their input is appreciated. I encourage all members of this House to support our communities and vote in favour of this motion.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 775 agreed to

Motion No. 905 — adjourned debate

Clerk: Motion No. 905, standing in the name of Mr. Cathers; adjourned debate, the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken at some length with respect to the details of this motion, and my remarks, as such — I completed them the last time I was on my feet, so I will cede the floor.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to Motion No. 905, that this House urges the Government of Yukon to immediately begin consultation work on the development of a firearms act, of course, with segment one, two, and three additions that have been tabled by the Member for Lake Laberge.

So, on behalf of the Yukon government, we have long made it clear to the federal government that Yukoners need to be engaged about legislative changes that would impact them, including those proposed in amendments to Bill C-21. As a lawful gun owner, avid hunter, and family member of folks who have worked a trapline on the land for generations, I have a deep appreciation for the concerns raised by many Canadians regarding federal firearms legislation and its potential impacts on law-abiding firearms owners.

The Government of Yukon supports an approach that balances the rights of legal gun owners with an approach to gun control that helps protect public safety and our communities. I will note that my colleagues have spoken about the complexity of this. I want to commend them in their work. The Minister of Justice as well as the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate have spoken to this over and over again and the keys to what we have to take into consideration previously in the House.

We support the concerns of Yukon firearms owners, though, and of Yukon First Nation leaders with respect to the consequences of Bill C-21. I have spoken publicly about this in the past and will continue to do so. That advocacy on behalf of Yukoners has a place right here at home as well, and that is why we have been actively involved on this file, and I look forward to detailing the action as we discuss this important issue.

Our government has initiated discussions that are ongoing with the federal government and our counterparts across Canada about provincial and territorial firearms acts and exploring the role and benefits that a chief firearms officer position could bring to the Yukon.

A chief firearms officer is responsible for the administration of the *Firearms Act* in their region of jurisdiction. This includes support for required safety training, classification, licensing, and permitting for purposes such as hunting, target practice, and collection. The chief firearms officer has a critical role in public safety and in the reduction of violent crimes through ensuring that those firearms owners are qualified, authorized, and fit to possess them. They have a responsibility in overseeing that firearms are stored safely and correctly, which helps to reduce the access to firearms and ammunition by youth and also helps in the reduction of firearms-related injuries and accidents. This appointed position maintains a balanced approach between the promotion of public safety and respecting the rights of legal firearms owners.

Currently, the position for the Yukon is administered by the British Columbia and Yukon chief firearms officer located in British Columbia. The chief firearms officer currently located in British Columbia deals with Yukon issues. These issues are more complex in nature, relating to licensing or other items under the act. It does not traditionally deal directly with

the public-facing side of the program. Currently, Yukon has a firearms officer based in Whitehorse who deals with on-the-ground components of the program, including certification for training, range inspections, liaising with businesses such as Canadian Tire or Hougens's SportsLodge, and other items related to the *Firearms Act*.

Currently, there are seven provinces that have provincially designated chief firearms officers — those being Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. The chief firearms officer for British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the three territories are federally designated. Public Safety Canada is reviewing the firearms officer program, which supports firearm safety and the application of the *Firearms Act* in the territory. We have been open to discussing with Canada the benefits that this may have for Yukoners, including the possibility of having a chief firearms officer located in the territory. Officials from the Department of Justice have met with officials from Public Safety Canada to discuss the program and to understand the benefits of this role to the territory and under what circumstances this position would be appointed. Canada has completed its review of the firearms program delivery for the north, including the roles and responsibilities of chief firearms officers.

Canada's northern services review commenced on May 23, 2023 and was completed on March 2, 2024. Over the 10-month period, the review team gathered and analyzed feedback on the regulatory services, including conducting significant in-person consultations in each of the three territories — Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and, of course, the Yukon.

Four distinct factors resonated through the review: increased delivery of the Canadian firearms safety course; firearm application processing support; enhanced communication to clients; and increased CFP visibility with communities, partners, and stakeholders. It should be noted that the consultation with the territories did not identify any concerns or constraints that would benefit from additional administrative oversight, such as a localized chief firearms officer. However, to manage these teams, there is value in having a northern director with the chief firearms officer designation for the three territories to ensure consistency, cultural competency, and cultural safety while examining new programs and initiatives and promoting and maintaining important relations with communities, elders, and territorial government stakeholders.

I know from my own experience just on my renewal and for my own permits — I think it is important, in any case, to have the most significant designations here in the Yukon. I was supported over the last year when I had the renewal, but at the same time, there was a lot of back-and-forth and trying to communicate with individuals. It would have been great to have more substantial representation here from my own experience, and I think that Yukoners deserve that.

