



Yukon Legislative Assembly

1st Session

35th Legislature

Index to **HANSARD**

October 4, 2023 to November 23, 2023

NOTE

The 2022 Fall Sitting of the First Session of the Thirty-Fifth Legislature occupies two volumes

	Issue Numbers	Page Numbers
Volume 10	136 - 149	3831 - 4220
Volume 11	150 - 163	4221 - 4617

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

ADJOURNED DEBATES

Bill No. 208: <i>First Appropriation Act 2023-24</i> : Second Reading	
(Motion to adjourn) (Cathers),	2932
(Time expired) (White),	2967
Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i> : Second Reading	
(Motion to adjourn) (Cathers),	3845
Motion for the Production of Papers No. 6 - Re documents related to the Safe at Home	
Society's purchase of the former High Country Inn (Time expired) (Clarke, Y.),	3358
Motion No. 168 - Re reviewing social assistance rates (Amendment to) (Time expired) (Mostyn), ..	633
Motion No. 239 - Re establishing a publicly funded community walk-in clinic (Time expired)	
(McPhee),	1052
Motion No. 378 - Re fertility treatment tax credit (Time expired) (McPhee),	1786
Motion No. 437 - Re COVID-19 pandemic funding for municipalities (Time expired on motion,	
as amended) (Mostyn),	2188
Motion No. 575 - Re quality assurance assessment of the Yukon midwifery program	
(Amendment to) (Time expired) (Cathers),	3141
Motion No. 683 - Re chronic disease and disability benefits program (Time expired) (White), ...	3564
Motion No. 720 - Re Yukon Housing Corporation seniors asset limit policy (Time expired)	
(McLean),	3784
Motion No. 775 - Re comprehensive municipal grant (Time expired) (Streicker),	4390
Motion No. 793 - Re rural solid-waste disposal (Time expired) (Streicker),	4166
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations (Time expired) (McLean),	4589

ASSENT TO BILLS

Commissioner Adeline Webber,	3890, 4090, 4180, 4256, 4452, 4616
------------------------------------	------------------------------------

BILLS (see **BILLS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT BILLS** and **GOVERNMENT BILLS**)**BILLS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT BILLS**

No. 1 - <i>Act to Perpetuate a Certain Ancient Right</i> (Tredger)	
Introduction and First Reading,	6
No. 301 - <i>Act to Amend the Taxpayer Protection Act</i> (Cathers)	
Introduction and First Reading,	259

BLAKE, ANNIE (see also DEPUTY SPEAKER, CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE)

Questions, oral:

Addictions treatment,	3978
Grizzly bear management,	4175
Health care services,	4282
Health care services in rural communities,	4504
Midwifery in Yukon,	4203
Nurse recruitment and retention,	3945
Old Crow garbage disposal,	4225
Physician recruitment and retention,	4310
Support for substance use emergency,	4529
Whitehorse General Hospital laboratory services,	4420

Speaks on:

Bill No. 31: <i>Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act</i>	
Third Reading,	4451
Bill No. 32: <i>Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)</i>	
Third Reading,	4255
Ministerial statements:	
<i>Child Care Act</i> review,	4501
Land-based healing fund,	4474
<i>Missing Persons Act</i> and regulation,	3974
Yukon convention centre,	4084
Yukon residential schools missing children,	3850
Motion No. 762 - Re mental wellness supports for children and youth,	3932, 3937
Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation,	4370, 4383
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4577

CABLE, DAN (see CLERK OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY)**CASTING VOTE**

Amendment to Motion No. 756 (Speaker Harper),	3925
---	------

CATHERS, BRAD

Questions, oral:

Bail system reform,	4114, 4141
Health care services,	4595

CATHERS, BRAD *(continued)*

Questions, oral:

Health care services in rural communities,	3975
Health care specialist wait times,	4421, 4503
Health human resource strategy,	4088
Housing development memorandum of understanding,	4058
Physician recruitment and retention,	4396, 4475
Psychiatric services,	4527
Public Accounts and carbon tax,	4224
RCMP funding and staffing,	4365
Support for substance use emergency,	4307
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter,	3839, 3851
Yukon Hospital Corporation funding,	4334

Speaks on:

Bill No. 29: <i>Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)</i>	
Third Reading,	4178
Bill No. 31: <i>Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act</i>	
Second Reading,	4181
Third Reading,	4451
Bill No. 32: <i>Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4205
Third Reading,	4255
Bill No. 33: <i>Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4040
Third Reading,	4089
Bill No. 34: <i>Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4009
Third Reading,	4452
Bill No. 210: <i>Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23</i>	
Second Reading,	3857
Third Reading,	3889
Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i>	
Second Reading,	3860
Ministerial statements:	
COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations,	4171
Land-based healing fund,	4473
<i>Missing Persons Act</i> and regulation,	3974

CATHERS, BRAD *(continued)*

Speaks on:

Ministerial statements:

Whitehorse Emergency Shelter,	4278
Wildland Fire Management,	3883
Motion No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting,	3948
Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding,	3915, 3924, 3930
Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation,	4378
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8 th Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges,	4142, 4159
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7 - Re concurrence in the 1 st Report of the Members' Services Board,	4116

CHAIR'S STATEMENTS

Re request for a private member to volunteer to be Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole, .. 4507,
4520, 4539

CLARKE, NILS

Speaks on:

Bill No. 28: <i>Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	3952, 3956
Third Reading,	4035, 4037
Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i>	
Second Reading,	3865
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4575
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8 th Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges,	4148

CLARKE, YVONNE

Questions, oral:

Affordable housing and land development,	3884, 4598
Diabetes treatment,	4449
Health care CASA commitments,	4283
Housing support programs,	4007
Nurse recruitment and retention,	4114
Rent control,	4031
Residential lot development,	3913, 4418
Vimy Heritage Housing Society funding,	4226

CLARKE, YVONNE *(continued)*

Questions, oral:

Whistle Bend development,	4138
Women's organizations funding,	3944
Yukon Hospital Corporation policies,	4367
<i>Yukon University Act</i> consultations,	4564

Speaks on:

Ministerial statements:

Housing initiatives fund,	4560
Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ strategy,	4030
National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence,	3910
Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement,	3836

CLERK OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Informs the Assembly of the absence of the Speaker,	4027, 4055
Reads bills for Assent,	3890, 4090, 4180, 4255, 4452, 4616
Reports on Petition No. 21,	4200
Reports on Petition No. 22,	4361

COMMISSIONER (Hon. Adeline Webber)

Assents to bills,	3890, 4090, 4180, 4256, 4452, 4616
-------------------------	------------------------------------

COMMITTEES, REPORTS OF SPECIAL*Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform*

(dated October 31, 2023) (Sessional Paper No. 125) (White),	4222
---	------

COMMITTEES, REPORTS OF STANDING

Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees, Standing Committee on

9 th report tabled (dated July 5, 2023) (Sessional Paper No. 112) (Clarke, N.),	3834
10 th report tabled (dated October 30, 2023) (Sessional Paper No. 121) (Clarke, N.), ...	4199
11 th report tabled (dated November 6, 2023) (Sessional Paper No. 127) (Clarke, N.), ..	4305

Members' Services Board

1 st report tabled (dated October 24, 2023) (Sessional Paper No. 117) (Clarke, N.), ...	4109
--	------

Public Accounts, Standing Committee on

5 th report tabled (dated June 2023) (Sessional Paper No. 111) (Dixon),	3834
--	------

Rules, Elections and Privileges, Standing Committee on

8 th report tabled (dated October 4, 2023) (Sessional Paper No. 113) (Mostyn),	3834
---	------

COMMITTEES, SPECIAL (see also COMMITTEES, REPORTS OF SPECIAL)

Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly - Membership of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (Sessional Paper No. 103) (Speaker Harper), .. 3834

COUNTS IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* (Amendment to line "Operations" in Operation and Maintenance estimates in Vote 7) (Negatived), 4610

DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (see also DEPUTY CHAIR'S RULINGS and DEPUTY CHAIR'S STATEMENTS)**DEPUTY CHAIR'S STATEMENTS**

Re request for a private member to volunteer to be Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole, ... 4479

DIVISIONS

Bill No. 28: *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*

Second Reading, 3958

Third Reading, 4038

Bill No. 29: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*

Second Reading (Amendment to motion for Second Reading), 3982

Second Reading (As amended), 3983

Third Reading, 4179

Bill No. 31: *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*

Second Reading, 4181

Third Reading, 4452

Bill No. 32: *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*

Second Reading, 4205

Third Reading, 4255

Bill No. 33: *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*

Second Reading, 4043

Third Reading, 4090

Bill No. 34: *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*

Second Reading, 4011

Third Reading, 4452

DIVISIONS *(continued)*

Bill No. 210: <i>Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23</i>	
Second Reading,	3858
Third Reading,	3889
Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i>	
Second Reading,	3877
Third Reading,	4615
Motion No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting (Amendment to),	3951
Motion No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting (As amended),	3951
Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding (Amendment to) (Negatived) (Speaker's casting vote), ..	3925
Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding,	3931
Motion No. 762 - Re mental wellness supports for children and youth,	3937
Motion No. 821 - Re interest-free repayment period on COVID-19 support loan,	4369
Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation (As amended),	4384
Motion No. 846 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission,	4533
Motion No. 847 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators,	4534
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations (Amendment to) (Negatived),	4587
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7 - Re concurrence in the 1 st Report of the Members' Services Board,	4118
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 8 - Re concurrence in the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform,	4343

DIXON, CURRIE

Questions, oral:

Carbon tax,	4003, 4201
Carbon tax exemptions for home heating fuel,	4223
Cost of living,	4599
Dawson City daycare,	4399
Diesel energy generation costs,	4446
Energy strategy effect on electricity rates,	4251, 4281
Funding for non-governmental organizations,	4308
Health care services,	4528
Mammography services,	4502
Rent control,	4032, 4059, 4084
Rural solid-waste transfer stations,	3911
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter,	3838, 3852

DIXON, CURRIE (*continued*)

Speaks on:

Bill No. 28: <i>Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	3953
Third Reading,	4036
Bill No. 29: <i>Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	3982
Ministerial statements:	
British Columbia Cabinet and First Nations Leaders' Gathering,	4306
<i>Cannabis Control and Regulation Act</i> five-year review,	4002
<i>Child Care Act</i> review,	4500
Child Development Centre,	3942
Yukon residential schools missing children,	3850
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 8 - Re concurrence in the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform, ..	4342

FILED DOCUMENTS

154. Proposed closure of Silver City transfer station, letter re (dated September 14, 2023) from residents of Silver City to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier (White),	3881
155. <i>2022 Annual Report Yukon Minerals Advisory Board</i> (Streicker),	3941
156. Teacher on call shortage, letter re (dated October 18, 2023) from Selkirk Elementary School Council (White),	4056
157. Supporting the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and calling for leadership on territorial housing policy, letter re (dated October 20, 2023) from Allison Camenzuli, Chair, Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, and Ben Pereira, Chair, Housing, Lodging and Lot Development Committee, Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier (Dixon),	4082
158. <i>Yukon Geographical Place Names Board 2022-2023 Annual Report</i> (Streicker),	4135
159. Audit of the consolidated financial statements, letter re (dated October 19, 2023) from Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada, to Currie Dixon, Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Dixon),	4170
160. Urgent increases to program funding, letter re (dated November 2, 2023) from Cynthia Rudell-Lyslo, Executive Director, and Tim Brady, Board Chair, Opportunities Yukon/ Career Industries to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier (White),	4277
161. Comprehensive municipal grant and future sustainability, letter re (dated September 29, 2023) from Ted Laking, President, Association of Yukon Communities, to Kate White, Leader of the Third Party (White),	4294

FILED DOCUMENTS *(continued)*

162. Non-profit sector requests, letter re (dated August 2, 2023) from Wendy Morrison, Chair, Yukon Nonprofit Advisory Council, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier (Dixon),	4305
163. Takhini River Road maintenance, letter re (dated August 28, 2023) from Hon. Nils Clarke, Minister of Highways and Public Works, to Brad Cathers, Member for Lake Laberge (Cathers), .	4305
164. Holocaust education, letter re (dated November 6, 2023) from Scott Kent, Member for Copperbelt South, to Hon. Jeanie McLean, Minister of Education (Kent),	4357
165. <i>2023-25 Strategic framework for French-language services</i> announcement (November 14, 2023) (Streicker),	4418
166. Working definition of anti-Semitism, letter re (dated May 2, 2023) from Currie Dixon, Leader of the Official Opposition to Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Justice (Dixon), ..	4446
167. <i>Yukon Lottery Commission Annual Report 2022-23</i> (Silver),	4558
168. Environmental contamination at Yukon landfills, letter re (dated November 10, 2023) from Martin Melendro, Executive Director, Yukon Conservation Society, and Lewis Rifkind, Mining Analyst, Yukon Conservation Society, to Hon. Richard Mostyn, Minister of Community Services (Mostyn),	4558
169. Yukon Type 1 Diabetes Strategy, letter re (dated November 23, 2023) from Marney Paradis, Yukon T1D Support Network, to Hon. Tracy-Anne McPhee, Minister of Health and Social Services (Dixon),	4594

GOVERNMENT BILLS**Bill No. 28: *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*** (Clarke)

Introduction and First Reading,	3882
Second Reading,	3951–3958
Division,	3958
Committee of the Whole,	4012–4020
Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4020
Reported without amendment,	4025
Third Reading,	4035–4038
Division,	4038
Assent,	4090

Bill No. 29: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)* (Pillai)

Introduction and First Reading,	3834
Second Reading,	3979
Amendment proposed to motion for second reading (White),	3981
Amendment to motion for second reading agreed to (Division),	3982
Division,	3983

GOVERNMENT BILLS *(continued)***Bill No. 29: Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)** (Pillai)

Considered by Members' Services Board and reported with amendment,	4109
Motion to concur in Members' Services Board's First Report (Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7),	4118
Reprinted version tabled,	4135
Third Reading,	4177–4179
Division,	4179
Assent,	4180

Bill No. 31: Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act (McPhee)

Introduction and First Reading,	3849
Second Reading,	4180–4181
Division,	4181
Committee of the Whole,	4400–4402
Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4402
Reported without amendment,	4415
Third Reading,	4451
Division,	4452
Assent,	4452

Bill No. 32: Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023) (McPhee)

Introduction and First Reading,	3849
Second Reading,	4205
Division,	4205
Committee of the Whole,	4228
Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4233
Reported without amendment,	4247
Third Reading,	4254–4255
Division,	4255
Assent,	4256

Bill No. 33: Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023) (Mostyn)

Introduction and First Reading,	3909
Second Reading,	4039–4043
Division,	4043
Committee of the Whole,	4063–4066
Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4066
Reported without amendment,	4079

GOVERNMENT BILLS *(continued)*

Bill No. 33: Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023) (Mostyn)

Third Reading, 4089–4090
 Division, 4090
 Assent, 4090

Bill No. 34: Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023) (Silver)

Introduction and First Reading, 3941
 Second Reading, 4008–4011
 Division, 4011
 Committee of the Whole, 4423–4426
 Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to, 4426
 Reported without amendment, 4440
 Third Reading, 4452
 Division, 4452
 Assent, 4452

Bill No. 210: Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23 (Silver)

Introduction and First Reading, 3834
 Second Reading, 3856–3858
 Division, 3858
 Committee of the Whole, 3859–3860
 Unanimous consent re deeming all Votes carried, 3859
 Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses, the preamble and title read and
 agreed to, 3860
 Reported without amendment, 3860
 Third Reading, 3889
 Division, 3889
 Assent, 3890

Bill No. 211: Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 (Silver)

Introduction and First Reading, 3834
 Second Reading, 3843–3845, 3860–3877
 Division, 3877
 Committee of the Whole, . 3890–3905, 3958–3968, 3983–3997, 4021–4024, 4043–4053,
 4067–4078, 4091–4105, 4118–4131, 4182–4196, 4206–4220, 4233–4247, 4256–
 4261, 4284–4300, 4312–4330, 4344–4357, 4402–4415, 4427–4440, 4453–4468,
 4479–4495, 4507–4522, 4535–4553, 4600–4615
 Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 10 cleared or carried, 4024
 Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 11 cleared or carried, 4051

GOVERNMENT BILLS *(continued)*

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* (Silver)

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 27 cleared or carried, 4092

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 54 cleared or carried, 4126

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 2 cleared or carried, 4261

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 51 cleared or carried, 4352

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 8 cleared or carried, 4437

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 18 cleared or carried, 4484

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 52 cleared or carried, 4487

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 3 cleared or carried, 4538

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 53 cleared or carried, 4601

Amendment proposed to line "Operations" in Operation and Maintenance
 estimates in Vote 7 (Dixon), 4609

Amendment to line negated (Count), 4610

Unanimous consent re deeming all remaining lines in Vote 7 cleared or carried, 4610

Reported without amendment, 4615

Third Reading, 4615

 Division, 4615

Assent, 4616

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting (Streicker)

Notice, 3835

Debate, 3948–3951

 Amendment proposed (Tredger), 3949

 Amendment agreed to (Division), 3951

Motion, as amended, agreed to (Division), 3951

No. 745 - Re authorization for the Assembly to meet via video conference during the 2023 Fall Sitting (Streicker)

Notice, 3835

Motion agreed to, 3951

No. 746 - Re pairing arrangements for the 2023 Fall Sitting (Streicker)

Notice, 3835

Motion agreed to, 3951

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS *(continued)***No. 774 - Re membership of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major****Government Boards and Committees** (Streicker)

Notice,	3973
Motion agreed to,	4063

No. 846 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission (McPhee)

Notice,	4472
Debate,	4532–4533
Motion agreed to (Division),	4533

No. 847 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators (McPhee)

Notice,	4472
Debate,	4533–4534
Motion agreed to (Division),	4534

HARPER, JEREMY (see SPEAKER)**HASSARD, STACEY**

Questions, oral:

Carbon tax,	4200
Confidence and supply agreement commitments,	3912
Cost of living,	4004
Cyber security and foreign interference,	3855
Faro community support services,	4173
Health care services in rural communities,	4111
Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement,	4332, 4333, 4396
Public Accounts,	4140
Resource Gateway project,	3888
Rural communities funding and support,	4596
Rural emergency medical responder honoraria,	4253
Teacher recruitment and retention in Teslin,	4478

Speaks on:

Bill No. 28: *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*

Second Reading,	3956
-----------------------	------

Ministerial statements:

Council of the Federation meeting and health summit,	4362
Motion No. 793 - Re rural solid-waste disposal,	4160
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4569, 4587

ISTCHENKO, WADE

Questions, oral:

Better Buildings program,	4034, 4061
Carbon tax and alternative heating subsidies,	4204
Fuelwood subsidy,	4368
Government support for local media,	4310
Outfitter guidelines review,	4176
Rural emergency services,	4112
Rural school replacement,	4450
Rural solid-waste transfer stations,	3885
Shakwak project funding,	4477
Whitehorse airport improvement costs,	4530

Speaks on:

Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4571
--	------

KENT, SCOTT

Questions, oral:

Atlin hydro expansion project,	4280
Beaver River watershed land use plan,	4227
Diesel energy generation costs,	4250
Diesel generators,	4531
Energy strategy effect on electricity rates,	4562
Energy strategy effect on greenhouse gas emissions,	4368, 4447
Mental health services in schools,	3943
Mineral exploration industry,	4336
Mining legislation,	4422
Parent advisory committee,	4062, 4138
Psychiatric services,	4565
School busing,	3978, 4174
School replacement,	3947

Speaks on:

Ministerial statements:

Ministerial statements,	4136
Minto mine closure and reclamation,	4110
Sexual orientation and gender identity policy in education,	4057
Motion No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting,	3950
Motion No. 846 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission,	4533
Motion No. 847 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators,	4534

LEGISLATIVE RETURNS

102. Response to Written Question No. 38 re: electricity supply and demand and Written Question No. 39 re: power outages (Streicker),	3909
103. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. White related to general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - COVID-19 leave</i> (Silver),	4109
104. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Clarke related to general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - Interview and Relocation Expense Directive</i> (Silver),	4109
105. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - CSFY Dawson Program</i> (McLean),	4199
106. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - allocation for experiential learning spaces</i> (McLean),	4199
107. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. McLeod related to general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - landfills receiving compactors</i> (Mostyn),	4199
108. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to a ministerial statement re: Minto mine closure and reclamation (Streicker),	4446
109. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. White related to general debate on Vote 53, Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - miners' liens</i> (Streicker),	4446
110. Response to matter outstanding from discussion related to the appearance of witnesses from the Yukon Workers' Safety and Compensation Board before Committee of the Whole on October 26, 2023 (Mostyn),	4472
111. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Clarke related to general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - committee recommendations</i> (Pillai),	4558
112. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Clarke related to general debate on Vote 18, Yukon Housing Corporation, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - community land trust</i> (Pillai),	4558
113. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Istchenko related to general debate on Vote 52, Environment, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - campground access roads</i> (Clarke, N.),	4558

LEGISLATIVE RETURNS *(continued)*

114. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - Drury Creek rest stop (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4558
115. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - third-party rental agreements (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4558
116. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - sound barriers on Alaska Highway (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4558
117. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - brushing between Johnsons Crossing and Lone Tree Creek (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4558
118. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - Pelly Crossing runway lights (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4594
119. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - printing contracts (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4594
120. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with MLA Tredger related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - Government of Yukon CO2 emissions (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4594
121. Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Hassard related to general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - Ten Mile Creek gravel pit (Clarke, N.)</i> ,	4594
122. Response to Written Question No. 35 re: Emergency Medical Services coverage (Mostyn), ...	4594
123. Response to oral question from Mr. Kent re: mineral exploration industry (Streicker),	4594
124. Response to Written Question No. 14 re: Aging in Place Seniors Advisory Committee (McPhee),	4594
125. Response to Written Question No. 25 re: health care in rural Yukon communities (McPhee), .	4594
126. Response to Written Question No. 26 re: mental health services (McPhee),	4594
127. Response to Written Question No. 27 re: home care in communities (McPhee),	4594
128. Response to Written Question No. 31 re: Whitehorse Correctional Centre substance use issues and supports (McPhee),	4594

McLEAN, JEANIE

Speaks on:

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 - Second Reading*, 3863

Ministerial statements:

British Columbia Cabinet and First Nations Leaders' Gathering, 4306

Child Care Act review, 4500, 4501

Child Development Centre, 3942, 3943

COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations, 4171, 4172

Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ strategy, 4029, 4030

National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, 3909, 3910

Sexual orientation and gender identity policy in education, 4057, 4058

Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding, 3928

Motion No. 762 - Re mental wellness supports for children and youth, 3934

Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations, 4587

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8th Report of
the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, 4153