It is important to note that the Yukon has the highest per capita number of prohibited and restricted firearms licences in Canada and has the largest demographic of female possession

and acquisition licence holders in Canada. Lawful firearm owners in the territory include hunters, trappers, people performing remote wilderness work, those living in remote and rural areas, and those who enjoy being in the Yukon wilds for camping and recreation.

Should the Yukon wish to enact its own firearms legislation, there are several provisions of the federal *Yukon Act* that could block or restrict the territory's ability to do so. For the record, it's important to note these. First of all, subsection 20(1):

"Nothing in subsections 18(1) and 18(2) and section 19... — of legislative powers — "shall be construed as giving the Legislature greater powers than are given to legislatures of the provinces under sections 92, 92A and 95 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*."

Also, to note for the record, under subsection 24(1): "The Governor in Council may, in writing, direct the Commissioner to withhold his or her assent to a bill that has been introduced in the Legislative Assembly."

Under subsection 24(2): "A bill in respect of which a direction has been given may not become law without the Governor in Council's assent, which assent may not be given later than one year after the day on which the bill is adopted by the Legislative Assembly." Section 26 says: "In the event of a conflict between a law of the Legislature and a federal enactment, the federal enactment prevails to the extent of the conflict."

On January 18, I wrote to Minister LeBlanc regarding the appointment of a chief firearms officer resident in the Yukon and indicating our interest in exploring what benefits this position would bring to the residents of Yukon. Again, I think it's important to note the work that we've been up to here on our side of the House.

On February 29, I met virtually with Premier Smith of Alberta, and firearms and public safety was discussed. Following this discussion, I sent a letter to Premier Smith and her team on March 12. In it, I expressed our interest in learning more about Alberta's provincial firearms legislation, how it is developed, best practices that were uncovered, and lessons learned through their process.

On March 12, I also sent a letter to Premier Moe of Saskatchewan outlining that the Government of Yukon supports an approach that balances the rights of legal gun owners with an approach to gun control that helps to protect public safety and our communities and our interest in exploring options related to firearms legislation in our jurisdiction. It should be noted that I think this was all before we had an opportunity have these discussions here as tabled by the Member for Lake Laberge.

In addition, on April 15, I directed the Deputy Minister of the Executive Council Office through a letter to conduct a jurisdictional analysis of the passage of provincial legislation by the Government of Saskatchewan and by the Government of Alberta to protect the rights of lawful gun owners and to continue to work with Minister LeBlanc's office as to the benefits that a chief firearms officer may bring to the Yukon.

Alberta has previously been unsuccessful in challenging amendments to the federal *Firearms Act* on the basis that they had unduly interfered with the province's sphere of influence over property and civil rights. The Alberta Court of Appeal and Supreme Court of Canada's *Firearms Act* reference [2000]1 SCR 783 both disagreed, finding that the restrictions on gun ownership and gun licensing are properly characterized as criminal law.

In April 2023, the Federal Court of Canada heard legal challenges — *Parker v. Canada (Attorney General)* — to the federal firearms ban announced in 2020. Those challenges were dismissed on October 30, 2023.

In November 2023, four of the applicants, including the Canadian Coalition for Firearms Rights, filed appeals before the Federal Court of Appeal. Saskatchewan has since applied for intervenor status. No date has yet been set for the hearing of the appeals.

As I have outlined here today, we are actively having ongoing conversations with the federal government and our counterparts across Canada to understand their implementation of provincial firearms acts and explore the role and benefits that the position of the Canadian firearms officer could bring to the Yukon.

I want to thank local enthusiasts and leaders in this discussion who have been very kind with their time. It is helping to inform some of the work that I have been able to undertake. My concern, as I have stated today, is that clarity is still required around the legality of the provincial or, in this case, territorial *Firearms Act*. That doesn't mean, again, that work stops, but, Mr. Speaker, it is why we feel it appropriate to bring forward an amendment to this motion for us today.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I move:

THAT Motion No. 905 be amended by:

(1) inserting the phrase " , pending the final resolution of the appeal of *Parker v. Canada (Attorney General)*," after the words "Government of Yukon";

(2) replacing the word "consultation" with the words "public engagement"; and

(3) replacing the word "would" with the word "could".

Again, I think that this is very important. We think that this is an important piece to do. We think that it's important to hear from Yukoners on this subject — we really do. We want Yukoners to speak to this. We just need to make sure that the Supreme Court of Canada concludes so that we know that it's actually possible to do this.