McLEOD, PATTI

Questions, oral:

Big Creek bridge replacement, 3887

City of Whitehorse drinking water, 3976, 4033

Government relationship with municipalities, 4561

Municipality funding and support, 4335

Our Clean Future implementation, 4006

RCMP funding and staffing, 3842, 3855

Recycling program in Whitehorse, 4253, 4419

Rural emergency services, 3914

Watson Lake continuing care services, 4283, 4506

Speaks on:

Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding, 3926

Motion No. 775 - Re comprehensive municipal grant, 4384

McPHEE, TRACY-ANNE

Speaks on:

Bill No. 31: *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*

Second Reading, 4180, 4181

Third Reading, 4451

McPHEE, TRACY-ANNE *(continued)*

Speaks on:

Bill No. 32: <i>Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4205
Third Reading,	4254, 4255
Ministerial statements:	
Land-based healing fund,	4473, 4474
<i>Missing Persons Act</i> and regulation,	3973, 3974
Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding,	3919
Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation,	4372
Motion No. 846 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission,	4532
Motion No. 847 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators, ..	4533
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8 th Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges,	4157

MEMBERS' SERVICES BOARD, REPORTS OF (see COMMITTEES, REPORTS OF STANDING)**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

British Columbia Cabinet and First Nations Leaders' Gathering (McLean/Dixon/White),	4306
<i>Cannabis Control and Regulation Act</i> five-year review (Silver/Dixon/Tredger),	4002
<i>Child Care Act</i> review (McLean/Dixon/Blake),	4500
Child Development Centre (McLean/Dixon/Tredger),	3942
Council of the Federation meeting and health summit (Pillai/Hassard/White),	4362
COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations (McPhee/Cathers/Tredger),	4171
Housing initiatives fund (Pillai/Clarke, Y./Tredger),	4559
Land-based healing fund (McPhee/Cathers/Blake),	4473
Ministerial statements (Pillai/Kent/White),	4136
Minto mine closure and reclamation (Streicker/Kent/White),	4109
Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ strategy (McLean/ Clarke, Y./White),	4029
<i>Missing Persons Act</i> and regulation (McPhee/Cathers/Blake),	3973
National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (McLean/Clarke, Y./Tredger),	3909
Sexual orientation and gender identity policy in education (McLean/Kent/White),	4057
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter (Pillai/Cathers/Tredger),	4278
Wildland Fire Management (Mostyn/Cathers/White),	3882
Yukon convention centre (Streicker/Van Bibber/Blake),	4083
Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement (Silver/Clarke, Y./White),	3836
Yukon residential schools missing children (Pillai/Dixon/Blake),	3850

MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED

Remembrance Day, recognition of, 4394

MOSTYN, RICHARD

Speaks on:

Bill No. 28: *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)* - Second Reading, 3954

Bill No. 33: *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*

Second Reading, 4039, 4042

Third Reading, 4089

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* - Second Reading, 3869

Ministerial statements:

Wildland Fire Management, 3882, 3884

Motion No. 775 - Re comprehensive municipal grant, 4385

Motion No. 793 - Re rural solid-waste disposal, 4162

Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation, 4381

Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations, 4569, 4584

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8th Report of
the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, 4154

MOTIONS (see GOVERNMENT MOTIONS, MOTIONS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF PAPERS,
MOTIONS IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE, MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT
MOTIONS, MOTIONS RESPECTING COMMITTEE REPORTS and MOTIONS, WITHDRAWAL OF)

MOTIONS IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (see also WITNESSES)

No. 12 - Re appearance of witnesses from the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board

(Streicker)

Moved, 4182

Motion agreed to, 4182

**No. 13 - Re appearance of witnesses from the Yukon Development Corporation and Yukon
Energy Corporation** (Streicker)

Moved, 4312

Motion agreed to, 4312

No. 14 - Re appearance of witnesses from Yukon University (Streicker)

Moved, 4507

Motion agreed to, 4507

MOTIONS IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE *(continued)***No. 15 - Re appearance of witnesses from the Yukon Hospital Corporation** (Streicker)

Moved,	4534
Debate,	4533–4535
Motion agreed to,	4535

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS**No. 113 - Re amendment to Standing Order 76** (Dixon)

Notice,	324
Debate,	379–393
Amendment proposed (Mostyn),	392
Debate adjourned on motion and amendment (Time expired) (Pillai),	393
Amendment removed from Order Paper,	859
Motion removed from Order Paper,	3831

No. 168 - Re reviewing social assistance rates (Blake)

Notice,	549
Debate,	622–632
Debate adjourned on motion and amendment (Time expired) (Mostyn),	633

No. 239 - Re establishing a publicly funded community walk-in clinic (White)

Notice,	989
Debate,	1047–1052
Debate adjourned (Time expired) (McPhee),	1052

No. 378 - Re fertility treatment tax credit (Clarke, Y.)

Notice,	1728
Debate,	1783–1786
Debate adjourned (Time expired) (McPhee),	1786

No. 437 - Re COVID-19 pandemic funding for municipalities (McLeod)

Notice,	2110
Debate,	2178–2188
Amendment proposed (White),	2182
Amendment agreed to (Division),	2183
Debate adjourned on motion as amended (Time expired) (Mostyn),	2188

No. 575 - Re quality assurance assessment of the Yukon midwifery program (White)

Notice,	2921
Debate	
Amendment proposed (McPhee),	3140
Debate adjourned on motion and amendment (Time expired) (Cathers),	3141

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS *(continued)*

No. 683 - Re chronic disease and disability benefits program (White)	
Notice,	3456
Debate,	3564
Debate adjourned (Time expired) (White),	3564
No. 720 - Re Yukon Housing Corporation seniors asset limit policy (Tredger)	
Notice,	3717
Debate,	3760–3784
Debate adjourned (Time expired) (McLean),	3784
No. 756 - Re RCMP funding (Cathers)	
Notice,	3849
Debate,	3915–3931
Amendment proposed (McPhee),	3923
Amendment negated (Division) (Speaker's casting vote),	3925
Motion agreed to (Division),	3931
No. 762 - Re mental wellness supports for children and youth (Blake)	
Notice,	3877
Debate,	3931–3937
Motion agreed to (Division),	3937
No. 775 - Re comprehensive municipal grant (McLeod)	
Notice,	3973
Debate,	4384–4390
Debate adjourned (Time expired) (Streicker),	4390
No. 793 - Re rural solid-waste disposal (Hassard)	
Notice,	4082
Debate,	4160–4166
Debate adjourned (Time expired) (Streicker),	4166
No. 821 - Re interest-free repayment period on COVID-19 support loan (White)	
Notice,	4305
Debate,	4369
Motion agreed to (Division),	4370
No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation (Blake)	
Debate,	4370–4384
Amendment proposed (Cathers),	4378
Subamendment proposed (Tredger),	4381
Subamendment agreed to,	4381
Amendment, as amended, agreed to,	4381

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS *(continued)***No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation** (Blake)

Amendment proposed to motion, as amended (Mostyn), 4383

Amendment to motion, as amended, agreed to, 4384

Motion, as amended, agreed to (Division), 4384

No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations (White)

Notice, 4500

Debate, 4566–4588

Amendment proposed (Silver), 4582

Amendment negated (Division), 4587

Debate adjourned (Time expired) (McLean), 4589

MOTIONS RESPECTING COMMITTEE REPORTS**No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8th Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges** (Cathers)

Notice, 4025

Debate, 4142–4160

Motion agreed to (Division), 4160

No. 7 - Re concurrence in the 1st Report of the Members' Services Board (Streicker)

Notice, 4109

Unanimous consent to move motion, notwithstanding Standing Orders 27(1) and 13(3), . 4115

Debate, 4116–4117

Motion agreed to (Division), 4118

No. 8 - Re concurrence in the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform (White)

Notice, 4223

Notice to call motion as government-designated business (Streicker), 4254

Debate, 4337–4343

Motion agreed to (Division), 4343

MOTIONS, WITHDRAWAL OF

Blake

Motions No. 116, 270, 525 and 538, 3831

Motion No. 782, 4107

Cathers

Motions No. 16, 89, 154, 240, 404, 474, 573 and 637, 3831

Motion No. 795 and 828, 4555

Motion No. 812 (not placed on Notice Paper), 4247

MOTIONS, WITHDRAWAL OF *(continued)*

Cathers	
Motion No. 841 (not placed on Notice Paper),	4469
Motion No. 854 (not placed on Notice Paper),	4525
Motion No. 829 and Motion for the Production of Papers No. 11,	4591
Clarke, Y.	
Motions No. 499 and 680,	3831
Dixon	
Motion No. 113 and 639,	3831
Hassard	
Motion No. 610,	3831
Istchenko	
Motions No. 475 and 611,	3831
Kent	
Motions No. 343, 357, 558, 559, 560 and 625,	3831
McLeod	
Motion No. 278,	3831
Mostyn	
Motion No. 767 (not placed on Notice Paper),	3907
Motion No. 803 (not placed on Notice Paper),	4167
Motion No. 817,	4497
Pillai	
Motions No. 350 and 579,	3831
Motion No. 801 (not placed on Notice Paper),	4167
Silver	
Motion No. 640,	3847
Motion No. 729 (not placed on June 13, 2023 Notice Paper),	3831
Tredger	
Motion No. 293,	3831
White	
Motions No. 33 and 144,	3831
Motion No. 842 (not placed on Notice Paper),	4469

NOTICE OF GOVERNMENT-DESIGNATED BUSINESS

Motion Respecting Committee Reports No. 8 to be called as government business,	4254
--	------

NOTICE OF PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Opposition private members' business

Order of business for October 11, 2023 (Kent/White),	3889
Order of business for October 25, 2023 (Kent/Tredger),	4115
Order of business for November 8, 2023 (Tredger/Kent),	4337
Order of business for November 22, 2023 (White/Kent),	4532

PAGES

Introduction of (Speaker Harper)	3831
--	------

PETITIONS

No. 21 - Re grizzly bear hunting (Blake)

Presented,	4170
Received,	4200
Response (Clarke, N.),	4394

No. 22 - Re bedbugs in Yukon Housing Corporation units (Tredger)

Presented,	4332
Received,	4361
Response (Pillai),	4558

PILLAI, RANJ

Speaks on:

Bill No. 29: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*

Second Reading,	3979, 3982
Third Reading,	4177, 4179

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*

Second Reading,	3872
-----------------------	------

Ministerial statements:

Council of the Federation meeting and health summit,	4362, 4363
Housing initiatives fund,	4559, 4560
Ministerial statements,	4136, 4137
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter,	4278, 4279
Yukon residential schools missing children,	3850, 3851

Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation,	4379
---	------

Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4577, 4582
--	------------

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7 - Re concurrence in the 1 st Report of the Members' Services Board,	4117
---	------

POINTS OF ORDER

Re amendment to motion for Second Reading of Bill No. 29, <i>Act to amend the Elections Act</i> (2023) (Streicker),	3981
Speaker's ruling,	3981
Speaker's statement,	3999
Re relevance - amendment to motion (White),	4585
Speaker's ruling,	4585

QUESTIONS - ORAL

2 Lodgepole Lane concerns (Van Bibber),	4176
Addictions treatment (Blake),	3978
Affordable housing (Tredger),	4086, 4448
Affordable housing and land development (Clarke, Y.),	3884, 4598
Atlin hydro expansion project (Kent),	4280
Bail system reform (Cathers),	4114, 4141
Beaver River watershed land use plan (Kent),	4227
Better Buildings program (Istchenko),	4034, 4061
Big Creek bridge replacement (McLeod),	3887
Carbon tax	
(Dixon),	4003, 4201
(Hassard),	4200
Carbon tax and alternative heating subsidies (Istchenko),	4204
Carbon tax exemptions for home heating fuel (Dixon),	4223
City of Whitehorse drinking water (McLeod),	3976, 4033
Community medevac services (White),	4476
Confidence and supply agreement commitments (Hassard),	3912
Consultation on school replacement (White),	4060
Cost of living	
(Dixon),	4599
(Hassard),	4004
Cyber security and foreign interference (Hassard),	3855
Dawson City daycare (Dixon),	4399
Dawson City recreation centre (Van Bibber),	4398
Diabetes treatment (Clarke, Y.),	4449
Diesel energy generation costs	
(Dixon),	4446
(Kent),	4250

QUESTIONS – ORAL *(continued)*

Diesel generators (Kent),	4531
Electricity rates (Tredger),	4005
Energy strategy effect on electricity rates	
(Dixon),	4251, 4281
(Kent),	4562
Energy strategy effect on greenhouse gas emissions (Kent),	4368, 4447
Faro community support services (Hassard),	4173
Fuelwood subsidy (Istchenko),	4368
Funding for non-governmental organizations (Dixon),	4308
Government relationship with municipalities (McLeod),	4561
Grizzly bear management (Blake),	4175
Health care CASA commitments (Clarke, Y.),	4283
Health care services	
(Blake),	4282
(Cathers),	4595
(Dixon),	4528
(White),	4597
Health care services in rural communities	
(Blake),	4504
(Cathers),	3975
(Hassard),	4111
Health care specialist wait times (Cathers),	4421, 4503
Health human resource strategy (Cathers),	4088
Health-related refundable tax credits (Clarke, Y.),	4283
Housing development memorandum of understanding (Cathers),	4058
Housing support programs (Clarke, Y.),	4007
Mammography services	
(Dixon),	4502
(Van Bibber),	4476
Mental health services in schools (Kent),	3943
Midwifery in Yukon (Blake),	4203
Mineral exploration industry (Kent),	4336
Mineral staking in Na-Cho Nyäk Dun land use planning region (White),	4397
Mining legislation (Kent),	4422
Mining project oversight (White),	3913
Minto mine reclamation (White),	4139

QUESTIONS – ORAL *(continued)*

Municipality funding and support	
(McLeod),	4335
(White),	4334
Nisutlin Bay bridge replacement (Hassard),	4332, 4333, 4396
Nurse recruitment and retention	
(Blake),	3945
(Clarke, Y.),	4114
(White),	4087
Old Crow garbage disposal (Blake),	4225
<i>Our Clean Future</i> implementation (McLeod),	4006
Outfitter guidelines review (Istchenko),	4176
Parent advisory committee (Kent),	4062, 4138
Physician recruitment and retention	
(Blake),	4310
(Cathers),	4396, 4475
(White),	4309
Policing priorities (Van Bibber),	3841, 4364
Psychiatric services	
(Cathers),	4527
(Kent),	4565
Public Accounts (Hassard),	4140
Public Accounts and carbon tax (Cathers),	4224
Public transit funding	
(Tredger),	4202
(Van Bibber),	3914
RCMP funding and staffing	
(Cathers),	4365
(McLeod),	3842, 3855
Recycling program in Whitehorse (McLeod),	4253, 4419
Rent control	
(Clarke, Y.),	4031
(Dixon),	4032, 4059, 4084
Residential lot development (Clarke, Y.),	3913, 4418
Resource Gateway project (Hassard),	3888

QUESTIONS – ORAL *(continued)*

Rural communities funding and support	
(Hassard),	4596
(White),	3854
Rural emergency medical responder honoraria (Hassard),	4253
Rural emergency services	
(Istchenko),	4112
(McLeod),	3914
(Van Bibber),	4449
Rural school replacement (Istchenko),	4450
Rural solid-waste transfer stations	
(Dixon),	3911
(Istchenko),	3885
(White),	4505
School busing	
(Kent),	3978, 4174
(Van Bibber),	4141, 4252
School replacement (Kent),	3947
School staff shortage (Van Bibber),	3946
Seniors housing (Tredger),	4563
Shakwak project funding (Istchenko),	4477
Skagway marine services (White),	3977, 4251
Support for substance use emergency	
(Blake),	4529
(Cathers),	4307
Teacher recruitment and retention (White),	4112
Teacher recruitment and retention in Teslin (Hassard),	4478
Teacher staff housing (White),	4032
Teacher staffing	
(Van Bibber),	4085, 4226
(White),	3886
Vimy Heritage Housing Society funding	
(Clarke, Y.),	4226
(Tredger),	4366
Watson Lake continuing care services (McLeod),	4283, 4506
Whistle Bend development (Clarke, Y.),	4138
Whitehorse airport improvement costs (Istchenko),	4530

QUESTIONS – ORAL *(continued)*

Whitehorse Emergency Shelter	
(Cathers),	3839, 3851
(Dixon),	3838, 3852
(Tredger),	3840
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and downtown core concerns (Van Bibber),	4564
Whitehorse General Hospital laboratory services (Blake),	4420
Women’s organizations funding (Clarke, Y.),	3944
Yukon Hospital Corporation funding (Cathers),	4334
Yukon Hospital Corporation policies (Clarke, Y.),	4367
Yukon River crossing at Dawson City (Van Bibber),	4422
<i>Yukon University Act</i> consultations (Clarke, Y.),	4564
Yukon University Polaris project funding (Van Bibber),	4531

QUESTIONS - WRITTEN

No. 14 - Aging in Place Seniors Advisory Committee (White)	
Filed at Table,	1673
Response (McPhee) (Legislative Return No. 124),	4594
No. 25 - Re: health care in rural Yukon communities (Cathers)	
Filed at Table,	2105
Response (McPhee) (Legislative Return No. 125),	4594
No. 26 - Re: mental health services (Cathers)	
Filed at Table,	2105
Response (McPhee) (Legislative Return No. 126),	4594
No. 27 - Re: home care in communities (Cathers)	
Filed at Table,	2105
Response (McPhee) (Legislative Return No. 127),	4594
No. 31 - Re: Whitehorse Correctional Centre substance use issues and supports (Blake)	
Filed at Table,	2713
Response (McPhee) (Legislative Return No. 128),	4594
No. 33 - Re: Safe at Home Society’s purchase of the former High Country Inn (Hassard)	
Filed at Table,	2713
No. 35 - Re: Emergency Medical Services coverage (Cathers)	
Filed at Table,	3082
Response (Mostyn) (Legislative Return No. 122),	4594
No. 36 - Re: Commitment to develop lots (Clarke, Y.)	
Filed at Table,	3248

QUESTIONS – WRITTEN *(continued)*

No. 37 - Re: Dawson City recreation centre (Van Bibber)	
Filed at Table,	3615
No. 38 - Re: electricity supply and demand (Van Bibber)	
Filed at Table,	3640
Response (Streicker) (Legislative Return No. 102),	3909
No. 39 - Re: power outages (Van Bibber)	
Filed at Table,	3640
Response (Streicker) (Legislative Return No. 102),	3909
No. 40 - Re: Yukon Hospital Corporation positions (White)	
Filed at Table,	3750
No. 41 - Re: micro-generation program (MLA Tredger)	
Filed at Table,	4617
No. 42 - Re: power generation (MLA Tredger)	
Filed at Table,	4617
No. 43 - Re: <i>Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy</i> (Blake)	
Filed at Table,	4617
No. 44 - Re: safe supply program (Blake)	
Filed at Table,	4617
No. 45 - Re: <i>Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act</i> (Blake)	
Filed at Table,	4617
No. 46 - Re: health transformation advisory committee (Blake)	
Filed at Table,	4617
No. 47 - Re: managed alcohol program (Blake)	
Filed at Table,	4617

SESSIONAL PAPERS

102. <i>Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sittings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees</i> (October 4, 2023) (Speaker Harper), ..	3834
103. <i>Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly - Membership of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform</i> (Speaker Harper),	3834
104. <i>COVID-19 Pandemic - COVID-19 Vaccines in Yukon - Independent Auditor's Report - 2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly</i> (June 20, 2023) (Speaker Harper),	3834
105. <i>Left in the Dark - Report 1 - Investigation into the mishandling of abuse allegations at a Yukon school by the Department of Education - A Report from the Yukon Ombudsman</i> (September 7, 2023) (Speaker Harper),	3834

SESSIONAL PAPERS *(continued)*

106. Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 (28 June 2019) (Speaker Harper),	3834
107. Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 (19 June 2020) (Speaker Harper),	3834
108. Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 (15 June 2022) (Speaker Harper),	3834
109. Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (28 April 2023) (Speaker Harper),	3834
110. Annual Report 2022 Workers' Safety and Compensation Board Yukon (Mostyn),	3834
111. Fifth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts - Yukon Housing (June 2023) (Dixon),	3834
112. Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (July 5, 2023) (Clarke, N.),	3834
113. Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges - Ministerial Statement (October 4, 2023) (Mostyn),	3834
114. Yukon Development Corporation 2022 Annual Report (Streicker),	4029
115. Yukon Energy 2022 Annual Report (Streicker),	4029
116. Yukon Hospitals Year in Review 2022-2023 and Yukon Hospital Corporation Consolidated Financial Statements March 31, 2023 (McPhee),	4109
117. First Report of the Members' Services Board (October 24, 2023) (Clarke, N.),	4109
118. Yukon Arts Centre Annual Report 2022/23 (Streicker),	4135
119. Yukon Heritage Resources Board Annual Report April 1, 2022 - March 31, 2023 (Streicker), .	4135
120. Bill No. 29, Act to amend the Elections Act (2023), reprinted with amendment in English and French (Pillai),	4135
121. Tenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (October 30, 2023) (Clarke, N.),	4199
122. Annual Report 2022-2023 Yukon Public Service Labour Relations Board (Silver),	4222
123. Annual Report 2022-2023 Yukon Teachers Labour Relations Board (Silver),	4222
124. Government of Yukon Financial Report For the Period April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023 (Silver),	4222
125. Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (October 31, 2023) (White),	4222
126. Building Blocks to Children's Rights: 2022/2023 Annual Report - Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Office (Speaker Harper),	4277
127. Eleventh Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (November 6, 2023) (Clarke, N.),	4305

SESSIONAL PAPERS *(continued)*

128. Yukon Judicial Council Annual Report 2022 (McPhee),	4418
129. Yukon Law Foundation Annual Report - November 1, 2021 to October 31, 2022 (McPhee), ..	4418
130. Yukon Liquor Corporation Annual report April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023 (Silver),	4472
131. Cannabis Yukon Annual report April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023 (Silver),	4472
132. Yukon University 2022-23 Year-in-Review and Yukon University Consolidated Financial Statements Year Ended March 31, 2023 (McLean),	4472
133. Yukon Child Care Board Annual Report 2022-2023 (McLean),	4523
134. Yukon Health Status Report Update 2022 (McPhee),	4527
135. 2022-2023 Annual Report Yukon Human Rights Commission and Yukon Human Rights Commission Financial Statements Year Ended March 31, 2023 (Speaker Harper),	4558
136. Yukon Public Accounts 2022-23 (Silver),	4558
137. Annual Report Yukon Housing Corporation For the year ended March 31, 2023 (Pillai), ...	4558
138. Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues Annual Report 2022-2023 (McLean),	4558
139. Health Care Insurance Programs - Health Services - Fiscal Years 2013-14 to 2022-23 - Annual Report April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023 (McPhee),	4558
140. Annual Report 2022-23 Crime Prevention & Victim Services Trust Fund (McPhee),	4558
141. Yukon state of the environment report 2023 (Clarke, N.),	4594

SILVER, SANDY

Speaks on:

Bill No. 34: <i>Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4008, 4011
Third Reading,	4452
Bill No. 210: <i>Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23</i>	
Second Reading,	3856, 3858
Third Reading,	3889
Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i>	
Second Reading,	3843, 3874
Ministerial statements:	
<i>Cannabis Control and Regulation Act</i> five-year review,	4002, 4003
Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement,	3836, 3837
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4580
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8 th Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges,	4150

SITTING DAYS

No. 136 October 4, 2023 (Wednesday), 3831–3846
 No. 137 October 5, 2023 (Thursday), 3847–3877
 No. 138 October 10, 2023 (Tuesday), 3879–3905
 No. 139 October 11, 2023 (Wednesday), 3907–3937
 No. 140 October 12, 2023 (Thursday), 3939–3969
 No. 141 October 16, 2023 (Monday), 3971–3997
 No. 142 October 17, 2023 (Tuesday), 3999–4025
 No. 143 October 18, 2023 (Wednesday), 4027–4054
 No. 144 October 19, 2023 (Thursday), 4055–4079
 No. 145 October 23, 2023 (Monday), 4081–4105
 No. 146 October 24, 2023 (Tuesday), 4107–4132
 No. 147 October 25, 2023 (Wednesday), 4133–4166
 No. 148 October 26, 2023 (Thursday), 4167–4196
 No. 149 October 30, 2023 (Monday), 4197–4220
 No. 150 October 31, 2023 (Tuesday), 4221–4247
 No. 151 November 1, 2023 (Wednesday), 4247–4273
 No. 152 November 2, 2023 (Thursday), 4275–4301
 No. 153 November 6, 2023 (Monday), 4303–4330
 No. 154 November 7, 2023 (Tuesday), 4331–4357
 No. 155 November 8, 2023 (Wednesday), 4359–4390
 No. 156 November 9, 2023 (Thursday), 4391–4415
 No. 157 November 14, 2023 (Tuesday), 4417–4441
 No. 158 November 15, 2023 (Wednesday), 4443–4468
 No. 159 November 16, 2023 (Thursday), 4469–4496
 No. 160 November 20, 2023 (Monday), 4497–4523
 No. 161 November 21, 2023 (Tuesday), 4525–4553
 No. 162 November 22, 2023 (Wednesday), 4555–4589
 No. 163 November 23, 2023 (Thursday), 4591–4617

SITTING LENGTH

Government House Leader's report on (Streicker), 3979

SPEAKER (see also DEPUTY SPEAKER, SPEAKER'S RULINGS and SPEAKER'S STATEMENTS)

Absent, 4027, 4055
 Casting vote (Amendment to Motion No. 756), 3925

SPEAKER (*continued*)

Introductions

Amundson, McKenzie,	3831, 4497
Braeuner, Anya,	4497
King, Annette,	3831, 4275, 4497
Mewett, Joe,	3831
Milnes, Julia,	3831, 4497
Oakley, Alex,	4134
Pages,	3831
Smith, Rick,	3831
Veinott-McKeugh, Rachel,	4497
Tables documents,	3834, 4277, 4558

SPEAKER'S RULINGS (see also DEPUTY SPEAKER'S RULINGS)

Re point of order re amendment to motion for Second Reading of Bill No. 29: <i>Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)</i> ,	3981
Re point of order re relevance - amendment to motion,	4585

SPEAKER'S STATEMENTS (see also DEPUTY SPEAKER'S STATEMENTS)

Re artwork in the Chamber, new,	3879
Re electronic signatures and members' participation in proceedings via video conference, ...	4081
Re in recognition of National Child Day,	4497
Re in recognition of Remembrance Day,	4391
Re point of order re amendment to Second Reading of Bill No. 29, <i>Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)</i> ,	3999
Re "Tabling Returns and Documents" rubric - tabling documents that are in the style of ministerial statements is not allowed,	4247
Re volume of off-mic comments,	4400

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE YUKON CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON ELECTORAL REFORM (see COMMITTEES, SPECIAL and COMMITTEES, REPORTS OF SPECIAL)**STREICKER, JOHN**

Speaks on:

Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i> - Second Reading,	3867
Committee of the Whole Motion No. 15 - Re appearance of witnesses from the Yukon Hospital Corporation,	4534-4535

STREICKER, JOHN (*continued*)

Speaks on:

Ministerial statements:

Minto mine closure and reclamation,	4109, 4110
Yukon convention centre,	4083, 4084
Motion No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting,	3948, 3949, 3951
Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding,	3924
Motion No. 775 - Re comprehensive municipal grant,	4388
Motion No. 793 - Re rural solid-waste disposal,	4165
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4573, 4583
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 - Re concurrence in the 8 th Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges,	4143
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7 - Re concurrence in the 1 st Report of the Members' Services Board,	4116
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 8 - Re concurrence in the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform,	4339

TERMINATION OF SITTING

As per Standing Order 76(1),	4614
As per Standing Order 76(2),	4615

TREDGER, LANE (see also DEPUTY CHAIR OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE)

Questions, oral:

Affordable housing,	4086, 4448
Electricity rates,	4005
Public transit funding,	4202
Seniors housing,	4563
Vimy Heritage Housing Society funding,	4366
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter,	3840

Speaks on:

Bill No. 28: <i>Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	3953
Third Reading,	4037

TREDGER, LANE (*continued*)

Speaks on:

Ministerial statements:

<i>Cannabis Control and Regulation Act</i> five-year review,	4003
Child Development Centre,	3943
COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations,	4172
Housing initiatives fund,	4560
National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence,	3910
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter,	4279
Motion No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting,	3948
Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding,	3930
Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation,	4381

TRIBUTES

Addictions Awareness Week, National, recognition of (McPhee/Clarke, Y./Blake),	4526
Augustine, Linda, remembrance of (Streicker),	4081
Breast Cancer Awareness Month, recognition of (McPhee/McLeod/Tredger),	4108
Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, recognition of (Silver/Van Bibber),	4499
Canucks, recognition of (Streicker/Van Bibber/White),	4247
Child Day, National, recognition of (McLean/Clarke, Y./Blake),	4498
Chortkiv, Ukraine, recognition of (Pillai/Dixon/White),	3907
Circular Economy Month, recognition of (Clarke, N./Istchenko/Tredger),	3880
Dawson City Fire Department 125 th anniversary, recognition of (Silver/Van Bibber/Tredger), ...	3939
Diabetes Day, World, recognition of (McPhee/Kent),	4445
Duty Counsel Day, recognition of (Clarke, N.),	4168
Energy Efficiency Day, recognition of (Streicker/Istchenko/Tredger),	3833
Falle, Al, remembrance of (Cathers),	4331
Fire Prevention Week, recognition of (Mostyn/McLeod/White),	3880
Francophone Immigration Week, National, recognition of (Streicker/Clarke, Y./Tredger),	4304
Friesen, Carl, remembrance of (Streicker/Dixon/White),	4221
<i>George Black</i> ferry and Pelly barge staff, recognition of (Clarke, N./Hassard/Tredger),	4135
Geoscience Forum and Trade Show, recognition of (Streicker/McLeod/White),	4469
Geoscience Forum award recipients, Yukon, recognition of (Streicker/Kent/White),	4525
Hanifan, Kathy, remembrance of (White/Van Bibber),	4443
Heart of Riverdale, recognition of (Clarke, N./Kent/White),	4198
Housing Day, National, recognition of (Pillai/Clarke, Y./Tredger),	4555

TRIBUTES *(continued)*

Indigenous Veterans Day, National, recognition of (McLean/Istchenko/Blake),	4393
Innovation Week, Yukon, recognition of (Pillai/Van Bibber/White),	4360
Innovators Awards, 2023 Hall of, recognition of (Streicker/Dixon),	4444
Klondike Road Relay, recognition of (Mostyn/McLeod/White),	4169
Lamrock, Morris, remembrance of (Streicker/White),	4417
Library Month, Canadian and Yukon public libraries, recognition of (Mostyn/McLeod/Tredger), ...	4000
Lung Cancer Awareness Month and Radon Action Month, recognition of (McPhee/ Clarke, Y./Tredger),	4248
MADD Project Red Ribbon campaign, recognition of (McPhee/Hassard/Blake),	4276
Major Funk, recognition of (Pillai/Clarke, Y./Tredger),	4027
Mental Illness Awareness Week, recognition of (McPhee/Clarke, Y./Blake),	3848
Northwestel Festival of Trees, recognition of (McPhee/Kent/White),	4556
Operation Nanook-Tatigiit, recognition of (Mostyn/Istchenko),	4107
Polio Day, World, recognition of (Pillai/Cathers/Blake),	3999
Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, recognition of (McPhee/Clarke, Y. /Blake),	3972
Pronouns Day, International, recognition of (McLean/Clarke, Y./Tredger),	4056
Remembrance Day, recognition of (Pillai/Istchenko/White),	4391
Royal Canadian Legion's poppy campaign, recognition of (Pillai/Istchenko/White),	4167
ShakeOut Day, International, recognition of (Mostyn/McLeod/White),	4055
Share the Spirit Yukon campaign, recognition of (Mostyn/Van Bibber/White),	4593
Sisters in Spirit Vigil, recognition of (McLean/Van Bibber/Blake),	3832
Skilled Trade and Technology Week, National, recognition of (McLean/Kent/White),	4303
Small Business Week, recognition of (Pillai/Van Bibber/White),	3971
Stix Together, recognition of (McPhee/Van Bibber/Tredger),	4471
Teachers' Day, World, recognition of (McLean/Van Bibber/White),	3847
Team Yukon at the North American Indigenous Games, recognition of (Mostyn/McLeod /Blake), ...	3940
Transgender Day of Remembrance, recognition of (McPhee/Istchenko/White),	4497
Visual arts, Yukon Prize for, recognition of (Streicker/Clarke, Y./Blake),	4359
Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle's 20 th anniversary, recognition of (McLean/ Clarke, Y./Blake),	4133
Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon's 30 th anniversary and Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon's 50 th anniversary, recognition of (Streicker/Van Bibber/White), .	4028
Women's Hockey League, Whitehorse, recognition of (McLean/Dixon/Tredger),	4591
Yukon First Nations Health Programs, recognition of (Silver/Cathers/Blake),	4197
Yukoner Appreciation Week, recognition of (Pillai/Van Bibber/White),	4275

UNANIMOUS CONSENT

Bill No. 28: <i>Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)</i>	
Re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4020
Bill No. 31: <i>Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act</i>	
Re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4402
Bill No. 32: <i>Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)</i>	
Re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4233
Bill No. 33: <i>Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)</i>	
Re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4066
Bill No. 34: <i>Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)</i>	
Re deeming all clauses and title read and agreed to,	4426
Bill No. 210: <i>Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23</i>	
Re deeming all Votes carried,	3859
Re deeming all clauses, the preamble and title read and agreed to,	3860
Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i>	
Re moving second reading pursuant to Standing Order 55(2),	3843
Re deeming all lines in Vote 2 cleared or carried,	4261
Re deeming all lines in Vote 3 cleared or carried,	4538
Re deeming all lines in Vote 8 cleared or carried,	4437
Re deeming all lines in Vote 10 cleared or carried,	4024
Re deeming all lines in Vote 11 cleared or carried,	4051
Re deeming all lines in Vote 18 cleared or carried,	4484
Re deeming all lines in Vote 27 cleared or carried,	4092
Re deeming all lines in Vote 51 cleared or carried,	4352
Re deeming all lines in Vote 52 cleared or carried,	4487
Re deeming all lines in Vote 53 cleared or carried,	4601
Re deeming all lines in Vote 54 cleared or carried,	4126
Re deeming all remaining lines in Vote 7 cleared or carried,	4610
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7	
Re moving the motion notwithstanding Standing Orders 27(1) and 13(3),	4115

VAN BIBBER, GERALDINE

Questions, oral:

2 Lodgepole Lane concerns,	4176
Dawson City recreation centre,	4398
Mammography services,	4476
Policing priorities,	3841, 4364

VAN BIBBER, GERALDINE *(continued)*

Questions, oral:

Public transit funding,	3914
Rural emergency services,	4449
School busing,	4141, 4252
School staff shortage,	3946
Teacher staffing,	4085, 4226
Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and downtown core concerns,	4564
Yukon River crossing at Dawson City,	4422
Yukon University Polaris project funding,	4531

Speaks on:

Ministerial statements:

Yukon convention centre,	4083
--------------------------------	------

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF

Adams, Alison (McLean),	4591
Adel, Ted (Streicker),	4221
Akriti (Streicker),	4027
Alford, Dominic (Streicker),	4221
Allan, Grant (Streicker),	4525
Amundson, McKenzie (Speaker Harper),	3831, 4497
Anderson, Robin (Streicker),	4027
Ashthorn, Heather	
(Clarke, N.),	3879
(Streicker),	4133, 4417
Asquith, Ben (Pillai),	4359
Auguste, Maya	
(McLean),	3907
(Streicker),	4303
Austad, Leif (White/Dixon),	4555
Bailey, Devin (Mostyn),	3879
Baker, Kaylyn (Streicker),	4359
Bartlette, Deb	
(McPhee),	4472
(Van Bibber),	4469
Bartsch, Jessie (Streicker),	4417
Bartsch, Susie Anne (Streicker),	4417

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Baxter, Bob (Streicker),	4443
Beattie, Denise (McLean),	4391
Beebe, Jeremy (Mostyn),	4591
Beemer, Tori (Streicker),	4525
Bélanger, Edith (Streicker),	4303
Benson, Ryan (Streicker),	4417
Berdahl, Scott (Streicker),	4525
Berry, Dennis (Streicker),	3831, 4027
Bidrman, Eva (McPhee),	4555
Bill, Doris (McLean),	3831
Bilsky, Jason (Cathers),	4555
Bilsky, Tracey (Mostyn),	4167
Birss, Aura-Leigh	
(McLean),	4133
(Streicker),	4417
Bittenbender, Asha (McPhee),	4497
Bjork, Angelique (Streicker),	4469, 4525
Blackjack, Greg (Mostyn),	4055, 4107
Blewett, Marg (Streicker),	4081
Bliedung, Heidi (Clarke, N.),	4133
Blisner, Barry (Mostyn),	4591
Blisner, Jack (Mostyn),	4591
Bogaard, Jack (Pillai),	4555
Bohnet, Sevn (Streicker),	4469
Boisvert, Anthony (Pillai),	4555
Bouchard, Alex (McLean),	4591
Bourcier, André (Streicker),	4303
Bourdache, Bruno (Dixon),	4303
Bradshaw, Mary (Streicker),	4359
Braeuner, Anya (Speaker Harper),	4497
Brais, Melanie	
(Cathers),	4331
(Pillai),	4391
Brais, Paul	
(Cathers),	4331
(Pillai),	4391

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Bramadat, Avery (Streicker),	4027
Branson, Thomas (Streicker),	4525
Brekke, Dave (Streicker),	4247
Brooks, Emily (McPhee),	4497
Brost, Erin (McLean),	3939
Brown, Lucas (Pillai),	3971
Budenkyvych, Serhii (Pillai),	3907
Burke, Dorothy (Pillai),	4167
Burke, Mike (Pillai),	4525
Burke, Ryan (Streicker),	4525
Burrell, Heather (Streicker),	3939
Burrill, Adrian (Pillai),	4027
Butler, Liz (Mostyn),	4167
Cable, Bryna (Clarke, N.),	3880
Cairns, Marie (Mostyn),	3939
Cameron, Mary (McLean),	3847
Cardiff, Haley (White),	4443
Cardiff, Jaclyn (White),	4443
Cardiff, Jessen (White),	4443
Carrothers, Jaydee (McLean),	4303
Casselmann, Aaron (Dixon),	3832
Casson, Linda (Pillai),	3831
Chandler, Mark (Clarke, N.),	4167
Charlie, Jason (Pillai),	4555
Chiou, Peter (Streicker),	4133
Colbert, Miranda (McLean),	3939
Coles, Dawn (Silver),	4197
Collingwood, Adele (Pillai),	3999
Collingwood, Brent (Pillai),	3999
Collins, Naomi (Mostyn),	3999
Collins, Robert (Streicker),	4417
Cook, Jason (Streicker),	4443
Cooper, Shannon (Dixon),	4167
Coyne, Megan (Mostyn),	4591
Cozens, Kelly (Silver),	4107
Craig, Kristina (Pillai),	4555

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Craig, Lois (Pillai),	3999
Cratty, Morris (Pillai),	4167, 4391
Cromarty, Megan (Mostyn),	3939, 4167
Crossfield, Michelle (Streicker),	4469
Cunning, Laker (Streicker),	4247
Curlew, Frank (McPhee),	4555
Dangwall, Jyotika (Pillai),	4555
Davis, Rose (Pillai),	4167
de Visch Eybergen, Elske (Pillai),	4555
Deuling, Amanda (Mostyn),	4167
Dhillon, Nicole (White),	4469
Dillman, Nicole (Silver),	4197
Dixon, Bonnie (Pillai),	4275
Dixon, Brittany (Dixon),	4555
Dobrowolsky, Helene (White),	4443
Dorward, Jess (McLean),	4133
Douglas, Judy (Streicker),	4247
Duchesne, Julia (Mostyn),	4055
Dunaway, Naomi (Pillai),	4555
Dunbar, Mike (Clarke, N.),	4133
Duncan, Lori (McLean),	4133
Dunmall, Natasha (McPhee),	4275
Eaton, Brian (White),	4391
Eckert-Maret, Tiffany (Pillai),	4359
Estabrook, Brenda (Streicker),	4221
Etter, Pascaline (White),	4469
Falle, Irma (Cathers),	4331
Falle, Maddison (Cathers),	4331
Falle, Ray (Cathers),	4331
Falle, Seth (Cathers),	4331
Faulkner, Jeff (White/Dixon),	4555
Ferby, Rika Matsunami (Streicker),	4247
Ferris, Ramesh (Pillai),	3999
Flaherty, Helen (White),	4443
Florkiewicz, Rob (Streicker),	4417

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Follwell, Missy (Streicker), 4247

Forrest, Judy
 (Streicker), 4417
 (Tredger), 4417

Forward, Karen
 (McPhee), 4472, 4555
 (Pillai), 4469

Foster, Al (Streicker), 4081

Fraser, Max (White), 4443

Fred, Joseph (Streicker), 4027

French, Sara (Streicker), 4027

Fricke, Beth (Pillai), 4555

Friesen, Michelle (McLean), 4133

Gale, Wyatt (Mostyn), 4591

Gallina, Paolo (McLean), 4497

Gardiner-Falle, Lesley (Cathers), 4331

Gartner, Abbey (McLean), 4303

Gervais, Colin (Pillai), 4359

Gingell, Judy (McLean), 3831

Giroux, Marie-Pierre (Streicker), 4303

Gjersten, Jennie (McPhee), 4555

Glada, Emma (Pillai), 3831

Gostick, Carla
 (McLean), 3831, 4591
 (Mostyn), 4055

Green, Christopher (Mostyn), 3879

Green, Tim (Streicker), 4133

Greetham, Sue (Streicker), 4167

Griffis, Ashley (McLean), 4497

Grimes, Deserine (Pillai), 4555

Grossinger, Red
 (Pillai), 4391
 (Streicker), 4133

Hall, Jon (Pillai), 4391

Haltrich, Nathalie (McPhee), 4472

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Hamel, Sylvia, and grade 10 sciences humaines class from from St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School (Clarke, N.),	4591
Hamilton, Shawn (Streicker),	4525
Hamilton, Susan (McPhee),	4472
(Van Bibber),	4469
Hammer, Shayna (Pillai),	4359
Haney, Lauren (Streicker),	4469
Hanifan, Peggy (White),	4443
Hansen, Al (Streicker),	4443
Hardwood, Chad (Dixon),	3832
Hart, Dave (Pillai),	4167
Hartling, Judy (McLean),	4555
Hartling, Neil (Streicker),	4027
Harvey, Max (Pillai),	4167
Heyligers-Hare, Selina (Pillai),	4027
Hill, Arjay (McPhee),	4472, 4555
(Van Bibber),	4469
Hlubish, Marta (Pillai),	3907
Hodgson, Dana (McLean),	4591
Hoe, Winnie (Mostyn),	3999
Holder Robinson, Marcel (Pillai),	4555
Holmberg, Greg (McPhee),	4275
Horne, Barrett (Pillai),	4359
Howard, April (McPhee),	4443
Hutton, David (Clarke, N.),	4133
Iles, Joe (Hassard),	4197
(McPhee),	4555
Iles, Myra (Silver),	4197
Innes, Vanessa (Dixon),	4555
Isaak, Chris (Streicker),	4247
Isaak, Donna (Streicker),	4247
Isaak, Ed (Streicker),	4247
Isaak, Tara (Streicker),	4247

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Jai, Julie (Streicker),	4359
Jenkins, Barry (White),	4443
Jessup, Anne	
(Hassard),	4469
(McPhee),	4472
Jessup, Harvey (Hassard),	4469
Jirousek, Daniel (Pillai),	4555
Joe, Pat (Mostyn),	3939
Johnson, Mel	
(McPhee),	4472
(White),	4469
Johnstone, Lorelee (Streicker),	4469, 4525
Jones, Donna	
(McPhee),	4443
(Mostyn),	4167
Kassbaum, Brandon (Streicker),	4221
Kayseas, Ash (McPhee),	4497
Kearney, Mike (Streicker),	4221
Kelly, Cassandra (McLean),	3847
Kennedy, Kristy (McLean),	4497
King, Annette (Speaker Harper),	3831, 4275, 4497
King, Michelle (McLean),	3939
Kinnear, Lacia (McPhee),	4555
Klein, Yannick (Streicker),	4303
Knight, Redd (Pillai),	4167
Knowles, Cal (Pillai),	4167, 4391
Knowles, Louise (Pillai),	4391
Kohut, Abby (Streicker),	4247
Krocker, Mary Ann (Silver),	4107
Kroening, Carole (Tredger),	4197
Kroon, Sarah (Pillai),	4555
Kuiack, Marguerite (McLean),	3939
Lackowicz, Adele (Streicker),	4221
Lackowicz, Paul (Streicker),	4221
Lafforgue, Edwardo (Streicker),	4027
Lalena, Guin (McLean),	4591