So, this is quite important. I look forward to the support from the Yukon Party today and look for the support from the Member for Lake Laberge. Again, I have copies here of our amendment for the Clerk.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier: THAT Motion No. 905 be amended by:

(1) inserting the phrase “, pending the final resolution of the appeal of *Parker v. Canada (Attorney General)*” after the words “Government of Yukon”;

(2) replacing the word “consultation” with the words “public engagement”; and

(3) replacing the word “would” with the word “could”.

Is there any debate on the amendment?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that I cede the floor to the Member for Lake Laberge, who I think wants to speak to this.

I want to take an opportunity to thank the leaders in the Yukon. There are a number of individuals — I think they know who they are — who have been very strong on this work. I want to thank them. I do want to also thank Premier Smith and Premier Moe for the discussions and/or sharing the policy work that they have done. Again, I think it is very important that we understand that we have a very significant law-abiding gun-owner community here. We have a very significant amount of ownership.

I know in my case as a gun owner, as an avid user, as somebody who holds a restricted permit as well, I think this is something that we would be interested in doing the work. I think it’s important — as we all know, this is really about, in many cases, freedoms, and it is about understanding what people want. I think that it is important to do proper engagement — that is the policy work — but going out to hear from Yukoners — and I think that we will have a strong voice from Yukoners. I think that it is also important as we go out to do this work that we see if we can actually — if it is legally possible.

So, I think that those are all the pieces that we put in place. I look forward to support today from the Member for Lake Laberge and an opportunity to get this amendment passed and get to a vote and show the community that we support their interests.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, this is the third day that we have debated this. Twice, the Minister of Justice has talked the motion out. There is no need to delay until the outcome of a court case. The Premier’s amendment weakens the motion and changes the intent.

It is important to note that our proposal is to consult with Yukon stakeholders, beginning with looking at the models in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and based on that as a starting point, work together with those Yukon stakeholders to develop a Yukon firearms act aimed at protecting the rights of innocent people who own firearms.

It is important to note that, during that work, the Premier can consider what type of legislation they believe would be legal to introduce at the outcome of that. So, there is no need to stall on this. We will not be supporting the amendment.

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the amendment? Are you prepared for the question on the amendment? Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: Disagreed.

Speaker: I think the nays have it.

I declare the amendment —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: Hold on a second. I heard “disagree”.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: We are too far along. I heard “disagreed”, and we’re going to continue on.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I think that you and the Clerk have the responsibility to ascertain what the votes are. Everybody spoke loudly. I respect that’s your decision, but when there has been confusion in the past about what the will of the floor was, the Speaker had every right to just call for a division to ascertain the will of the floor.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: The Member for Lake Laberge, on the point of order.

Mr. Cathers: Pardon me, Mr. Speaker.

The Government House Leader appeared to be challenging your ruling. I don’t think that was actually a point of order.

Speaker’s ruling

Speaker: On the point of order, I have already stated that I heard members say “disagreed”, so we are going to continue moving forward.

I think the nays have it.

I declare the amendment defeated.

Amendment to Motion No. 905 negatived

Speaker: If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, there are times that things are wild in this Chamber, and I would say that this is one of those days when that happens.

I have concerns, honestly, about the motion as it has been written and presented, and I did actually really appreciate the path forward that the Premier was attempting. The reason I appreciate it is, to be honest, having heard that he reached out directly to two Conservative Premiers in the country to ask about their experiences with this, about their own drafting of the legislation, about what things we are looking at to me was a really good indication of trying to work a way through it.

I am disappointed that amendment didn’t carry. I did vote in favour of it.

My concern is, as the motion is written now — or the intent of that motion — is that it says automatically that there will be work on the development of a Yukon firearms act. I think the amendment was trying to show a path. This has been challenged in other jurisdictions, and it has been brought

forward. Ultimately, I would encourage the government maybe to get staff to redraft it for someone else, and I would be willing to try to vote again.

The fact is that it is in front of the courts. If the legislation from both Saskatchewan and Alberta doesn't stand, then Yukon's won't either, so learning from other jurisdictions is the first example. Waiting to see those core outcomes is important — waiting to see what happens there. I think what we heard from the Premier was a willingness to have those conversations. I am concerned that this is taking us down a path that has proven unsuccessful in other jurisdictions. I do think that waiting to see those core outcomes would have been important because putting the time, energy, and resources ahead of those outcomes — it just doesn't seem to make a lot of sense to me.

So, I am torn right now, Mr. Speaker. I do hope that there are additional people on the other side, and maybe they can get the amendment drafted with someone else's name. That would be great, and we could try again. Ultimately, I wish honestly that there was the ability to have the pause — to have the pause before we go forward with legislation to see the outcome of that court decision.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise today to take the opportunity to speak to Motion No. 905. When discussing firearms regulations, it is important that we look at it in the context of existing issues in our territory and Canada-wide. Gender-based violence is a significant and complex issue in the Yukon, with rates approximately three to four times higher than the national average. Recent Statistics Canada data between 2011 and 2021 indicated that the territories reported the highest rates of gender-related homicides.