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Lane, Ruth (McLean),	3939
Laroude, JP (Streicker),	4027
Lassen, Jeane (McLean),	4591
Lassen, Moira (McLean),	4591
Laxton, Dave (Pillai),	4167, 4391
Layton, Doug (Mostyn),	4107
Leas, Amanda	
(McLean),	4391
(Pillai),	4555
Legge, Sandy (Streicker),	4027
Leitch, Aletta (Streicker),	3831
Leslie, Amanda (McPhee),	4555
Levesque, Monique (McPhee),	4472
Lewis, Anne (Pillai),	4275
Lewis, Danny (Streicker),	4247
Lewis, Dodie (Streicker),	4247
Lewis, Kaysa (Streicker),	4247
Lewis, Mary Ann (White),	4391
Lewis, Red (Streicker),	4247
Lewis, Rob (White),	4391
Lewis, Shaun (Streicker),	4247
Lewis, Stacy (Mostyn),	4167
Lewis, Sunniva (Streicker),	4247
Lewis, Tanya (McLean),	3847
Lindsay, Alison (Mostyn),	3999
Lindstrom, Darla-Jean (Silver),	4197
Liu, Angel (Streicker),	4133
Lopushinsky, James (Dixon),	3832
Lopushinsky, Randi (Dixon),	3832
Loughry, Layla (McPhee),	4275
Low, Georgianna (McLean),	4133
Lucier, Al (Silver),	4197
Lyslo, Cynthia (Dixon),	4303
MacDonald, Trika (McLean),	3847
MacDougall, Sandra (McPhee),	4472
MacMaster, Caitlyn (Pillai),	4359

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Maddison, Sidney (White),	4443
Magun, Andrea (Pillai),	4555
Malette, Debbie (Streicker),	4525
Manekin-Beille, Lauren (Pillai),	4555
Marchand, Gael (Mostyn),	3939
Marie, Jasmin (McLean),	4133
Marsh, Sarah (Streicker),	4027
Martinson, Abigail (McPhee),	4275
McBride, Michael (Clarke, N.),	4167
McCann, Mike (Mostyn),	4167
McCaw, Tom (Cathers),	4331
McClelland, Carrie (Streicker),	4417
McDougall, Naomi (Silver),	4197
McDowell, Colin (Pillai),	4555
McEachran, Cory (McPhee),	4275
McInroy, Cat (Dixon),	3832
McLean, Rick (McLean),	3880
McLeod, Andrew (Pillai),	4391
McLeod, Megan (Clarke, N.),	3880
McPhee, Araica (McPhee),	4443
McRae, Aiden (Pillai),	4359
Mead, Stephen (Streicker),	4469
Mechan, Kate (Pillai),	4555
Mewett, Joe	
(Pillai),	4167, 4391
(Speaker Harper),	3831
Meyer, Arden (Streicker),	4221
Middler, Anne (Streicker),	4443
Middler, Juniper (Streicker),	4443
Milford, Heather (Silver),	4107
Miller, Alexis (McLean),	3847
Milnes, Julia (Speaker Harper),	3831, 4497
Moir, Karen (Streicker),	4469
Mooney, Katie (McLean),	4303
Mooney, Norah (Clarke, N.),	4167
Mooney, Stephen (Pillai),	4359

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Moreau, Manon (Streicker),	4417
Morrison, Brenda (Streicker),	4221
Mueller, Scott (Clarke, N.),	4133
Murray, Mellisa	
(Pillai),	3971
(Streicker),	4525
Murray, Stuart	
(Pillai),	3971
(Streicker),	4469, 4525
(White),	4525
Nash, Jill (McPhee),	4443
Newkirk, Kerry (Dixon),	4555
Newnham, Jodi-Lyn (Streicker),	4417
Njootli, Gary (Streicker),	4133
Nordahl, Ali (Streicker),	4247
Northcott, Clara (McLean),	3939, 4497
Oakley, Alex	
(McLean),	4133
(Speaker Harper),	4134
O'Carroll, Nick (Mostyn),	4591
Ogarov, Oleksii (Clarke, N.),	4197
Olito, Krystal (Silver),	4197
O'Neill, Jen (Dixon),	3832
Ordish, Matt (Silver),	4555
Paradis, Marney (McPhee),	4443
Park, Ray (Streicker),	4247
Parker, Al (Pillai),	4391
Parker, Ella (Streicker),	4417
Parker, Laurie (McLean),	4497
Parker, Steven (Clarke, N.),	3880
Parkes, Finley (McPhee),	4497
Partridge, Sophie (McLean),	4497
Pauls, Adanchilla (Silver),	4197
Pauls, Grant (McLean),	4197
Pelletier, Charlie-Rose (McLean),	3907
Pemberton, Mike (Streicker),	3831, 4221

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Pereira, Ben (Pillai),	3971
Pettitt, Trish (McLean),	4591
Pigage, Lee (Pillai),	3999
Ponsioen, Yogi (Mostyn),	4591
Porter, Arianna (Pillai),	3831
Potvin, Richard (Streicker),	4469
Powell, Todd (Streicker),	4469, 4525
Power, Nancy (Streicker),	4303
Power, Susan (McLean),	4133
Prescott, Casey (Streicker),	4133
Ratcliff, Trevor (McLean),	3847
Reed, Brian (Pillai),	4167, 4391
Regimbal, Jim (Clarke, N.),	4133
Reimchen, Donna (Pillai),	3907
Reimert, Andrew (McLean),	3880
Reimert, Corinna (McLean),	3880
Relf, Carolyn (Streicker/Pillai),	4469
Renwick-Shields, Bronte (White),	4497
Reyna, Omar (Streicker),	4359
Richardson, Christie (Pillai),	4555
Rivard, Laurence (Streicker),	4303
Rivest, Chantelle	
(Hassard),	4469
(McPhee),	4472
Rivest, Cheryl	
(McLean),	4591
(McPhee),	4472
(White),	4469
Rodden, Remy (Streicker),	4417
Rogers, Maralyn	
(McLean),	4591
(McPhee),	4472
(Van Bibber),	4469
(White),	4443
Roldan, Christian (McPhee),	4555
Romero, Diana (Streicker),	4303

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Ronalds, Julia (McLean), 3907

Ross, Bruce (Pillai), 3999

Ross, Pat (Streicker), 4221

Rowles, Shelagh (McLean), 3847

Rudolph, Carly (Pillai), 3831

Ruf, Daniela (McPhee), 4275

Ryder, Amy

 (Clarke, N.), 4167

 (McLean), 3847

Sahid, Ziad (Pillai), 4359

Salmon, Laura (Silver), 4197

Sampson, Alissa (Streicker), 4525

Sanchez-Aguirre, Carlos (McPhee), 4275

Sanders, Ben (Pillai), 4359

Sanders, Jim (Streicker), 3831

Sanders, Kerän (Streicker), 3831

Savoie, Rod (Streicker), 4027

Schall, Vera (Streicker), 3831

Schulze, Carl (Streicker), 4525

Scott, Erin (Pillai), 4359

Segriff, Sadie (McPhee), 4497

Settle, Morgan (Streicker), 4417

Shadow, Sharon (McLean), 4133

Sharma, Monica, and grade 10 social sciences class from from St. Francis of Assisi Catholic
 Secondary School (Clarke, N.), 4591

Shmatko, Volodymyr (Pillai), 3907

Sias, Emersyne (McLean), 4133

Sidney, Carl (Pillai/McLean), 4391

Simpson-Fowler, Andrea (Clarke, N.), 4197

Simpson-Fowler, Grace (Clarke, N.), 4197

Sinclair, Kristen (Pillai), 4555

Skelton, Sara (Silver), 4555

Slade, Devon (McPhee), 4275

Slat, Heidi (Pillai), 4555

Sloan, David (Silver), 4469

Sloychuk, Jeff (Pillai), 3907

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Smart, Elaine (Dixon),	4555
Smith, Kathleen (McLean),	4591
Smith, Rick (Speaker Harper),	3831
Smith, Sean (McLean),	4391
Soo, Dylan	
(Pillai),	4359
(Streicker),	4027
Stavert, Kim (McLean),	4591
Steele, Gordon (Cathers),	4331
Stewart, Vanessa (Streicker),	4417
Stimson, Ocean (Mostyn),	4591
St-Laurent, Sandra (Streicker),	4303
Stokes, Dale (McLean),	3939
Stoneman, Tammy (McLean),	3847
Swan, Ann (Silver),	4197
Swystun, Heather (Streicker),	3831
Taillefer, Lorraine (Streicker),	4303
Taylor, Wendy (McPhee),	4555
Taylor, Natalie (McLean),	3907, 4133
Tewnion, Will (Streicker),	4469
Theriau, Greg	
(Mostyn),	4107
(Pillai),	4391
Thompson, Michele (Silver),	4197
Thompson, Olivia (Pillai),	4275
Tolgyesi, Marguerite (McLean),	3907
Travis, Rachel (Mostyn),	3999
Tredger Campbell, Judy (Tredger),	4197
Tredger, Jim (Tredger),	4197
Trefry, John (Pillai),	4167
Tripp-Friesen, Robyn (Streicker),	4221
Tritschler, Laurie (White),	4469
Trotter, Walter (Dixon),	3832
Tsay, Sam (Streicker),	4133
Ulyett, Coralie (McLean),	4591
Umanes, Violetta (Clarke, N.),	4197

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

van Delft, Shyloh (Streicker),	4417
Van der Meer, Sierra (Streicker),	4359
Van Marck, Jacquelyn	
(McPhee),	4275
(Streicker),	4417
Van Zandvoort, Jeff (McLean),	4303
Vanier, Reid (Mostyn),	4167
Veinott-McKeough, Rachel (Speaker Harper),	4497
Venton Ross, Bonnie (Pillai),	3999
Vollans-Leduc, Lisa	
(Streicker),	4359
(White),	4443
Warner, Brianne	
(McLean),	4591
(Streicker),	4469
Warner, Brianne (Streicker),	4525
Watcham-Roy, Tash	
(Dixon),	3832
(McLean),	4591
Waterreus, Karin (Streicker),	4221
Watson, Michelle (Pillai),	4555
Webber, Adeline (McLean),	4133
Welch, Keith (Pillai),	4555
West, JoMary (Dixon),	3832
Westerlies, Scott (Dixon),	4167
Whachell, Alainnah (Streicker),	4359
Whipple-Grantham, Sigourney (McLean),	4133
Williams, Andy (Streicker),	4247
Withers, Christine (White),	4443
Withers, Stu (White),	4443
Wojtowicz, Peter (Streicker),	4133
Wolaniuk, Terrence (Mostyn),	4107
Wolosewich, Jeff (McLean),	4303
Wonfor, Lauren (Streicker),	4417
Xuan, Summer (Mostyn),	3999

VISITORS, INTRODUCTION OF *(continued)*

Young, Chris	
(Cathers),	4331
(Dixon),	3832
Yurkiv, Taras (Pillai),	3907
Zazula, Grant (Pillai),	3907
Zinn, Jessica (McLean),	4303
Zwikirsch, Peter (Pillai),	4167
Zylstra, Paul (Pillai),	4555

WEBBER, ADELINE (see COMMISSIONER)**WHITE, KATE**

Questions, oral:

Community medevac services,	4476
Consultation on school replacement,	4060
Health care services,	4597
Mineral staking in Na-Cho Nyäk Dun land use planning region,	4397
Mining project oversight,	3913
Minto mine reclamation,	4139
Municipality funding and support,	4334
Nurse recruitment and retention,	4087
Physician recruitment and retention,	4309
Rural communities funding and support,	3854
Rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4505
Skagway marine services,	3977, 4251
Teacher recruitment and retention,	4112
Teacher staff housing,	4032
Teacher staffing,	3886

Speaks on:

Bill No. 29: <i>Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	3980
Third Reading,	4178
Bill No. 31: <i>Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act</i>	
Second Reading,	4181
Bill No. 32: <i>Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4205

WHITE, KATE *(continued)*

Speaks on:

Bill No. 33: <i>Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4042
Third Reading,	4090
Bill No. 34: <i>Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)</i>	
Second Reading,	4010
Bill No. 210: <i>Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23</i>	
Second Reading,	3857
Third Reading,	3889
Bill No. 211: <i>Second Appropriation Act 2023-24</i>	
Second Reading,	3862
Ministerial statements:	
British Columbia Cabinet and First Nations Leaders' Gathering,	4306
Council of the Federation meeting and health summit,	4363
Ministerial statements,	4137
Minto mine closure and reclamation,	4110
Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ strategy,	4030
Sexual orientation and gender identity policy in education,	4058
Wildland Fire Management,	3883
Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement,	3837
Motion No. 744 - Re member participation in sittings of the House via video conference due to illness during the 2023 Fall Sitting,	3950
Motion No. 756 - Re RCMP funding,	3924, 3926
Motion No. 821 - Re interest-free repayment period on COVID-19 support loan,	4369
Motion No. 823 - Re physicians' assistants legislation,	4379
Motion No. 846 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Commission,	4533
Motion No. 847 - Re appointments to the Yukon Human Rights Panel of Adjudicators,	4534
Motion No. 856 - Re rural solid-waste transfer stations,	4566, 4582
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7 - Re concurrence in the 1 st Report of the Members' Services Board,	4116
Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 8 - Re concurrence in the Final Report of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform,	4337, 4343

WITNESSES BEFORE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (see also MOTIONS IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE)

Yukon Development Corporation

 Mike Pemberton, Chair, 4317–4330

 Dennis Berry, President and Chief Executive Officer, 4317–4330

Yukon Energy Corporation

 Lesley Cabott, Chair, 4317–4330

 Chris Milner, Acting President and Chief Executive Officer, 4317–4330

Yukon Hospital Corporation

 Al Lucier, Chair of Board of Trustees, 4539–4553

 Jason Bilsky, Chief Executive Officer, 4539–4553

Yukon University

 Lesley Brown, President and Vice-Chancellor, 4511–4522

 Christine Mahar, Public Member of Board of Governors, 4511–4522

Yukon Workers' Safety and Compensation Board

 Mark Pike, Chair, 4183–4196

 Kurt Dieckmann, President and Chief Executive Officer, 4183–4196

APPENDIX A

(Bill No. 210: *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*)

 General Debate, 3859–3860

(Bill No. 211 - *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*)

 General Debate, 3890–3896

 Detailed breakdown of Vote discussions

 Community Services,4093–4105, 4284–4300, 4344–4352

 Economic Development,3958–3968, 3983–3992, 4601–4610

 Education,3992–3997, 4402–4415, 4535–4538

 Energy, Mines and Resources,3896–3905, 4453–4468, 4600–4601

 Environment,4206–4220, 4437–4440, 4485–4487

 Executive Council Office,4126–4131, 4182–4183, 4256–4261

 French Languages Services Directorate, 4091–4092

 Health and Social Services,4261–4273, 4488–4495

 Highways and Public Works, ...4051–4053, 4067–4078, 4352–4357, 4507–4511,
 4610–4614

 Justice,4312–4317, 4427–4437

 Public Service Commission, 4021–4024

 Tourism and Culture, 4118–4126

 Women and Gender Equity Directorate, 4043–4051

 Yukon Housing Corporation, 4233–4247, 4479–4484



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 136

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, October 4, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 4, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

I would like to begin the 2023 Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly by respectfully acknowledging all Yukon First Nations and also that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as they are now outdated: Motions No. 154, 474, and 637, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge; Motions No. 350 and 579, standing in the name of the Hon. Premier; Motions No. 475 and 611, standing in the name of the Member for Kluane; Motion No. 525, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin; Motions No. 558, 559, and 560, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South; and Motion No. 610, standing in the name of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

The following motions have been removed from the Order Paper, as the actions requested in the motions have been taken in whole or in part: Motions No. 16, 89, 240, 404, and 573, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge; Motions No. 33 and 144, standing in the name of the Leader of the Third Party; Motion No. 113, standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition, on which debate adjourned on October 13, 2021; Motion No. 639, standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition; Motions No. 116, 270, and 538, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin; Motion No. 278, standing in the name of the Member for Watson Lake; Motion No. 293, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre; Motions No. 343, 357, and 625, standing in the name of the Member for Copperbelt South; and Motions No. 499 and 680, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek Centre.

Finally, Motion No. 729, notice of which was given by the Member for Klondike on April 27, 2023, was not placed on the June 13, 2023 Notice Paper, as the motion was outdated.

INTRODUCTION OF PAGES

Speaker: It gives me great pleasure to introduce the pages who will be serving the House during the 2023 Fall Sitting. They are: Chris Cooper and Carter France from Porter Creek Secondary School; Luka Slykhuis and Junior Zang from CSSC Mercier; and from F.H. Collins Secondary School, Trinity Schwalm, Halia Fritzen Pealow, Sweta Patel, and Paisley Schroeder. Today, we have with us Halia Fritzen Pealow and Paisley Schroeder.

Applause

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under Introduction of Visitors, it gives me great pleasure to introduce Annette King, the Child and Youth Advocate. From her staff, we also have Julia Milnes, Deputy Child and Youth Advocate, and McKenzie Amundson, client service administrator. In addition, I would like to introduce Rick Smith, investigator and compliance review officer and general counsel for the Office of the Ombudsman. I would also like to introduce Joe Mewett.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further visitors to be introduced?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to welcome to the House today, first, Carly Rudolph and Linda Casson, both president and secretary for the Yukon Liberal Party. Thank you for being here today. Also, we have two young individuals with us today who are part of an Indigenous training program introducing youth to government. So, I would like to also welcome Arianna Porter and Emma Glada. Please welcome them to the House today.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would ask my colleagues to please help me welcome some very special guests here today. The first one is Judy Gingell, currently the chair of the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children Project but also former Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations and former Commissioner of the Yukon. Also joining her today is the vice-chair for the Yukon Residential School Missing Children Project, Doris Bill, who is also the former Chief of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and a co-chair with me on the Yukon Advisory Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Welcome. Thank you so much for coming today.

I would also like to, of course, recognize one of my staff members from the Cabinet staff, Carla Gostick, who is a member of my team. Welcome to all of you. Thank you.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are a few guests I would like to ask us all to welcome: first of all, proud grandparents visiting from Winnipeg, Jim Sanders and Kerän Sanders; from the Yukon Development Corporation, the president and CEO, Dennis Berry; and the chair of the Yukon Development Corporation Board, Mike Pemberton. We also have with us Aletta Leitch, manager of energy programs; Heather Swystun, senior energy advisor; and Vera Schall, who is a senior energy advisor, but I first met Vera when she was a young teen organizing the Marsh Lake dog show for many years. If we could welcome them all, please.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: I see a number of folks who have joined us from the Yukon business community, so I will ask the members to join me in recognizing a few of them. I see Jen and JoMary from Bliss Salon. I see James and Randi Lopushinsky and Chris Young from Coldwell Banker, Walter Trotter and Chad Hardwood from Arcrite, Cat McInroy from Well Bread Culinary, and probably others whom I am going to miss right now, but I will ask folks to join me in welcoming them to the gallery.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would like to ask folks to help me welcome to the gallery today — new to the gallery and new to the caucus office — Tash Watcham-Roy, who is the administrative assistant for the Minister of Highways and Public Works and the Minister of Environment and also the administrative assistant to the Minister of Finance, Public Service Commission, and Yukon Liquor Corporation. Also, beside her is Aaron Casselman, who is my ministerial assistant.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Sisters in Spirit Vigil

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Sisters in Spirit Vigil held each October. This vigil is a time to come together to mourn and remember Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit-plus people who are missing or who have been lost to violence. But for too many Indigenous families in the Yukon and throughout Canada, every day is a day of mourning and remembrance. They continue to search for answers, closure, and healing.

This country has a dark history, Mr. Speaker, of discrimination against Indigenous women and girls. The colonial legal system stripped us of our traditional matriarchal roles and societal status for far too long. It denied us fundamental civil and human rights. Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people have inherited a legacy of discrimination, and we continue to suffer from those impacts.

We remain vulnerable to gender-based violence, yet we are resilient. Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people continue to show up and advocate for our loved ones and for systemic change. The ongoing violence that affects our communities is an emergency that demands immediate attention. We need to listen to the MMIWG and 2S+ family survivors and their advocates, and we need to act on their calls for justice.

On this day, I must also reflect on the recent news of the potential unmarked graves of the former Choooutla residential school site and the research that indicates that 33 children died at that residential school. My heart goes out to all of the family members of these innocent children, and my gratitude to the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children Project, which led this research with sensitivity and respect for impacted communities and families — thank you.

Last week, I had the honour of participating in Wolf and Crow potlatches on the traditional territory of the Kaska Nation in Watson Lake.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the history between residential schools and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is very much linked. These potlatches were held to honour the women and girls and two-spirit people lost to violence from that area of our territory.

Mr. Speaker, 16 names were spoken — 16 names. Nine others were honoured the week before in Ross River, for a total of 25. This represents more than half of all the lost sisters in our territory. They were daughters, sisters, mothers, aunties, wives, grandmothers, and friends. Today, we take time to mourn and remember, but we also stand together with the sense of resilience and determination. We remember our lost people not as victims but as symbols of strength, courage, perseverance, and our spirit as Indigenous people. We stand with the families today as we marched in the vigil, and I hope that it brought them some sense of love that we show for them.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Sisters in Spirit National Day of Action 2023. It is always with a heavy heart that we rise in this House and across Canada on October 4 to bring the issue of missing and murdered women, girls, and gender-diverse people to the front of mind.

Certainly, it is one day to recognize an event, but we must remember them every day. The Native Women's Association of Canada continues to work, along with local associations, to bring awareness, educate, research, and collect data on this national tragedy. Across the nation, the red dress has been the visual symbol. Today, we wear blue to ensure that the Sisters in Spirit Vigil and Walk are visible to show our continued support for grieving families and loved ones.

This is one process in the healing and also gives an opportunity to honour the memories and lives of those lost to violence and death. Take a moment today to remember, and let us continue to place protections and safety nets for our vulnerable population.

Today, at the RCMP station on 4th Avenue, many gathered to comfort each other and to witness another year since our last vigil. As we move forward, thank you to those families who share their painful stories. Thank you to all who organize and support those in need. Thank you to all who give a part of their busy day to be a part of this cause, and thank you for remembering.

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Sisters in Spirit. We commemorate this day to honour the lives of all victims and families of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls across all parts of Canada and here in the Yukon while ensuring that their lives and experiences of injustice across all systems in society are not forgotten.

As a daughter, sister, auntie, and mother who comes from a long line of strong Indigenous matriarchs, I can't help but to feel the weight of systemic discrimination and ignorance as we

continue to have the need to designate a day to honour Indigenous women and girls whose lives have been unjustly cut short.