We know that Indigenous women and girls are far more likely to experience violence in their lifetime. In fact, across the country, 21 percent of gender-related homicides of women and girls involved an Indigenous victim, who represents five percent of the Canadian population. Why do we need to look at firearms ownership in the context of gender-based violence? Because gun violence is a gendered issue.

There is a substantial amount of data and research that links mass shootings in Canada and internationally to gender-based violence. I would also like to add that the data is often restricted to the gender binary of men and women, but we know that the 2SLGBTQIA+ community faces gendered violence at a disproportionate rate. Between 2011 and 2021 in urban areas Canada-wide, of the gender-related homicides of women and girls, 18 percent died by firearms. In rural areas, the rates are even higher — 33 percent of victims died by firearms.

Shooting deaths have also happened here in the Yukon in our wonderful, beautiful communities. Many families and friends have been affected. In 2021, the community of Faro was profoundly shaken after two people were killed and another critically injured after a gunman went on a shooting rampage. The killer was the estranged husband of a female victim, and though the community is healing, the impacts of this event continue. Just last year, another shooting death happened in the community of Mayo. Two men died; the entire community was affected. We must do what we can to protect our citizens.

There are connections between intimate-partner violence and mass shootings. Data from the United States indicates that most mass-shooting victims are not random. Research has indicated that two-thirds of mass shootings and domestic incidents are perpetrated by shooters with a history of domestic violence — that's a fact.

We see this in our country as well. The École Polytechnique shooting was a hate crime against women. The man who killed 22 people in Portapique, Nova Scotia in 2020 had a well-documented history of domestic violence and started his killing spree by assaulting his common-law partner. The failure of police to respond to multiple reports of the gunman's violence is an example of the ways in which we as a society fail to adequately address gender-based violence. The detailed report published after that tragedy stated that we have misperceived mass violence as our greatest threat without considering its relationship to other more pervasive forms of violence, such as gender-based violence. We must not ignore those lessons.

In 2022, Canadian women represented 89 percent of victims of violent crimes involving firearms committed by a spouse or intimate partner and nearly half — 44 percent — of incidents in which the perpetrator was another family member. Violent crimes committed against women are far less likely to have been committed by a stranger. In fact, it's 18 percent compared to men at 64 percent. While the proportion of firearms-related violent crimes perpetuated by a stranger has generally been declining over the last 15 years, the proportion of firearms-related violent crime perpetrated by a spouse or intimate partner jumped by more than half, from six percent in 2009 to 9.2 percent in 2022, mainly due to crimes perpetuated by men on their intimate partners or former intimate partners.

It is important to acknowledge that any firearm ownership regulation can only be effective if we also focus on the use of illegal firearms as well as curb the ways in which unlicensed individuals can obtain them. According to Statistics Canada data from 2022, the firearms used in homicides were rarely legal firearms used by their legal owners who were in good standing.

We know that firearms-related violent crime is on the rise in Canada. In 2022, the rate of firearms-related violent crime was 36.7 incidents per 100,000 population — an 8.9-percent increase from 2021. This is highest rate recorded since comparable data was first collected in 2009. All provinces and territories have seen the rate of firearms-related violent crime increase since the low in 2013. The largest increases were recorded in the Northwest Territories at plus-303 percent. Saskatchewan was plus-165 percent, Yukon was plus-149 percent, and New Brunswick was at plus-126 percent.

Firearms-related violent crime represents a small portion of crimes in Canada, but it is also linked to the most serious crimes, such as homicide, attempted murder, robbery, aggravated assault, and gang-related violence. Firearms-related violent crime can have major detrimental impacts on the affected persons and communities, and we know that only too well in the Yukon. These, of course, include the physical injuries, most often serious or lethal —

Speaker: Order, please.

The time being 5:30 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

Debate on Motion No. 905 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled May 1, 2024:

35-1-154

Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators 2022-23 Annual Report (Speaker Harper)

The following legislative return was tabled May 1, 2024:

35-1-133

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. White related to general debate on Vote 3, Education, in Bill No. 212, *Third Appropriation Act 2023-24* — grade 12 students (McLean)

The following documents were filed May 1, 2024:

35-1-253

Tree removal in 44-lot subdivision, letter re (dated April 29, 2024) from Bruce Tomlin, Mayor, Village of Haines Junction, to Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Community Services (Istchenko)

35-1-254

May 1 motion re: Connective Support Society, correspondence re (dated April 30, 2024) between Annie Blake, Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, and Chief Nicole Tom, Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation (Blake)