Today, I also remember the eight Indigenous women whom I have known personally and who have gone missing or been murdered, including Miranda Peter, Angel Carlick, Evangeline Billy, Joni Andre, Wendy Carlick, Sarah MacIntosh, Brandy Vittrekwa, and Ramona Peter. I think of all women and their families across the Yukon who continue to bear the weight of their losses while also upholding their strength in remembering the lives lived by these beautiful women and being the voice for change. We, as Indigenous women, are the core of our nations' communities and families, yet we need to fight for equality, respect, dignity, and justice. This continues to be evident in today's times, as women, families, and Indigenous leaders and allies across Canada continue to call on their government to search a landfill in Manitoba for remains of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

We also recognize the hard work of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, Yukon Women's Transition Home Society — also known as Kaushee's Place — Betty's Haven, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Yukon Status of Women Council, and the local RCMP, all of whom continue to lead the hard work of advocacy, education, relationship- and system-building to create safer, inclusive, dignified, respectful, and welcoming spaces across all parts of society, systems, and communities for and with Indigenous women and girls in the Yukon. Mahsi.

In recognition of Energy Efficiency Day

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute today to Energy Efficiency Day. This commemorative day recognizes our shared efforts to implement energy efficiency and sustainability in our lives. Energy efficiency is the cheapest, quickest, and cleanest way to meet our energy needs, bring down energy costs, and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. Smarter energy use also reduces the amount of electricity needed to power our lives.

Mr. Speaker, I can proudly say that Yukon residents are embracing energy-efficiency practices. Their participation in our good energy rebates and efficiency programs speaks volumes. For example, 150 homeowners have completed high performance upgrades to homes throughout the Yukon. These impactful upgrades reduced their home's energy use by at least 20 percent. Over the past several years, over 700 new high-performance homes were constructed throughout the territory. These new homes are 50-plus percent better than the current building standards. That's incredible and certainly worth celebrating.

Yukon homeowners have also switched to over 100 smart electric heating systems, including heat pumps and electric thermal storage units. We celebrate the forward-thinkers for showing us that we can reduce our environmental impact while keeping warm during the Yukon's cold winters.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that First Nation governments, municipalities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations are taking action. To date, we have seen energy improvements completed for more than 150 commercial buildings, community centres, and administration buildings throughout the Yukon.

We can also be energy efficient through our means of transportation. Whether using zero-emission vehicles, the bus, an electric scooter, or human-powered kicksleds, these modes of transportation are absolutely more energy efficient. I'm very pleased to announce that we recently issued our 1,000th rebate for electric bikes here in the Yukon.

Our good energy rebate supports small energy-efficient actions like purchasing Energy Star home appliances all the way to major insulation upgrades and installing renewable energy systems. As a result, Yukoners are driving electric vehicles, timing their appliances for off peak, and producing renewable solar electricity on the roofs of their homes.

I applaud and thank all Yukoners for doing their part in integrating clean energy goals into their lives. By being energy efficient and practising smarter energy use, we are reducing our climate impacts and building a more affordable, reliable, and sustainable energy-efficient future for the Yukon. It's as easy as turning off a light switch.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Istchenko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 6 as Energy Efficiency Day and to recognize all those who do their part to increase efficiency and reduce waste in their homes and workplaces.

As we move into colder and darker months, we're going to start seeing sharp increases to utility bills. Families continue to look for ways that they can save money while also staying warm throughout the winter and not sacrificing to keep the lights on. There are small cost-efficient improvements that Yukoners can make to their homes that can really help to keep the heat inside where it belongs. These include window-wrap kits, upgraded weather stripping around the doors, and using thermostats to set lower heat at night or when they are not at home.

Further rebates exist throughout initiatives like the good energy program, which allows Yukoners to get money back on different larger scale upgrades and retrofits and purchasing clean transportation vehicles.

Rebates are also available for generating electricity from renewable energy sources and are further supplemented by accessing the microgeneration program.

The federal government also offers complementary retrofit grants for Canadian homeowners living in the north and off-grid communities.

So, I encourage all Yukoners to learn more about the things that they can do to help conserve energy in their homes and to reduce their overall energy footprint.

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Energy Efficiency Day. There are fantastic people working on this goal all over the Yukon. Thank you to all the people at the Energy Solutions branch helping Yukoners make changes, big and small, to their homes and businesses to be more energy efficient. Thank you to everyone who has put money and effort into making their buildings and vehicles more energy efficient. We appreciate all of your efforts.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Speaker: Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling *Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sitzings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees*, October 4, 2023; *Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly — Membership of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform; COVID-19 Pandemic — COVID-19 Vaccines in Yukon — Independent Auditor's Report — 2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly*, June 20, 2023; and a report entitled *Left in the Dark — Report 1 — Investigation into the mishandling of abuse allegations at a Yukon school by the Department of Education — A Report from the Yukon Ombudsman*, September 7, 2023.

Finally, I have four reports for tabling — four annual reports of the Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission to the Legislative Assembly.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling, pursuant to section 22 of the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act*, the 2022 Workers' Safety and Compensation Board annual report.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Mr. Dixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have for tabling the *Fifth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts*, dated June 2023.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have for tabling the *Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees*, dated July 5, 2023.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have for tabling the *Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges*.

Speaker: Are there any further committee reports to be presented?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 210: *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 210 agreed to

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 211 agreed to

Bill No. 29: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 29 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the expansion of the Yukon home ownership loan program to help eligible Yukoners build or buy a home.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Adeline Webber on her appointment as the Commissioner of Yukon.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's ongoing partnership with the Government of Canada to provide the Canada-Yukon housing benefit which assists low-to-moderate income Yukoners to pay rent.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House is committed to protecting, respecting, and supporting students' rights through the continual evaluation, modernization, and implementation of the sexual orientation and gender identity policy.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to:

(1) continue to advance initiatives outlined in the LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan* that will help chart a path forward in ending discrimination and making Government of Yukon programs and services more inclusive of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in the Yukon;

(2) foster an environment that embraces gender equality by embracing the values of inclusion and acceptance; and

(3) ensure that all Yukoners, of all genders or sexual orientation, are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

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

THAT this House acknowledges the importance of supporting low-income Yukoners affected by inflation by:

(1) increasing the monthly payments of the Yukon seniors income supplement by 37.5 percent; and

(2) providing eligible social assistance recipients with an additional \$100 per month until a rate review is completed.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House:

(1) condemns the spurious use of the notwithstanding clause to challenge education policies that cause harm to vulnerable individuals; and

(2) urges the provincial and territorial governments to refrain from the inappropriate use of the notwithstanding clause to take away vulnerable children's rights.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon working with the Government of Canada to support low-income homeowners' transition from home heating oil to low-emitting heating technologies that will result in an estimated \$1,500 to \$4,700 in savings on their home energy bills, thereby easing financial pressures caused by inflation.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House acknowledges the importance of supporting low-income Yukoners by:

(1) increasing the territory's minimum wage and tying future yearly increases to the consumer price index for Whitehorse; and

(2) creating a paid sick leave rebate program for Yukoners earning less than the average private sector wage, including self-employed Yukoners.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the expansion and extension of the inflation relief rebate to reduce Yukoners' power bills.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to COVID-19 symptoms, illness, or protocols may participate in the sittings of the House by video conference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by video conference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) be permitted to participate in counts in Committee of the Whole, notwithstanding Standing Order 44 and Standing Order 44.1;

(4) contribute to constituting quorum in the Legislative Assembly under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(5) be considered to have attended the Sitting of the Legislative Assembly with no deduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting, if the Legislative Assembly stands adjourned for an indefinite period of time, the Government House Leader and at least one of the other House Leaders together may request that the Legislative Assembly meet virtually by video conference, with all the Members of the Legislative Assembly being able to participate remotely, notwithstanding any current Standing Orders regarding members' physical presence in the Chamber.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting:

(1) the Clerk shall keep a daily list of paired members in which any member of the government and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by noon on that date to indicate that they will not take part in any recorded division in the Legislative Assembly held on that date; and

(2) following each such division held, the names of any members mentioned on the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and in the Votes and Proceedings.

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

THAT this House supports the annual increase to the Yukon child benefit that matches the Whitehorse consumer price index to ensure that the benefit keeps pace with the rising cost of living.

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

THAT this House congratulates Manitoba New Democratic Party Leader Wab Kinew on becoming the first First Nation Premier of a province in Canada and on forming government.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to accept the recommendations contained in the 2023 comprehensive municipal grant review as conducted by the Association of Yukon Communities.

MLA Tredger: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to implement the recommendations from the 2023 report on the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter by the House of Wolf & Associates Inc., entitled *A Path Forward*.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with the City of Whitehorse and the Council of Yukon First Nations in creating a downtown community safety officer program to:

- (1) provide safety and support to all citizens in the downtown area; and
- (2) address safety concerns of businesses, local residents, and people using the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba to search the Prairie Green Landfill for Morgan Harris and Mercedes Ryan.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates the Kwanlin Dün First Nation on the completion of the Haeckel Hill wind project.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is an honour to share crucial information for the territory that will serve as a valuable resource for future generations and also provide insight into current issues.

The Yukon Employees' Union is a valued partner to the Yukon government. After collaborative discussions, we reached a new three-year collective agreement in June. This means that more than 3,500 public servants — including EMS personnel, home care providers, mental health wellness professionals, community nurses, continuing care practitioners, and various other union staff members — will receive the compensation that they deserve.

This agreement is fair and balanced. It recognizes the valuable work done by our public servants and the service that they provide to Yukoners. It upholds our commitment to fiscal

responsibility in managing public funds. The three-year agreement contains several updates and new provisions to benefit employees, including wage increases of 10.5 percent over three years for members. This is in line with the recently negotiated agreement for federal public servants. It also includes provisions to advance our recruitment and retention efforts, especially with in-demand health care workers and other key difficult-to-fill positions across government. This new agreement is in effect until December 31, 2024.

As we discuss the significance of the new collective agreement, it is crucial to recognize the far-reaching impacts that it has across the territory. When our public servants receive competitive wages, they have more resources to invest back into the local economy. This means more money flowing back into our businesses, cafés, restaurants, and local services. In short, by increasing financial security within households, we are increasing stability in our local economy. This stability attracts investors and encourages a business-friendly environment. It helps to create a foundation of growth, supporting businesses to expand, create jobs, and contribute to the economy.

I would like to express my gratitude to the dedicated members of the Yukon Employees' Union for their constructive engagement throughout this process. Their dedication to their work and their commitment to finding common ground for the good of the public servants is commendable. I would also like to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the negotiating teams from both sides. Negotiations are not always easy. They require hard work and a relationship of trust and understanding that must be built and maintained. This new collective agreement demonstrates our government's commitment to fair labour practices, the well-being of our public service, and fiscal responsibility. Our government is now working to implement this new collective agreement and ensure that our public service earns the salary that reflects their hard work and their commitment. I hope that we will see support from all parties for our dedicated public servants. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Clarke: Salamat po, Mr. Speaker. When this was announced back in the summer, we were pleased to see that the Yukon government and the Yukon Employees' Union had reached a new deal. However, we do have some questions for the minister about it.

One of the most notable aspects of the negotiations of this agreement was the time that it took. The negotiations carried on well past the expiry of the previous contract in 2021 and dragged all the way into 2023. Several observers of the process have remarked that this was one of the longest negotiations in recent memory.

The process appeared to be quite difficult as well. After beginning in 2021, Yukoners saw the negotiations break off at various points, and the federal labour relations board had to step in to attempt to break the stalemate. Following that, the union had begun to prepare its members for the possibility of a strike vote in early June.

In the face of the impending strike vote, the Yukon government finally conceded and an agreement was reached. On June 6, CBC Yukon reported that the union had won its two main demands. Those were — and I quote: “... an across-the-board pay hike of 4.5 per cent in the first year of the deal, and three per cent in each of the next two years.”

The report from CBC also noted that the Yukon government backed off of a proposed change that would have frozen severance pay. So, perhaps the minister can explain why the government dragged its feet throughout this process and caused one of the longest negotiations in recent memory, only to then give in to the initial demands made by the union in the first place.

It's also worth noting that this agreement will expire in less than a year and a half. So, can the minister tell us what the status of the negotiations on the next agreement are? When will they begin formally negotiating? Does the minister anticipate proposing a freeze to severance pay that was such a big sticking point last time?

Finally, we are aware that one of the other issues that caused some conflict between the YEU and the Liberal government was the proposed creation of a new health authority. Here is what the YEU bulletin from May 2023 said — and I quote: “The government plans to offload government services to an arm's-length health authority. This devolution could mean the migration of entire departments and will most likely include the devolution of staff from all health and social services branches, Yukon hospitals, community health centres and more. This could affect fewer than five hundred people or it could impact greater than a thousand members — we just don't know.”

So, can the minister tell us if he has met with the YEU to discuss these concerns? Does the minister anticipate these concerns becoming another issue in the next round of negotiations next year?

Salamat po.

Ms. White: Today I celebrate the resiliency and tenacity of the public service and its union. I appreciate the angle that the minister has taken, but let's be honest. After 18 long months of this government playing games at the negotiation table, a strike vote was looming. This government chose to push union members to the brink instead of negotiating in good faith and supporting their employees. This agreement came at a time when communities across the territory were feeling the crunch of service gaps across every government department.

When the Yukon government chose to walk away from the negotiating table in May, the Yukon NDP was ready to join employees on that picket line — a picket line that we would not have crossed. As the largest employer in the territory, we expected the Yukon government to lead by example and to provide their workers with the best possible working conditions, not to play games and not to drag the negotiation to the brink of a strike. All workers need and deserve fair wages and good, safe working conditions. Many government employees are essential workers, and all Yukon government

employees are critical for the functioning of our territory. They deserve a fair contract for years to come.

The Yukon government, as an employer, should be a model for all to strive for. It should inspire other employers to do better instead of trying to shortchange their workers. This government often stands up in this House responding to our questions by accusing us of disrespecting public servants when we question the minister's decisions, but when it comes time to give them better working conditions and give them a well-deserved raise, they were met with 18 months of silence.

So, with staff shortages across the territory affecting much-needed services for Yukoners, this government seemed prepared to shut it all down. Rather than offering up competitive wages to attract new workers, they put lives and our economy at risk by trying to shortchange the members of the Yukon Employees' Union. Instead of addressing long-standing health and safety issues, they tried to create a two-tiered workforce by taking away severance for workers. When the workers asked for their fair share to help their wages keep up with inflation, the government walked away from the table.

The Yukon's public service does an incredible job of keeping the whole of the government services running, from health care to education, highways, public housing workers, building inspectors, the folks upstairs in Finance, and all those on the front lines in all of our communities. Without them, the government is nothing.

So, today I applaud the bravery of the bargaining team and all members of YEU locals Y010 and Y017 for standing firm and winning a better future, not just for Yukon government workers, but for all workers, as a new benchmark is now set.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would like to respond by again acknowledging the hard work and dedication of the negotiating teams from both sides, which resulted in a government that, once again this year, is in the top 100 employers in Canada — an extremely important step that we are very, very proud of on this side of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, negotiations are extremely complex. In this case, there were a number of factors, including the increased inflation rates and also the availability of the parties that did influence negotiations. Nonetheless, we were all committed to reaching a deal. I have to say, as I listen to the framing from the opposition, I would like to emphasize again that our government never walked away from discussions — never. We also followed the process every step of the way, as well as direction provided to us by the conciliation board chair.

So, again — disagree with the members opposite as far as how they are framing these negotiations — these complicated, tough negotiations.

However, we did want to get this right and to reach an agreement that was fair and also fiscally responsible, and it takes a lot of time to do that as well.

We have seen across North America numerous collective bargaining negotiations that resulted in labour action or came very close. Changes in the labour market and the increase to inflation as well have changed the dynamics at the bargaining table. Every negotiation process is unique, and this definitely

was no exception. That being said, the results demonstrated the shared commitment of all parties to secure a strong outcome for all Yukoners.

What does this all mean for public servants? It does mean an increase in acting pay from five percent to 10 percent, an increase in retention allowances for social workers, new annual retention allowances for student support services, and also new pay grids for nurses and midwives. These are just a few highlights. I don't have enough time today to go over all of them. This investment reflects our commitment to the public service and to the public servants and ensuring that they receive the compensation that they need and that they deserve.

Our government believes firmly in this agreement and we believe that it is fair to our hard-working public servants, to upholding our fiscal responsibility and managing the public funds. This is reflective of how we retain our AA standard credit rating from S&P's global ratings again this year. With this agreement in place, our focus is on applying retroactive payments and ensuring that our public servants receive the support that they require, and this agreement marks a very positive step forward for all Yukoners. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Mr. Dixon: Last week, a much-celebrated and award-winning local business was forced to close its doors because of the — in their words — “ruinous conditions” created by the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Sadly, this should come as no surprise to anyone. Since the Liberal government decided in 2019 to take over the shelter and change its operating model to a so-called “low-barrier approach” which was much more permissive of drug and alcohol use, the results have been a disaster. Property damage, vandalism, harassment, open drug and alcohol use, and general crime and illegal behaviour have become the norm in the core of Whitehorse. How many more local businesses need to close before this government takes this issue seriously and actually starts making real change to the way that the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is operated?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I am going to say that I think I was pretty clear in my comments last week that we are taking this seriously and that there has to be change. For the business owners who are here — there are a lot of business owners who are here, some who have investments that are adjacent to that shelter that have been negatively affected by it, people whom I respect immensely. There are other business owners who are here who are just frustrated by seeing another business affected, people who have built the business sector here in the Yukon, and I, again, immensely respect those individuals, and I am validating the fact that something has to be done.

I am working with multiple departments. I think it was unfair that we put the onus just on one department. I think it has to be a multi-department approach. We do have to change what is happening. The activity that has been the most disruptive has been outside the building, and there has been a culture of

gathering and partying and really inappropriate behaviour. At the same time, inside the shelter there has been good work done, and we know that from the work we have done, the studies we have done, and the feedback. I think this is going to be a hot topic; it should be a hot topic. The public should keep us accountable for this. I look forward to questions 2 and 3, and I will let folks know in the Chamber what our plans are moving forward.

Mr. Dixon: The community is getting used to being told by the Liberal government that they take it seriously but then turning around and carrying on with business as usual as they have for the last number of years. For years now since the Liberals took the shelter over, there has been a steady stream of letters, e-mails, phone calls and complaints levied by businesses and residents about the increased crime and illegal behaviour in the area.

Even the mayor has weighed in and expressed concern on behalf of the municipality at the way the shelter is being operated. What is notable is that even people who need and who utilize the services of the shelter have complained that they don't even feel safe there.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, no one feels safe around the shelter anymore. So, when will Liberals finally admit that the changes they have made to the operational model of the shelter have been a disaster, and will they commit to making immediate changes?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, first, I would say there have been immediate changes. I think for anybody who has gone by — the first step was just the removal of structures that were outside. I think that they were leading to — folks gather, and I don't think that a lot of those individuals were seeking services. I think that it became a gathering spot, and then from there, some of the behaviour that was taking place was just disruptive and, in some cases, threatening to individuals. That is factual, and I will agree with the opposition on that point.

I think — to be open to the public in the gallery and business owners — you can talk about the service model, but the reason that the service model changed was because there were really negative things happening. They may not have been happening outside the building, but they were happening to the clients inside the building, and that might be easier for us all to deal with because we can drive by and don't have to deal with it, but there were bad things happening in that building to those clients — from one client to another and within the staffing model. That is why the decision was made. Those are the facts.

The other thing is — look, even members of the opposition know. It's a difficult one. I will take this, as Premier, and wear this and work with my colleagues and other service providers. But everybody on that side of the table made the vote in Management Board to fund this and build it where it is built. Even the Member for Lake Laberge has stood up and said that we shouldn't have built it there. So, we are all in this one —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Dixon: I remind the minister that other than a move of about a block, the shelter has been in the same area for decades and it wasn't until the Liberals took over the shelter in

2019 and changed the operating model that things started to go downhill.

Now, it is clear, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier is correct about one thing: He does bear responsibility for this. The Liberal government owns the shelter, they fund the shelter, they set the policy parameters within which the shelter is operated, and they are responsible for this. Only they can make the changes that are necessary to the operating model that has caused the problems that we see today. So, what immediate changes can the community expect to see to help resolve this disaster that the Liberal government has created?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I was getting at in my previous answer — which was just a quote from the Member for Lake Laberge when he said that, in hindsight, the location of the facility should have been different. I am just saying that — look, there were some steps in the early place, but I am stepping back from that and saying, “Yes. What are our immediate actions?”

So, we have moved structures from the front of the building. I have called for a meeting to go back with Connective, which is running it. I have gone through their transfer payment agreement. I think there are some things in there that really have to be focused on. The second paragraph talks about safety. I think there’s an issue on safety at this point in time. I have reached out to the City of Whitehorse. I have reached out to the Council of Yukon First Nations, and I also need the RCMP at the table with me.

We are shooting right now to have a meeting near the mid or end of next week to have players together. I think that we have to make incremental steps. We have to look at maybe some of those services potentially devolving to other areas. I think that having the number of things happening in that area right now is building too much activity. So, I think there are a number of things that we have to do.

But I also have tasked public servants across the government to come back over a period of two weeks to give me a set of options that we can look at. I have also sat down with the owners of Alpine Bakery. They have been very clear. They are taking the next six months and they are putting this on the government to make changes before they make a decision to reopen.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Mr. Cathers: Well, local businesses and residents have been expressing concern about the situation surrounding the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter for years. Many have felt that these concerns have fallen on deaf ears with government. However, since the government was embarrassed by the closure of Alpine Bakery, we have seen the Premier finally turn his focus back to the Yukon. It has been clear from media coverage that the Premier has finally personally intervened in this file and has expressed disappointment with the current situation.

In fact, we are told that the Premier informed businesses that he has taken over this file from the Minister of Health and Social Services. Can the Premier tell Yukoners whether he is satisfied with the lack of action in making any sort of real

changes in the operation of the shelter by the current Minister of Health and Social Services?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I would say that — and I have made the comments publicly — having one department deal with this issue was unfair, and that’s why I believe that having somebody in a role where I can still work hand in hand with the minister but also work with other levels of government which also have to be at the table on this — as anybody knows, Executive Council does do that work.

The little snippet about turning your mind back to this file — I’ll say this. Look, I don’t think my work ethic has ever been in doubt, and it’s good to see the Member for Lake Laberge back in the parking lot now that the summer is over because — I can tell you — I have been here working, but it is good to see him back.

On this file, I think that we are in a position where we have to ensure that we work across departments. This is a complex issue; we all know that. It makes great political hay. I am not discounting what folks in the gallery are going through. I have sat with folks who have options that they would like to work on in that area, and I don’t want to see the value of people’s assets decline. So, we will have to make incremental changes. I want to see some quick changes with the support of the public service. I need the support of the City of Whitehorse, I need Connective to continue to do their work, and I am also going to need the RCMP to work with us, hand in hand.

Mr. Cathers: I have to remind the Premier that this problem has been going on for years, including all of his time as Premier.

A day after the story broke about the closure of the Alpine Bakery, there was finally some action to remove the privacy structures along Alexander Street. This is something that businesses and neighbours had been asking for, for quite some time. In fact, we understand that this was recommended to the Minister of Health and Social Services well over a year ago, Mr. Speaker, but it wasn’t until the Premier was embarrassed publicly that any action was taken to remove these barriers.

How can the Premier still have confidence in the Minister of Health and Social Services when she has failed to act on even the most basic of recommendations to improve the operation of the shelter and safety around it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Again, great political hay but not actually true — not correct. I would love to say that, in a 24-hour period, the contractor went and took the structures away based on my comment, but that’s not what happened. The minister directed the Department of Health and Social Services to put a contract in place. The timing was that it happened during that day. They can go back and we can present a document here in the House to show that. But, no, it wasn’t my doing and I appreciate the fact that the work was undertaken.

There are some things in the report as well that the Third Party touched on today. There are some things that I agree with, but I will stand up and say that there are some things in that report that I don’t agree with. There are questions about additional structures in that area. I am going to say that, in working with vulnerable populations in previous careers, I don’t think that having gathering spaces outside of that area is

something that I agree with. I am not going to support it. I think that we need to have more supervision in that area. I think that we are going to have to be tougher in a number of different areas. That is just my prerogative. So, if I'm going to take on this work with colleagues, with the business community, with RCMP, with the Council of Yukon First Nations and with Connective, I also will be helping to direct some of the strategy.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's nice that the Premier has finally realized this is a problem, but his government has been very, very slow to act.

In response to my colleague the Member for Porter Creek North back in the fall of 2021, the current Minister of Health and Social Services told the Legislature this: "We continue to explore the options that support creating a safe and harmonious community for shelter clients, neighbouring residents, and businesses."

It's clear that the Premier doesn't think the minister has been successful at this since he has finally personally intervened and taken this file away from the Minister of Health and Social Services.

Can the Premier tell us why the minister, after taking almost no action to improve the operation of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, still has his confidence?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, first, I think, if we go back to the work that has been done, I would go back to the two reports that we did. One, of course, was touched on today that was really about strategy on how to improve the workings on the exterior of the shelter.

The other was the Vink Consulting report that was done. That report really focused on: Is the work of the shelter internally that's happening — whether that's the culturally specific and appropriate programming or the other supports — are we seeing value for our money?

We know, from that work, that we're getting — for every dollar spent, the analysis was \$2.11 back on our social programming. So, I think the work by Health and Social Services inside the shelter is good work that is being led by the minister.

Our problem, as everybody in the gallery knows — and those who are listening — is what's happening outside of this particular structure.

We have a contractor who is saying they have an obligation up to the doors. We know that some of those individuals are coming in and out. So, I'm challenging that assumption. I think, overall, some of the biggest problems are happening a block or two away. So, what do we do? Do we go back to the old way of doing things where we are all comfortable in the Yukon because there were a lot of vulnerable people who were down on the waterfront because they weren't affecting things — but those were still vulnerable people in tough situations dealing with generational trauma? Maybe. I don't think that's where we go. We have to deal with the problem outside. It's not just about Health and Social Services and their programming; it's about our community coming together. I'm willing to take this on, but I have to get the help of —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

MLA Tredger: When we talk about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and the neighbourhood around it, we're talking about people. At the core of this issue are people who have been deeply affected by two separate governments' mishandling of the situation. They are the people who live in the area, they are the business owners who make their livelihoods there, and they are the people who stay at the shelter — some of the most vulnerable Yukoners who are unfairly taking the blame.

The previous Yukon Party government failed all of them. The current Liberal government continues to fail all of them. Connective and CYFN work hard to deliver the essential services within the emergency shelter, but the safety of our neighbourhoods falls squarely on the shoulders of this Liberal government. There has been a lot of talk, a lot of promises, and no change on the ground. Residents, business owners, and shelter users are all being left to struggle on their own.

When can all of these people expect to see real action — not meetings — to make the downtown core a safe and welcoming place for everyone?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: So, for anyone who is not an elected official here and listening to this, you can see that there are many sides to this conversation. First of all, we have: Let's go back to the old ways where it doesn't really matter what happens to the clients as long as there is no disruption outside. On the other side, it is kind of an approach where it is saying: Don't worry about outside, but what is going to happen with the clients inside?

What we are saying is: The clients inside right now are getting good programming. I have sat with CYFN. We have done the analysis, but we have a problem on the outside of the building.

So, I don't believe that we are failing the individuals who are inside. I have to agree with the Leader of the Official Opposition — it is factual, and I have heard that there are individuals who are feeling uncomfortable accessing the services inside the building because of the activity on the outside of the building. I also think that we are seeing an increase in individuals from outside the Yukon who have made the Yukon their home. I know, from dealing with First Nation leadership — some who were here earlier today — that we see that. We see individuals from other communities outside of the Yukon, and they are also putting extra pressure that we probably didn't see in the same concentration before — the same number of individuals.

So, again, we will work with our stakeholders and we will make incremental change to ensure that there is good programming inside and safety on the outside.

MLA Tredger: I think that the time for incremental change has passed; this is not a new conversation. In 2015 when the Yukon Party built the poorly planned facility in a questionable location with no outdoor space and no consultation, the NDP asked how the neighbourhood would be involved. The answer, of course, was not at all. In 2017 when the shelter opened in the new location, the NDP asked the

Liberals how they would work with the community. The answer, as we know, is that they didn't.

Over the last five years, after report after report after report has come out on how to make the shelter work better for everyone involved, we have asked when action would be taken. The answer has been nothing but silence, and in the meantime, the situation has reached a boiling point.

So, we will ask again — this time about the latest report: When will the recommendations from the House of Wolf be put in place?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to say to the member opposite — whose constituents are downtown and who probably has their phone ringing off the hook and significant e-mails as they try to represent the individuals in their constituency — I will work across the aisle with you to ensure that we communicate with the constituents in that riding — the people who you represent — but the first step I need to do is to get the stakeholders together that are controlling the actual shelter. I need individuals, levels of government, and the RCMP that are handling things on the outside with community leaders. The next step will be to meet with individuals who live there, and then there are also business owners who have adjacent businesses. So, there are really three different sets of stakeholders that have to be met with, but I also want to be able to have the appropriate information and strategy before I meet with the citizens or the business owners, because, if not, I am wasting their time.

When it comes to what is happening inside — or the report from the House of Wolf — there are things in that report that I think are good. There is a conversation that has come to, I think, some resolutions. I am getting some individuals — safety folks or we will say “safety units” that are downtown. That is close to being in place and could be live by the end of October. I look forward to question 3.

MLA Tredger: What is absolutely maddening is that there have been years of meetings and reports full of recommendations to address the concerns that we are hearing. The latest report was made with input from the neighbourhood, from businesses, from residents, and from stakeholders. It has many concrete solutions that would make a real difference on the ground: a community safety officer program, public washrooms, and distributing essential services throughout the city instead of concentrating them all in a single building. It has been months since that report and years since these challenges started, but on the ground, we see no real action.

Will the government commit to publicly release their working plan so that neighbours, businesses, and people who use the shelter can see concrete actions and timelines?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that's an appropriate request from the member opposite, but there are a couple of pieces to that. One is about the washrooms in the downtown core. I believe — and I will go back and check — that these have been identified and integrated in the official community plan by the City of Whitehorse. That's why I think it is really important to be working with the City of Whitehorse. I think that the other levels of government or NGOs, such as the Council of Yukon First Nations, have looked at overseeing the downtown safety

program. I had a discussion with our executive director over the weekend about this. They feel that, by the end of October, they could have individuals. That safety group would not just be focusing on the shelter but on the whole downtown core, because there are some really negative things happening, not just in that area, but in other spots in the downtown, so I think that is important to do.

We have to engage with the RCMP. There have been letters and there are e-mails that have been sent around. We have all seen them. There is video that has been released. In that video, we see things that are happening a block away, and there is criminal activity.

That is not just about the shelter contractor; that's also about us working with the RCMP where those individuals are doing things that are against the law. They are damaging property, so we also have to deal with that.

Again, bringing stakeholders together and coming back with a timeline, I think, is fair and is accountable — and that is something I will work with our team to do.

Question re: Policing priorities

Ms. Van Bibber: On June 7 of this year, the Minister of Justice provided the RCMP with the Liberal government's policing priorities. Noticeably absent from those priorities was any reference to the concerns that the business community has been raising for years about the rising tide of crime affecting businesses and communities.

Can the Minister of Justice explain why the government's policing priorities failed to include any reference to property crime, vandalism, or theft that has become so unfortunately prevalent in our Yukon communities?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I know there will be more detail from the Minister of Justice, but I think it's important to say that there is a constant dialogue that happens between the Minister of Justice, who has kindly invited me to some of those meetings — to deal with the leadership from the RCMP.

I think it's also important to note that it's a little bit rich when there was a \$3.5-million increase to the RCMP in the main budget and the Yukon Party voted it down.

That's factual. You voted it down — the money to ensure that we had extra supports at the shelter, but you voted it down — the \$3.5 million for the RCMP. That's factual. You can wiggle in your chair all day long, but that is a fact.

We need those resources in order to ensure that we can take on the challenges in front of us.

I will leave questions 2 and 3 to the Minister of Justice.

Ms. Van Bibber: In their 2022-23 annual report, the Yukon Police Council said they had met with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. According to the Police Council, the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce raised — and I quote: “... concerns related to shoplifting, break and enters, vandalism of private and public property, and public alcohol and drug use.”

Despite this, none of these concerns were included in this year's policing priorities. Why are the concerns of the Yukon business community not reflected in the government's policing priorities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It is my pleasure today to rise to address the accuracy and the information contained in the question.

Each year, the Yukon Police Council works to collect community perspectives and to provide recommendations to the Minister of Justice to inform the policing priorities for the Yukon RCMP. The 2023-24 policing priorities are adopted and ultimately presented to the minister from the Yukon Police Council, as well as information from the Department of Justice. They involve strengthening relationships and increasing public trust, enhancing policing targeted at toxic illicit drugs and serious crime and policing with First Nations. Mr. Speaker, they came from the community. Those policing priorities are provided input to the Police Council by Yukoners themselves. These are the priorities set by Yukoners. These are the priorities set by me, as the minister, and presented to the Yukon RCMP.

We look forward to future opportunities to do the same. I can note that the Yukon Police Council is unique in Canada with respect to setting policing priorities that come from the community and the importance of that voice.

Ms. Van Bibber: We know that the Yukon Police Council met with representatives of the Yukon business community but we aren't aware of the minister having such a meeting.

Before the government creates policing priorities for next year, will the Minister of Justice agree to meet with the Yukon business community to seek their input about the annual RCMP policing priorities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that the member opposite doesn't recall the way in which the Yukon Police Council was devised. It has the responsibility of engaging with diverse community groups across the Yukon, including stakeholders and the public. Elements and recurring themes from those engagements, as well as feedback received — as I have said — from the Department of Justice are incorporated into the annual policing priorities.

The Police Council travels the territory with respect to hearing from communities and the importance of the issues that are of concern to them. They do so annually and they present the council's recommendations for consideration in setting the police priorities. Conversations happen regularly with the RCMP about the importance of those priorities.

The chambers of commerce, of course, are important voices with respect to having input, but they are not the only ones. The chambers of commerce are welcome. They certainly meet with our Cabinet members on a regular basis on this and other issues and will continue to have the respect of this Cabinet going forward and their voice being heard in this conversation.

Question re: RCMP funding and staffing

Ms. McLeod: While Yukoners have noticed a significant increase in crime in Whitehorse, rural communities have also been affected by increasing crime. Several Yukon communities have faced increasing rates and severity of crime. Despite this, RCMP staffing levels have remained unchanged.

Will the Yukon government commit to providing additional resources to the RCMP specifically for addressing rising crime in Yukon communities?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We did, we have, and we likely will again. My question to the members opposite is: Will you support additional resources in the budget for the RCMP — because you didn't this spring — will you, when we put additional resources in, in the next budget?

Ms. McLeod: Not quite the answer that communities would like to hear.

So, while it's clear that more resources for the RCMP are needed overall, there have also been concerns raised about fully staffing the existing police positions that already exist in Yukon communities. We continue to hear about significant periodic and ongoing vacancies in several RCMP positions throughout rural Yukon.

What steps has the minister taken to help the RCMP address ongoing vacancies in policing positions throughout Yukon communities?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It may be that the members opposite, when they had the honour of sitting in these chairs, were interfering with the operation of the RCMP on a regular basis. That is not what I do with respect to this job; it is not what our Cabinet does. The Department of Justice works to ensure the provision of a professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial policing service that is in response to the priorities of Yukoners and worthy of the public trust.

Our government funds significant and ongoing investment in Yukon police resources through the *Territorial Police Service Agreement* with the RCMP, as well as through investments with the Yukon First Nations and Inuit Policing program.

As the Premier mentioned, these are resources, increases in resources, services for Yukon communities across the territory that the members of the opposition did not support in this spring's budget. This year, the Government of Yukon approved a policing budget increase of over 20 percent compared to the previous year. The services provided by the Yukon RCMP are professional and important ones to Yukoners across the territory in each and every community, and they make the decisions about how those resources are deployed.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, now, over the past year, we have heard more and more Yukon communities speak up about this issue. Earlier this year, we heard the municipality and First Nation in Mayo both specifically ask for increased police resources for their community. Last month, following a public meeting about the rising rate of crime in Watson Lake, the municipality issued a statement calling for an action plan. Municipalities and communities across the Yukon are looking for increased support from the Yukon government to address the growing rate of crime. What increased support will the Government of Yukon provide to rural communities and municipalities to address this issue?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The increase of over 20 percent to the previous year's budget for the Yukon RCMP by this year's government budget is an increase that reaffirmed our staffing commitment to a number of important initiatives, including the

Historical Case Unit while adding two officers to the crime reduction unit. Two additional resources have been added to bring the First Nations and Inuit Policing program complement to 19 resources, and most recently, this government approved additional resources for Car 867. Under the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, these resources expand the capacity of the mobile crisis response team from five to seven days a week to cover critical call periods and provide trauma-informed, client-centred support for people experiencing mental-health related issues. These services are important not only here in Whitehorse, but across the territory, and the opportunity for Yukon's professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial policing service that is here in the territory. The RCMP and their amazing work that they do across the territory is incredibly important to be supported not only by our government, but by all MLAs and communities across the territory.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 55(2), I request the unanimous consent of the House to move second reading of Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, at this time.

Unanimous consent re moving second reading of Bill No. 211

Speaker: The Minister of Finance has, pursuant to Standing Order 55(2), requested the unanimous consent of the House to move second reading of Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, at this time.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 211, standing in the name of the Hon. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I move that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill No. 211, otherwise known as the *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* or the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the 2023-24 fiscal year. Each year, the bill provides an opportunity to update this House on areas of spending that have deviated from those planned at the start of the fiscal year. While this can include shifting priorities in order to take advantage of opportunities, it is more often than not that this is done in response to unanticipated events. Over the last three years, Mr. Speaker, we

have become very familiar with navigating unexpected scenarios regarding both minor and major course corrections. While these scenarios may be viewed as potential disruptions to our plan, they also provide opportunities to test our abilities to respond to challenges and to improve how we do so, year over year.

In 2020 and 2021, for example, our government responded to extraordinary challenges when COVID-19 required unprecedented levels of health and economic interventions to keep Yukoners safe. During this period, we developed new ways to streamline our budgeting process to ensure that funding was directed to areas where it was most needed. In the summer of 2021, we turned our attention to responding and mitigating historic floods that swept through many of our communities.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we are contending with a range of compounding challenges requiring our government to adjust spending to meet the territory's needs. I will highlight a few of those now.

Most striking, perhaps, has been the latest fire season, which has been one of the worst on record in jurisdictions throughout the country. We have seen that all levels of government need to work in a coordinated and collaborative way to ensure effective responses. This work requires adequate funding to implement.

While the situation here has not been as devastating as it has been for our neighbours to the east and to the south, intense forest fires have been raging all summer in the Yukon. I know that the support of all Yukoners and all members of this Chamber was very much with the residents of Mayo and also Old Crow this summer, given the evacuations they experienced.

However, the reality of natural disasters and climate change in this territory do not stop with just fires. My community of Dawson City and the entire Klondike Valley faced the enormous struggle that comes from homes, businesses, and farms facing immense and sudden flooding. These impacted individuals have also called on our territorial government to provide assistance, which requires adequate funding to address, not unlike our needs stemming from the fire season.

Instances like these have required us to be on high alert in terms of mitigation, evacuation, and suppression activities to keep residents safe. While these actions come with a cost, we will continue to do what's necessary to keep our communities and our people secure.

Mr. Speaker, we are all attuned to rising inflation and the elevated cost of living that continue to present challenges, not only here in the Yukon but across the country and around the world. Yukon households are seeing their budgets stretched by higher prices, with lower income households feeling the worst effects. As a result, our government implemented a number of ongoing programs to make life more affordable for Yukoners.

Several measures included in the 2023-24 budget are already in place. In 2023-24, we extended the inflation relief rebate program, which provides a \$50-per-month rebate on ATCO and Yukon Energy utility bills for April and May billing periods, along with three more months that have been recently added. Ever since our government began implementing this

rebate, I have heard from Yukoners across the territory about how this has really helped in keeping their household expenses lower.

Other measures in our 2023-24 budget which will continue to make life more affordable for Yukoners include funding for food in Yukon schools, the timber harvest incentive and a support program for commercial fuelwood harvesters and retailers to boost the fuelwood supply, a monthly top-up of 37.5 percent to the eligible recipients of the Yukon seniors income supplement, a \$100 monthly increase to eligible social assistance recipients, a 10-percent increase to monthly payments to caregivers of children in out-of-home care, and a \$170,000 increase to the Yukon child benefit for modest- and low-income families. This is in addition to ongoing financial investments in early learning and childcare, which makes life more affordable for families as the new universal childcare program has reduced fees to less than \$10 per day on average. We have also created a temporary assistance program for Yukon landlords to support a stable supply of rental units.

With many higher costs being felt by Yukoners in their day-to-day lives, governments are incurring additional costs as well as we respond to higher costs of living.

This year, we negotiated a new collective agreement which recognizes increased costs of living for Yukon government employees. The Yukon government values the work of the Yukon public service and is pleased that a new collective agreement was negotiated with the Public Service Alliance of Canada and the Yukon Employees' Union. The agreement is fair and balanced overall, as it recognizes the value of our employees and the services that they provide to all Yukoners while upholding our fiscal responsibility as a government when it comes to managing public funds.

The agreement contains several updates and new provisions to benefit employees including wage increases of 10.5 percent over three years for YEU members, in line with the recently negotiated agreement for federal public servants. Not only does this carry an immediate cost for government going forward, it also requires us to meet our commitments to staff by providing retroactive payments to the beginning of this agreement.

Our government has also had to respond to events in our mining sector. The closure of the Minto mine in mid-May has affected Yukoners who are owed money by a former operator who abandoned the site. We understand that it has been a very difficult time for all who are involved. As a regulator, the Yukon government's focus has been on ensuring that the environment is protected at the Minto site. We have been applying lessons learned from Wolverine mine and moved quickly to ensure that water treatment at the site continues.

We are pleased that a court settlement has resulted in Selkirk First Nation, which owns the land that the mine is on, being due to receive over \$1.7 million in unpaid royalties.

Minto first started production in September 2007 and has gone through several ownership changes. The Yukon continues to be a top destination for mining operations around the world. In fact, in addition to copper continuing to command strong prices, it speaks very well to the prospects of the site finding a

new owner. We remain optimistic that a deal can be reached. In the meantime, we are undertaking water management and treatment activities at the site and working closely with the Selkirk First Nation on the planning for early reclamation and closure.

The Yukon government currently holds \$75.2 million in financial security for the site, and further work is underway to determine how it will be applied to the expenditures incurred by the government. We will continue to work in coordination with Selkirk First Nation to do what is necessary to ensure environmental protection, because this is in the best interest of all Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring the health and wellness of Yukoners also continues to be a top priority of this government. This means ensuring that our health and social care system is equipped to provide the supports and services that Yukoners need and expect. Across the country, jurisdictions have grappled with increased challenges associated with providing health care to our citizens. The Yukon is not exempt from these challenges. From rising costs to longer wait times, all governments are looking for solutions to better deliver their services.

In the Yukon, we continue to identify pressures that cannot be covered from existing funds, and we are making adjustments to our budget accordingly. On January 20, 2022, the Government of Yukon declared a substance use health emergency in response to a surge in substance-use related harms, including a drastic increase in opioid-related deaths. This declaration was a commitment to respond — a call to action to all governments, communities, organizations, partners, and Yukoners to do their part. This is an ongoing territory-wide challenge that cannot be solved by the Yukon government alone.

In August of this year, the Government of Yukon, in partnership with First Nation governments and the Council of Yukon First Nations and in conversations with the territorial RCMP, launched the substance use health emergency strategy. This strategy marks the next step in the Yukon's approach to addressing the substance use health emergency and reflects a shared commitment by this government, Yukon First Nation governments, and partner organizations to address substance use and organized crime in the territory.

The strategy proposes 43 action items grounded in four areas of growth: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support, and community safety and well-being. Implementation of the strategy requires a collaborative approach that includes Yukon First Nation governments, communities, service providers, and other partner organizations, as I said. Regular updates, adaptations, and transparent reporting processes will ensure that this strategy remains relevant and responsive to changing circumstances and emerging needs.

Beyond these acute needs, we also continue to work closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to identify and meet their core funding needs as new and emerging pressures are identified to ensure that Yukoners have access to the services that they require. Making sure that our insured health

system has the funding it needs is also paramount. As our population continues to grow and the number of Yukoners over the age of 65 rises, we are responding to increasing demand and costs within the insured health services. This includes providing additional funding to address increased hospital fees as well as growth in areas such as medical travel, pharmacare, and physician payments. Health care is a core need for all citizens, and making sure that we have a healthy and sustainable insured health system continues to contribute to the overall health of our population.

While these supplementary estimates serve as a chance to respond to challenges, they also give us the ability to respond to opportunities. As a top mining destination, ensuring that companies have the means to bring their products to market is a priority for this government. We are fortunate that secure tidewater access can be found just a few hours away from our border in Skagway, Alaska. Maintaining a reliable ore export option in Yukon's nearest deep-water port supports mining development, mineral exploration, and investment in the territory.

It also helps to promote Yukon's position as a significant jurisdiction contributing to Canada's supply chain security, green energy targets, critical mineral goals, and more. We believe that we are working toward a mutually beneficial solution with the Municipality of Skagway which will secure long-term tidewater access for Yukon's industry. The Yukon will see preferential access to ore export facilities for 35 years with an option to extend this access for an additional 15 years. The territory will also seek a significant discount in all fees associated with use of the platform for the next 20 years. We look forward to further discussions with our partners as this agreement proceeds.

All of these converging challenges make for a first supplementary estimate that is larger than usual. At the same time, many of these unanticipated costs are becoming more predictable. While we may not know which challenge may pose a risk during any given year, we have come to know that events that were once categorized as once-a-century occurrences are becoming increasingly more common. In response, we are also improving how we prepare for them.

Most importantly, this government recognizes the need, with budget 2023-24, to return to more sustainable footing when it comes to budgetary planning. By reducing our capital plan from previous record levels of investment at the start of each fiscal year, we created a fiscal cushion that allows us to respond to these types of events when needed while continuing to remain in a healthy fiscal position.

We also expanded the use of tools that provide a further buffer in the face of uncertainty. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, this government introduced a new budgeting tool for the Yukon to help absorb some of the unexpected events heading our way. This tool, which began as the government's \$15-million contingency fund used primarily at that time for COVID-19 pressures, served us very well in responding to events while protecting the government's fiscal framework.

More recently, we expanded this contingency fund to provide a more realistic reflection of the challenges heading our way from one year to the next. This tool allows us to absorb the costs associated with some of the most acute needs throughout the year. Since its inception, this contingency fund has increased to \$50 million and helps us in our response to a variety of emergent issues.

Most of the events that I've touched on in these last few minutes have been absorbed by this fund, which has been exhausted in the first supplementary estimates.

While this tool protects Yukon's fiscal position, I want to be clear: All of the funding included in this contingency fund must be debated in this Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, while I dive into the details of the spending included in this bill during Committee of the Whole, I would like to briefly outline the high-level changes to the fiscal framework before I wrap up my remarks today.

On the expenditures side, the first supplementary estimates will result in an increase of \$132.7 million in gross O&M spending, with an additional \$26.8 million in new recoveries and \$18.7 million in new revenues. There is no change in gross capital spending. However, there are several adjustments on an individual basis, with decreases in some departments based on timelines and the progress of various capital projects.

There is also a \$5.8-million decrease in capital recoveries. With the adjustments in spending, we will see a revised surplus of \$3.6 million or a \$44.7-million decrease from the main estimates in the spring.

At the same time, the revised forecasted net debt as part of the first supplementary estimates is \$423.8 million or an increase of \$49 million from the main estimates.

Mr. Speaker, while this may seem like a big variance, we would like to remind members about the significant unforeseen events that we have endured since passing the mains in the spring. I would like to reiterate the importance of the contingency fund in significantly reducing the impact to the territory's surplus position.

As governments across the country, we have all learned first-hand that we are not immune to global issues, whether those be from a constantly changing climate or a high inflationary environment. This government will continue to do what is necessary to protect our places and our people, all while making lives more affordable for Yukoners, building healthy communities, investing in our collective future, and advancing reconciliation.

At this time, we must find balance that ensures that we are doing so in a responsible way within the means of the territory. I am pleased to conclude my remarks, Mr. Speaker, by saying that prudent planning at the start of each year has ensured that we continue to have the flexibility to do so while remaining in a surplus position.

While I look forward to providing further details and answering questions about the spending included in this bill during Committee of the Whole, I also look forward to the remarks from other members during the second reading.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks today.

Motion to adjourn debate

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I move that debate be now adjourned.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge that debate be now adjourned.

Motion to adjourn debate on second reading of Bill No. 211 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 2:44 p.m.

The following sessional papers were filed October 4, 2023:

35-1-102

Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sitzings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees (October 4, 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-103

Report of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly — Membership of the Special Committee on the Yukon Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (Speaker Harper)

35-1-104

COVID-19 Pandemic — COVID-19 Vaccines in Yukon — Independent Auditor's Report — 2023 Report of the Auditor General of Canada to the Yukon Legislative Assembly (June 20, 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-105

Left in the Dark — Report 1 — Investigation into the mishandling of abuse allegations at a Yukon school by the Department of Education — A Report from the Yukon Ombudsman (September 7, 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-106

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019 (28 June 2019) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-107

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020 (19 June 2020) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-108

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022 (15 June 2022) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-109

Yukon Conflict of Interest Commission Annual Report to the Legislative Assembly for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 (28 April 2023) (Speaker Harper)

35-1-110

Annual Report 2022 Workers' Safety and Compensation Board Yukon (Mostyn)

35-1-111

Fifth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts — Yukon Housing (June 2023) (Dixon)

35-1-112

Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (July 5, 2023) (Clarke, N.)

35-1-113

Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges — Ministerial Statement (October 4, 2023) (Mostyn)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 137

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, October 5, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, October 5, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. The following motion has been removed from the Order Paper, as the actions requested in the motion have been taken in whole or in part: Motion No. 640, standing in the name of the Hon. Premier.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming some guests here today for the tribute on World Teachers' Day. First, from the Department of Education, I have our Deputy Minister of Education, Mary Cameron. We have: Superintendent Trevor Ratcliff; First Nations educational consultant, Tammy Stoneman; director of Curriculum and Assessment, Tanya Lewis; Assistant Deputy Minister of Schools and Student Services Cassandra Kelly; and senior advisor, Alexis Miller. From our Yukon University, we have Dr. Shelagh Rowles, provost and vice-president, and Trika MacDonald, executive advisor to the president for Yukon University. Thank you all for being here.

I also want to welcome Amy Ryder, former Cabinet colleague. Thank you for being here today as well.

Applause

TRIBUTES

In recognition of World Teachers' Day

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Yukon educators in recognition of World Teachers' Day. On October 5, 1966, UNESCO adopted the recommendation concerning the status of teachers recognizing both the essential role of teachers in advancing education and the importance of their contributions toward the development of society and humankind. The vital role of educators is no less valuable today. In fact, considering that there is now a teacher shortage worldwide, the role of educators in our schools is even more important. UNESCO's 2023 theme for World Teachers' Day is: "The teachers we need for the education we want: The global imperative to reverse the teacher shortage". The Canadian Teachers' Federation has also selected the theme for 2023: "The Empty Classroom: Challenges and Solutions to the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Crisis".

We are taking these calls to action seriously here in Yukon and have made significant commitments to improve recruitment and retention of our territory's education professionals. Educators are essential for the growth and development and, truly, the survival of our society. This is why we have committed to adding 81 new full-time student support positions over the next three years.

This World Teachers' Day, we thank our educators for the incredibly important work that you do each and every day. We are thankful for our educators. Today, we stand up to recognize that teachers need the support of our government and our community now more than ever. It is our responsibility as the students, families, and in fact our entire society that benefit from their services as teachers to stand with our educators to applaud, uplift, and support them.

With patience, kindness, and mutual support, Yukon educators continue to set positive examples, innovate, and demonstrate deep care and compassion for the well-being of learners of all ages, including the leaders who will be standing in our shoes in the not-too-distant future.

I thank all of our teachers, specialized support staff, administrators, and all other school staff for their conscious efforts, their compassion and commitment to students and their school communities across the Yukon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize educators throughout the Yukon on World Teachers' Day. Since 1994, UNESCO declared World Teachers' Day to be October 5 and, as this is that date, we rise to say thank you to teachers.

It takes a certain kind of person to be a teacher. An effective educator must possess a set of skills and qualities to allow them to conduct an ordered class day, to command the attention of a roomful of students, to provide a safe place to allow creativity to flow, and to find effective ways to teach. The learning landscape has changed dramatically throughout the years. Teachers have shown that adaptability has proven to be one of those strengths that educators possess. Everyone has stories about teachers — good and bad. Some of them make a huge difference in your learning path and others not so much, but I do know that I remember every one of my teachers, and they all had some impact on me.

All groups of students quickly share notes: Which teachers are the soft touches? Who are the tough disciplinarians and how best to manoeuvre the world of getting by in the daily life of hard-done-by students?

As each year passed and teachers moved in and out of our small community of Dawson City, it was always with excitement and curiosity that we welcomed these strangers into our lives and our extracurricular activities.

A personal thanks to all the long-suffering teachers who helped me through my struggles and successes. To this day, teachers help harness the talents of our young Yukoners and help them find their potential.

Let's also encourage our students toward a career in education. Pass the torch to another generation who will continue to support Yukon students in a familiar setting. Today, we recognize teachers, administrators, executive assistants, educational assistants, and all other educators whose careers are dedicated to supporting Yukon students in their education journey.

Every day should be a reminder that teachers are there providing a wonderful service, shaping the minds and character of our children.

Thank you.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to pay tribute to all teachers, past and present, who have graced the Yukon with their dedication, passion, and commitment to learning.

Teachers are remarkable individuals. The work they do has an impact on the health, strength and sustainability of our collective well-being. Teachers are tasked with not only educating their charges with the curriculum of the day, but they help the child they see into the adult they will become. Early childhood educators teach their small charges everything from A to Z — not just the skills needed in kindergarten, like learning the alphabet and numbers, but things like covering their faces when they sneeze. They set the stage for what comes next.

Elementary school teachers are an even mix of educator, mind-reader, problem-solver, and negotiator. They defuse meltdowns, offer high fives and hugs as required, and they set the stage of lifelong learning. It takes a special sort of person to teach high school because — let's be honest — teenagers are equal parts charming, thought-provoking, and frustrating. In this day and age, high school teachers are competing with the Internet and electronic devices to make learning relevant, and they do, which is a testament to their skill.

Language teachers share not only words but culture, and they deepen our understanding of place and self. To those educators working in adult or advanced education, you will see students making decisions about the future that they want and you support them to reach those goals.

Yukon teachers have always been here for students but, more than ever, they are turning up for students by supporting things like GSAs and making sure there is space for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, I, like many, can still name every teacher I ever had, and as I get older, I make sure to tell them of the impact that they had on my life because I want them to know that what they do is important and it does have lasting impact. I look at my friends who themselves are now teachers and realize that this next generation of learners are pretty lucky. I can't wait to see which of them follow the path to be teachers themselves.

To all of you who answered the call to be educators, we know that your job isn't always easy but we know that what you do makes lasting impacts on the lives of those around you, and those people are lucky enough that you crossed their paths. So, to the teachers I was lucky enough to know as a student, thanks for helping to shape me into the adult that I have

become, and to all teachers, both past and present, thank you so much for what you do each and every day.

Applause

In recognition of Mental Illness Awareness Week

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I rise on behalf of our Liberal government to pay tribute to Mental Illness Awareness Week. October 1 to 7 marks Mental Illness Awareness Week this year. This important week, first established by the Canadian Psychiatric Association and now steered by the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, reminds Yukoners of the need to address mental illness with empathy, understanding, and proactive support.

Reflecting upon our shared history, we must confront and acknowledge the legacy of colonialism and intergenerational trauma here in the Yukon. With a thorough understanding of these long-standing issues, our government is steadfast in its pledge to offer appropriate support and take corrective actions ensuring that mental health services are available. Our goal is to foster an environment in which misconceptions about mental illness are replaced with knowledge and compassion.

I would like to commend the dedicated professionals within our Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services branch. Their commitment to providing essential mental health services to those in need throughout the Yukon is nothing short of exceptional. I would also like to acknowledge the Canadian Mental Health Association, Yukon division for their ongoing efforts in mental health advocacy, support, and education within our territory. Their work plays a pivotal role in enriching the mental wellness landscape of our territory. I also recognize the absolutely invaluable contributions of community members, local organizations, and other stakeholders in this shared mission. Their involvement on the ground, whether through support, education, or community building, fortifies our collective aim to tackle mental health challenges.

As we commemorate this year's Mental Illness Awareness Week, I invite all Yukoners to engage in this week's initiatives, deepening their understanding of mental health and continuing to foster a nurturing and informed community for everyone.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Mental Illness Awareness Week. This campaign takes place annually in October — this year from October 1 to 7 — to help raise awareness and increase advocacy efforts for Canadians who live with some form of mental illness. Some powerful statistics from Mental Health Research Canada are worth noting: 56 percent of struggling Canadians are not getting the mental health help they need. That is over half of all people who need it who are not getting help. There are a number of factors in the north that can potentially increase those already high statistics. We have seen the effects of this in our communities: higher levels of substance use, depression, and anxiety occur across the north, and especially in rural Yukon.

Unfortunately, this also means longer wait-lists and bigger service gaps. We have seen mental illness across our

communities: family, friends, co-workers, peers. Unfortunately, it is often substance use that triggers symptoms of mental illness. Those symptoms create further dependence on substances. By recognizing that there is a cycle of dependence and illness, we can identify the gaps and services and see what can be done better to help those who need it most.

Don't judge; listen; discuss treatment options; explore solutions. Be there for the people you love. Most importantly, say something when you feel that the services they need are not readily available.

Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Mental Illness Awareness Week and to the many individuals who work in NGOs, schools, counselling services, and government agencies throughout the Yukon.

I want to talk about children and youth across our territory. We are well aware of how COVID impacted the mental wellness of children and youth, and we are becoming much more aware of the need to provide students, teachers, and administrators the support and tools they require to help their students.

Families, too, need to be able to access services for their child or children when dealing with a mental illness, whether that be anxiety, depression, or any number of conditions.

Teachers and education professionals need tools and adequate resources when trying to support students.

We also need to be listening to children and youth and ensure that their voices are heard when talking about services and supports that they need in their communities — no decision about them without them.

Mental Illness Awareness Week is for everyone. Services and supports provided to all youth and children mean better health outcomes and futures for them and also for us. They are, after all, our future.

Mahsi'.

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 31: *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 31, entitled *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 31, entitled *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to

Bill No. 32: *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills for introduction? Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House recognizes the Government of Yukon's commitment to supporting the design and delivery of the understanding the early years course as part of the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate's early years program.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon's universal childcare program, which has seen childcare fees fall to less than \$10 a day, on average.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to increase resources and funding to the RCMP to support the hiring of additional front-line police officers in the Whitehorse area and in rural Yukon communities.

Ms. McLeod: I rise today to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the request of the Association of Yukon Communities to have the Canada Community-Building fund allocation tripled for the Yukon in order to address the infrastructure deficit in communities that has grown under the Liberal government.

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to amend the 2023-24 policing priorities provided by the Minister of Justice to the RCMP M Division by adding a priority related to property crime, vandalism, and theft.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Justice to consult with the business community prior to issuing the annual policing priorities to the RCMP M Division.

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce a bill that would:

- (1) allow municipalities to ban mineral staking and exploration within their boundaries; and
- (2) require consultation with residents living within three kilometres prior to issuing any class of exploration permit.

MLA Tredger: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to allow employers with pre-existing paid sick leave programs to access the Government of Yukon's paid sick leave program without requiring them to use up their own paid sick leave program first.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon residential schools missing children

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to begin by acknowledging the potentially triggering nature of today's statement. I will be discussing residential schools and the trauma that occurred as a result of this genocide against Indigenous people. While difficult to discuss, this is information that we must acknowledge as a territory and as a society. I am grateful to have this opportunity to do so here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly.

On September 26, 2023, the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children project working group announced the initial findings of their investigation at the former site of the Chooutla Indian residential school. The findings of 15 potential gravesites and the records of 33 deaths that occurred at the school is a stark reminder of the painful legacy of the residential school system and the enduring trauma experienced by Indigenous communities across the country.

No one in the Yukon is untouched by the recent announcement, but we must recognize the significant and immeasurable impact of these findings on Yukon First Nations. The weight of the legacy of residential schools is one that we must carry together. We do so in solidarity with First Nation communities, united as a territory, and with great compassion. Thank you to the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children project working group and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation for carrying out this important and challenging work. Their efforts to uncover the truth are vital to support the healing of families and communities.

Our government is committed to working collaboratively with Yukon First Nations and the working group. I will speak more in my response about the actions that our government is taking to support the working group's efforts. I offer my support to the survivors and their families, to the families who lost children to residential schools, and to all Yukon First Nations as we move forward together.

While consistent with elder and survivor accounts, this information remains profoundly challenging. It's heartbreaking to think about the children whose lives were cut short by the cruelty of an unjust society. We think of lives never lived, of siblings who never had the chance to grow old together. We think of the pain of the mothers whose babies were stolen from them and never returned. We think of the brutal severing of the

strong matrilineal lines described yesterday by the members from Vuntut Gwitchin and Mountainview and of their traditional knowledge lost as a result. We think of the fathers who never had the chance to raise their sons and daughters, the hunts that never occurred. We think of the generations who never had the chance to be born, their would-be parents' lives cut short before they had the chance to truly begin.

Yukoners, please check in on each other. Make time for learning and healing. Lean on the strength of our communities. The Yukon government has increased the number of rapid-access counselling appointments for people across the territory. People can call 867-456-3838 to request an appointment within 24 hours. I hope this painful journey will bring us closer to a place of truth, understanding, and reconciliation.

Mr. Dixon: I know that Yukoners observed with keen interest the press conference held last week regarding the update on the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children project and the results from the ground search conducted this summer at the former Chooutla school in Carcross. I hope that the families of those children who went to the Carcross school and didn't come home will ultimately get the answers that they seek.

Our thoughts are with the working group that is taking on this difficult process. I would like to offer my thanks to Chair Judy Gingell and Vice-Chair Doris Bill for leading this important project alongside First Nation governments and families.

As we know, the history of residential schools continues to be a national tragedy and the impacts are still felt today. That legacy has left permanent scars on residential school survivors and their descendants across the country and here in the Yukon.

For many Canadians, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission brought this historic shame into the light and opened the eyes of many more Canadians to the reality that so many victims have lived for generations.

For our part, the Yukon Party certainly supports the 94 calls to action outlined in the TRC report, and we wholeheartedly support the important work of the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children project.

I hope that the work conducted this summer and future work reveals answers that will help in the process of reconciliation and healing for the families, for Yukoners, and for all Canadians.

Ms. Blake: I thank my colleagues for their words today.

September 30 saw Canadians from all parts of Canada pause to remember, reflect, and mourn the legacy of residential schools and the many children who didn't come home.

Last week's truth and reconciliation ceremony in Whitehorse was significant and emotional due to the recent news out of Carcross where 15 potential gravesites were found on the lands of the former Chooutla residential school. Over a span of six decades, more than 1,300 children were taken from across the Yukon, Alaska, and British Columbia to the former Chooutla residential school.

As these events unfold, we are reminded in the Yukon and across Canada how recent residential schools are within Canada's history. Yukon First Nation people have always known that many children didn't return home.

Not only were there children who did not return home, but their whereabouts or burial was unknown. To this day, there are families in Vuntut Gwitchin, across the Yukon, and across Canada who still don't know where their family members are buried. We also acknowledge that there are ongoing impacts that are experienced across our territory and within our families. This also highlights the need for the Government of Yukon to really invest in mental health supports and counselling supports to be available in communities, including youth and children counsellors and addiction and trauma counsellors.

Many survivors live in our territory and communities. They have been deeply impacted by the recent news. Many survivors are reliving the trauma that they experienced during their time in residential school. It is critical for this government to implement direct supports for survivors that are accessible across the territory.

We must continue to work together to do the important work that needs to be done so that we can create safer spaces, programs, and supports for all people across the territory, no matter their place of residence.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to all members of the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children project working group, who are doing the emotionally hard work to answer the many questions that families continue to have about their lost children. Our hearts and prayers go out to all those affected.

Mahsi'.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Thank you to the members opposite for sharing their stories and perspectives. I am grateful that we can all rise above that which divides us politically and legitimize the experiences of survivors. Only with truth can there be reconciliation and healing. We pledge to listen, learn, and respect the experiences of survivors with empathy and understanding. We extend our gratitude to the Yukon Residential Schools Missing Children project working group for their tireless efforts.

Our government remains readily available to support their crucial work, fostering healing and reconciliation in every possible way. We will continue to work in collaboration with Canada and the Council of Yukon First Nations to support the working group.

Within the Government of Yukon, we have established an interdepartmental table to support the working group. This table will help remove any barriers to the work as they arise. The table is led by Aboriginal Relations and includes representatives from the Yukon coroner's office, Yukon Archives, Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services, heritage, and the Aboriginal Law Group, the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, and others. Yukon government will take its lead from the working group and Yukon First Nations and follow as their leaders in communities identify how they would like our assistance moving forward.

We will also continue to work collaboratively with Yukon First Nations on initiatives that address the brutal legacy of colonization. We commit to following the guidance of the working group and impacted First Nations, underscoring the importance of truth telling and reconciliation in every action that we take. To facilitate healing, we are allocating resources for culturally sensitive counselling, mental health services, and community-led healing programs. These initiatives will be tailored to meet the unique needs of survivors and their families. Our dedication extends to long-term, respectful and inclusive reconciliation efforts and engaging with Indigenous knowledge-keepers to observe cultural practices impacted by the residential school system.

In our commitment to educating future generations, we are implementing accurate residential school history programs in schools. We are promoting culturally sensitive sensitivity, tolerance, and respect through public awareness campaigns and events, and we encourage open dialogue to acknowledge and respect the truth. Transparency in communication is our promise. We commit to open discussions about programs and challenges faced in this journey. We recognize the need for community-led health and wellness initiatives and express our heartfelt appreciation for the strength of survivors. Together we are steadfast in our commitment to a future of mutual understanding and shared healing.

Funding for this work is provided by the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada and is administered by the Council of Yukon First Nations.

Thank you for your attention and let us move forward together on this important path toward healing and reconciliation.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier made it very clear to the Legislature that he thought the current programming available at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter was fine and good and the only problems were outside the building, but that is not what we have been hearing from Yukoners or what they have been telling this government.

Following the lived experience forum on homelessness held in March, a report summarized the views of people with lived experience of homelessness in Whitehorse. It outlined concerning stories of how they are experiencing violence, drug overdoses, discrimination, and feeling unsafe at the shelter and said that the lack of — and I quote: "... supports or sober spaces available, making it difficult for them to get the help they need."

Will the Premier acknowledge that the changes needed at the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter are not just cosmetic changes on the street but changes to the operational model of the shelter itself?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would say to the member opposite that I think that all elements of the shelter are on the table at this point. What I referred to yesterday — and hopefully I did not misspeak, but I did touch on the fact that there's really good

work that also was happening inside the shelter. There was an analysis done by a third party under the Minister of Health and Social Services, the Vink report, which talked about some really strong programming that was in place.

I also spoke with the executive director from the Council of Yukon First Nations and the Grand Chief and talked a bit about some of the success that they feel is happening within the programming.

But I think we have been very open — the Minister of Health and Social Services and I, in my role as Minister of Economic Development, working with other levels of government, reaching out to the Minister of Community Services, taking a look at the TPA and getting support from the Minister of Finance. We're all looking at ways to improve the situation.

I take the comments openly from the member opposite. I have had people reach out to me as well. I try to make sure that I'm meeting with people on the ground who have lived experience; I'm trying to make sure that people who use the shelter, who I know well — I'm also getting feedback from them.

Mr. Cathers: One of the things the Premier said yesterday was — and I quote: “What we are saying is: The clients inside right now are getting good programming.” It's not just us expressing concern. Last summer, the *Yukon News* ran an investigative article that outlined problems with the shelter's model, entitled “‘We can't get sober here:’ Whitehorse shelter unlikely place to find sobriety, advocates say”.

Here is what one former guest was quoted as saying in the article: “We can't get sober here. There's no point in even trying.” It has become clear to everyone but the Liberal government that what's happening now is really not working, and deeper change to how the shelter is run is needed. Despite this, yesterday the Premier repeatedly tried to claim that the programming is fine and that what's needed is for the street and issues outside to be cleaned up.

Will the Premier now agree to look deeper and actually make real, substantive changes to the way the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter is run?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: It's unfortunate that the member opposite is painting a picture that is not entirely accurate for Yukoners. The truth of the matter is that the Yukon government is committed to working with Connective, the Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon First Nations, and all of our community partners to take action and improve health and safety, and enhance supports for Yukoners that are provided at 405 Alexander and across our services provided by government.

We are committed to helping people who are experiencing homelessness to access the services that they need as easily as possible.

405 Alexander Street offers low-barrier, 24-hour, seven-days-a-week shelter and supportive living programs and a range of drop-in services for unhoused and street-involved adults. Our government provides emergency medical services there, homecare and mental wellness and substance use services, outreach services at 405 Alexander. We also provide other

services in partnership with non-governmental organizations that include on-site provision of services, including Blood Ties Four Directions.

So, we are committed, Mr. Speaker, to working in partnership with Connective, with all of the partners, with the community of the Yukon and Whitehorse to provide services needed by 405 Alexander clients.

Mr. Cathers: We do have to remind the minister that I actually quoted the Premier's own words from yesterday.

Yesterday, the Premier tried to assure this House that everything that was going on inside the shelter was fine and good, and the problem is on the street out front in the area around the shelter. That assertion is out of touch with local residents, businesses, and clients of the shelter. Even government's own reports make it clear that deeper changes are needed.

In an evaluation of the shelter from earlier this year, a consultant found that 38 percent of shelter guests interviewed reported that their substance use actually increased as a result of accessing the shelter.

Does the Premier actually consider this a success?

I will ask again: Will the Premier commit to making major changes to the way the shelter is run, or will he stick with his assertions from yesterday that the program that is currently being offered is just fine?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Look, yesterday the commitment I made was that we would work with all the partners that are part of this conversation. Some are specifically delivering programming. We have a contractor in place that provides services across Canada to a number of different entities — that being Connective — working with the RCMP, looking at all available tools to make the experience there as valuable as possible.

It's a weird wedge that the member opposite is trying to take today. I think that there is some good programming. I have been told that there is some good programming happening inside. Are there improvements that can be done inside the building or outside the building? Likely so, but I will say this: When we had this legacy handed to us, there were definitely things happening inside that building that were not appropriate and they were definitely harming people. At that time, no changes were being made, so, yes, we have made changes before and we will always seek to make sure that the best possible experience is in place with the individuals who are there. Again, we will continue to work with our partners on this work. I think it is going to take a number of different entities, not just the Government of Yukon, to ensure that the best possible results can be seen in that shelter.

Question re: Whitehorse Emergency Shelter

Mr. Dixon: It has not been lost on Yukoners that it wasn't until last week when Alpine Bakery announced that they were closing due to what they call ruinous conditions of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter that the Premier has paid any attention to this issue. The Liberal government has received letter after letter, e-mail after e-mail, and report after report outlining the concerns of residents, neighbours, businesses, and

even shelter clients about the problems of the shelter. Now, after being shamed into action, the Premier has announced that he is taking over this file from the minister and will be leading the government's response. So, why did it take a local business closing its doors for the Premier to acknowledge that the minister's lack of action has been unacceptable and for him to step in and take over this file from the minister?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I was very clear yesterday that I feel that we need all elements of the government responding to this. I think I was very clear that I felt that leaning solely on the Department of Health and Social Services, on the minister, to deal with a number of different elements of this is not fair. I also would challenge the comments because we have sat in meetings and worked through dialog with a number of stakeholders with the City of Whitehorse hosting meetings where this has been a topic of conversation. I have sat with chambers of commerce over the last number of years, and I truly believe that we need to have an all-of-government approach and also need to garner the support of a number of different organizations outside of the Yukon government. So, at this point, that is the commitment that I have made. I think that it is the appropriate thing to do. The feedback that I got yesterday from the business community, from business people who were here who reached out to me right after — words to say that they were here to help. So, I think we are doing the right thing and, again, we're focused on making sure that the experience for the clients is more appropriate and is as successful as possible and is respecting those who are in the neighbourhood, who are residents, and who are business owners.

Mr. Dixon: To the Yukon businesses, to the media, and to the Legislature yesterday, the Premier has made it clear that he is taking this file over. In fact, he had said yesterday that he had tasked officials from the minister's department who "come back over a period of two weeks to give me a set of options that we can look at." So, what everyone involved in this issue is wondering is: Where was this urgency from the minister? It was back in the spring that the mayor spoke out publicly about this and pleaded for leadership from the minister. The mayor said: "We're behind them, but they need to take the lead on this."

She went on to say that she hasn't seen any short-term solutions come from the Yukon government and that they — and I quote: "... continue to hear from residents and nearby businesses that they're getting tired of having to continually raise these issues and plead their case... This is something that needs some immediate attention as well as some long-term solutions." That's a letter from back in the summer, Mr. Speaker.

My question is simple: Why did it take the Premier intervening to give officials a deadline of two weeks to come up with options? Why did the minister fail to take action on this for so long?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I want to correct the record and the Leader of the Official Opposition. What I said is that I asked officials across government, from multiple departments, not just Health and Social Services. It's Economic Development, Executive Council Office, and a number of different

departments that I've asked. So, I think, in the role of Premier, you have that ability to do it, and I don't think the Minister of Health and Social Services would have been asking multiple departments that they're not responsible for, for that sort of response, but I do believe that it is my responsibility.

Should I have done that six months ago? You know what? I guess I should have. Again, this is on me. I will take on the role with full integrity and say that, four months ago, I should have done this, but at this particular time, it has to be an all-government response, and it has to be our community. Look, we are talking about some significant challenges in the community. These are not new — many of them are not new challenges. Like I said to the media yesterday, it wasn't like 10 years ago there weren't challenges within Whitehorse from folks, and especially the challenges that we have seen from some of our vulnerable population. But right now, the difference is that we have a structure that was built. Coming into government, we had the responsibility to take that on. The spot was chosen by the opposition and, right now, it's front and centre that we have a challenge and we have to make sure that it's better.

Mr. Dixon: I'm pleased to hear the Premier admit that he should have stepped in earlier, and that the minister hasn't acted on this and he should have stepped in four or six months ago. I'm glad to hear that he has finally admitted that because that's what everybody in this territory has known for months and years now.

Here's what the Mayor of Whitehorse wrote in a letter to the minister just this summer: "Rarely a week goes by without nearby residents or business owners expressing concern about the adverse impacts of the activities taking place on the sidewalks, roads, alleys and adjacent private property around 405 Alexander." She went on to say: "... this situation has been going on for years now, with little apparent improvement." The mayor concluded her letter with this plea to the minister — this was early this summer: "... I am also imploring you as Minister responsible, to give serious consideration to every and all options available to you to fully address the situation outside 405 Alexander Street."

Despite this, it was not until months later and local businesses closing that the Premier stepped in, and he admits that he should have done it sooner.

My question is simple: Are these the actions of a Premier who has confidence in his minister?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, I have full confidence in my minister and I seek the guidance of my minister each and every day, whether it is on the Health and Social Services file or on the Justice files. I have a colleague, the former president of the Canadian Bar Association, who has led multiple NGOs, has done leadership work across this government previously. I seek that guidance all the time, as I do from the rest of my colleagues. I feel very lucky to have a group of people who have experience, who actually have worked in the private sector, who actually have worked outside of government, who actually have led NGOs, who actually have a diverse set of experience. So, yes, I do seek their guidance.

On this particular case, I am not shirking any responsibility. I walked in here yesterday — and I will say it again. The Leader of the Official Opposition can amplify it. But, yes, as a politician and as a leader, I should have been on this file with other members of our community — sitting with them, not just going to meetings, which I did. Over the last number of years, I was wearing the Economic Development portfolio hat, and coming into the role as Premier, I feel like I should have supported my minister better and I should have done a better job, and so the commitment I made yesterday was to do a better job.

So, we can get up all day long; we can cheer against Yukoners, which I am hearing from the member opposite, but what we are going to do is try to make things better, Mr. Speaker, and that is what I am focused on doing.

Question re: Rural communities funding and support

Ms. White: Our caucus spent a lot of time this summer connecting with Yukoners in the communities. We heard over and over that rural Yukon is being let down by this Liberal government. Sadly, the state of rural health care is a perfect example. Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Teslin, Beaver Creek, and Ross River have all experienced weeks- or even months-long closures of their community health centres. The Yukoners we talked to have said that it is unacceptable, and we hear the same things, and more, from rural nurses. They don't feel listened to, they don't feel respected, and they definitely do not feel valued by this government. They end up leaving and community health centres shut their doors due to staffing shortages.

Will the minister tell us why rural nurses are so unsupported by this government that they are leaving their positions in droves?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Once again, unfortunately, politics — and not great politics — are colouring the comments being made by the members opposite.

Absolutely, there is no one on this side of the House who is supportive of us having to have some health centres with reduced services, which is what the case was on a number of occasions over the summer of 2023, but let's be clear and let's make sure that Yukoners know that the provisions of services to support nurses across this territory put in place by this government have, in the last year, reduced the vacancy rate of primary health care nurses in the territory from over 35 percent to below 25 percent.

While this vacancy rate has improved, we recognize that there is more work to be done, of course, to recruit new nurses and to support the existing staff to take the time off that they need for their health and well-being, which is the result of some of the community slowdowns or reduced services that have occurred. I am happy to talk more about this important aspect.

Ms. White: The state of our education system is another example of the Liberals' disregard for rural communities. Many Yukon students started off the school year without teachers in their classrooms or even access to a substitute teacher. From what we have heard, schools in Watson Lake, Teslin, Ross

River, Faro, Old Crow, Haines Junction, Destruction Bay, and Beaver Creek — all of those schools were understaffed.

There are those who like to blame the Yukon Party for making a mess of education and they are not entirely wrong, but the Liberals also want Yukoners to forget that they have had six years to fix it, and they have little to show for it. Educators keep suggesting simple solutions that could make a real difference, like opening positions and securing housing in communities earlier or not requiring teachers on call to reapply for their jobs yearly.

So, when will the minister start listening to educators and take action to keep our schools fully staffed?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today and talk about our incredible educators that we have throughout the territory. We just did a tribute today, and I spoke a little bit about what some of the challenges are in terms of ongoing national labour shortages that really became evident, of course, during the pandemic and have continued to have impacts on overall recruitment efforts.

For the 2023-24 school year, we were able to make many strategic recruitment actions. We have posted positions earlier to be more competitive with other jurisdictions. We have participated in online career fairs and the Yukon University fair, placed advertising in many social media platforms to date. Teacher recruitment has added seven online job fairs and 13 in-person education career fairs in the Yukon, Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick. These steps have supported the recruitment efforts. We continue to work to find staff with the best combination of qualifications, experience, and suitability, and we are definitely holding up the incredible work that educators do in our territory everyday.

Speaker: Order.

Ms. White: The Liberals are wanting to withdraw even basic services, like household waste disposal, in unincorporated communities. Instead, this government is asking rural Yukoners to drive several hours just to take out their trash. To add to that disrespect, the Liberals didn't even reach out to affected residents before they announced that they were closing four rural transfer stations.

They were forced to go back to communities after the signing of the second CASA, but the minister's so-called "consultation meetings" didn't fool anyone. This government still isn't ready to listen. There are better solutions than just closing down transfer stations, but this government is plowing ahead with a bad decision without regard for affected residents. This will kill small Yukon communities and endanger wildlife and people alike.

When will this government stop looking for shortcuts that work for no one and start listening to communities about the solutions that work for them?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am happy to talk this afternoon about the incredible improvements that this government is making to our solid-waste management in the territory, which is critical to our municipalities across the territory. It is critical to our climate change initiatives. It's an initiative that was brought to the former government in 2016 by the Association of Yukon Communities. It was again brought to my colleague

by the Association of Yukon Communities in 2017, and we have taken action based on the advice of the Association of Yukon Communities.

Our government has held consultations and public meetings in each of the communities that may be impacted by the waste transfer station closures. Communities like Keno have partnerships with local communities to haul waste to nearby facilities, and our actions support the request of Yukon municipalities far and wide to have sustainable rural infrastructure and services.

All communities matter, Mr. Speaker. We are here working on behalf of all Yukoners to improve and modernize the way we handle the massive amounts of garbage that we are creating as a society. It's important that we wrangle this. Our communities said it wasn't sustainable. We are taking action to improve things.

Question re: RCMP funding and staffing

Ms. McLeod: Yesterday, I asked the Liberal government to commit to providing additional resources to the RCMP specifically for addressing crime in rural Yukon communities. In response, the Premier said, "We did, we have, and we likely will again."

So, I would like to ask for some clarity: Can the Minister of Justice tell us how many new RCMP positions were added to rural Yukon in the Liberals' budget?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The Department of Justice, of course, works to ensure the provision of professional, accountable, and appropriately funded territorial policing service, which I said yesterday, in response to a question about RCMP resources. I am proud that we have increased our RCMP resources since forming government. Our government funds significant and ongoing investments in the Yukon police resources through the *Territorial Police Service Agreement* with the RCMP as well as through investments with the First Nations and Inuit Policing program.

This year, the Government of Yukon approved a policing budget increase of over 20 percent compared to the previous year. This increase will allow staffing increases that have been identified by the Whitehorse and Yukon RCMP to the Historical Case Unit, adding two officers to the crime reduction unit, which serves the entire territory. Two additional resources have been added to bring the First Nations and Inuit Policing program to a complement of 19 resources. They are spread across the territory, and individuals will be added to a number of communities as a result of the decisions made by the RCMP with respect to how they deliver that programming.

Ms. McLeod: Earlier this year, the First Nation and the municipality and the community of Mayo jointly called for an increase to RCMP positions in Mayo.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us how many new positions have been added to Mayo in response to this request?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I can note a result of the interactions and the letters that have been brought forward and the conversations with Mayo as a community. Both the Premier and I and other members of Cabinet have been to Mayo and have been meeting with the chief and council there and the

community with respect to their response and their request for additional resources. No additional RCMP positions have been dedicated to Mayo as a result of those conversations, and, as I said yesterday, the federal policing service, the RCMP here in the territory, have the responsibility of responding to those requests.

I can also indicate that we have had significant conversations with respect to how we can support Mayo. We will continue to do so through the work of the RCMP, through the work of their community safety concerns and their council's wishes as we go forward to work together with that community to provide safety, as we focus to do in all communities in the territory.

Ms. McLeod: Following a community meeting about rising crime in Watson Lake, the municipality released a statement calling for an action plan. There are many folks in my community who think that more RCMP resources are needed to address criminal activity in Watson Lake. The Premier has said that they did in fact provide increased resources for Yukon communities.

Can the government please tell us what additional resources have been provided specifically for Watson Lake?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think it's important to note that we were certainly interested in participating in any community meetings with respect to community issues, including those involving, of course, the police services across the territory. I can recall being invited to attend the meeting that is being referred to in Watson Lake with I think less than 24 hours' notice, and that wasn't a possibility for me to personally attend at the time. Certainly, we have supported it through other officials in the community being available.

I can indicate that currently there is a total number of RCMP regular members, considered officers, who are assigned to the territory and funded throughout the territory. There are 139 sort of regular members in the RCMP here in the territory, which is a significant amount of individuals. We have the third-highest police-per-capita ratio in Canada, with police strength of 320 officers per 100,000 people; ours, as I said, is 139. I am aware that the full complement of officers in Watson Lake are nine members.

Question re: Cyber security and foreign interference

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, on September 14, the Government of Yukon was hit with what was described as an unprecedented cyber attack which shut down government websites and internal Internet-based systems. This attack was one of several that struck Canadian provincial governments that week. Québec's cyber security minister told me that the attack was carried out by a pro-Russian hacker group called NoName.

Can the Government of Yukon provide an update on the investigation into the cyber attack in Yukon and can he confirm whether or not it was executed by the same pro-Russian hacker group that attacked Québec the day before?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Recently, on September 14, 2023, the Yukon government experienced distributed denial-of-service attack. The attack resulted in the inability to access Yukon.ca

websites and disrupted access to cloud services by internal government employees. Members of this House will know that occurred. This type of attack seeks to disrupt access to service by overwhelming the online systems with a massive load of requests. The attacks are not designed to gain access to internal information. We were able to introduce some measures and minimize the impacts of the attacks and make services available again within the same day. The attack was halted a couple of days later. The measures that were put in place to mitigate the impacts of the distributed denial-of-service attacks will help any future attacks. There is no evidence, Mr. Speaker, that any unauthorized access to private citizen data, government systems, or government files took place. Highways and Public Works continues to monitor this security measures that we have put in place.

I had the opportunity to meet with the team that worked on this tirelessly over the course of those number of days and I certainly thank the IT team downstairs in the Jim Smith Building for their amazing efforts in this regard.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, the question I asked the minister was whether or not it was the same pro-Russian hacker group that had attacked Québec the day earlier.

Earlier this year, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released a report that confirmed that a cyber attack that had hit their health care system in 2021 was also done by a Russian ransomware group. During that attack, there was a ransom demand from the attacking group, and while the provincial government would not confirm nor deny the payment of a ransom, it was widely understood that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador paid a ransom of approximately \$16 million.

Mr. Speaker, did the Government of Yukon receive a ransom demand during the cyber attack last month, and if so, did they pay it?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, what I can advise is that the Yukon government is an active member of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. We attend weekly briefings with the centre about emerging threats and receive all security alerts and recommendations for actions to be taken.

For example, on September 5, 2023, Google issued a security advisory to address vulnerabilities in Chrome for desktop. The Yukon government reviews these alerts and applies updates to its systems. We are also active members of the federal, provincial, and territorial committee on cyber security where governments share information about threats, advice, and best practices. The Yukon government also provides input into cyber security position papers that are produced by this committee.

Mr. Speaker, I can advise as well that there has been legislative authority that has been provided by this House over the course of the last year or year and a half for the improvement of all cyber security enhancement measures so that the Yukon is at the same standard or better than our provincial and territorial counterparts.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the update on what has been done since then, the questions were about whether or not the attack was done by this same pro-

Russian hacker group that attacked Québec. The second question was about whether or not there was a ransom demand and whether or not the government paid any ransom.

Could the minister please answer the questions that were asked?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, keeping our information systems and government-held information secure is a key objective of our government. Over the last decade, the number of cyber attacks around the world affecting both governments and private companies have increased. This trend is consistent for the Yukon in recent years. The Yukon government, like other governments across Canada, has experienced an increase in cyber attacks and risks. We take cyber security seriously, and in an effort to counter cyber security threats, Highways and Public Works is continually evolving our security-threat monitoring and detection solutions to repel attacks. We are improving the government's resiliency by taking new approaches to the ways in which we protect information, conducting security-threat risk assessments on systems and regularly mitigating vulnerabilities and working with a security operation centre service contractor to monitor our IT infrastructure 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

All I would say is that, as I said at the very beginning, this type of attack that occurred in September of this year seeks to disrupt access to services by overwhelming the online systems with a massive load of requests. The attacks are not designed to gain access to general information. That is what occurred.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 210: *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 210, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to begin debate on the *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*. Bill No. 210 is the third supplementary estimate for the 2022-23 fiscal year.

I have said several times over the years that supplementary estimates are an opportunity to reflect on noteworthy changes of events. The changes included in this supplementary estimate reflect that very nature.

As members will recall, the Yukon government recently completed negotiations and ratified a new collective bargaining agreement with the Yukon Employees' Union. The Government of Yukon values the work of the public servants

and, as both the Minister of Finance and the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission, I was pleased to see an agreement reached on the new collective bargaining agreement.

Some of the noteworthy provisions of the three-year agreement include wage increases of 10.5 percent over three years for members, in line with recent negotiated agreements for federal public servants, an increase in acting pay from five percent to 10 percent, an increase in auxiliary benefit allowances from \$2 to \$4 per hour, increases in shift premiums from \$2.25 to \$3 per hour, an increase in retention allowances for social workers, new retention allowances for correctional officers I and II at \$3,000, new retention allowances for student service supports at \$1,000, new nurse pay grids and new midwife pay grids, new retention allowances for primary care paramedics at \$3,000, and critical care paramedics at \$6,000, new retention allowances for a primary health care nurse at \$8,000 and primary health care nurse in charge at \$18,000, and cultural leave for Indigenous employees to observe or participate in traditional activities as well.

Needless to say, the sheer number of provisions included in this agreement, which covers more than 3,500 employees, resulted in a lengthier negotiation time. This was also made challenging by a higher-than-normal inflation rate for the territory, across the country, and around the world.

While I don't want to dive too far into the negotiation process, I would like to thank the negotiating teams who worked long hours to help reach an agreement. With such a large percentage of the workforce covered by this agreement, it is not a surprise that the financial implications are also noteworthy, and that is why we are here today.

Following the ratification of the agreement, the Yukon government was provided 120 days to implement the agreement. This time limit also includes a timeline to complete retroactive pay to employees for the portion of the agreement falling within the 2022-23 fiscal year.

Under the Public Sector Accounting Board standards, any retroactive payment occurring in a fiscal year that remains open must be reflected and booked in the same fiscal year. As we have not yet tabled the Public Accounts for the 2022-23 fiscal year, this means that the retroactive payment for that year must be included as part of the supplementary estimates for that year.

I'll come back to that point in a second. First, I would like to go over the financial implications reflected in the third supplementary estimates for 2022-23.

As part of these supplementary estimates, we will see an increase of \$15.3 million in O&M expenditures. The entirety of this amount is included to cover the retroactive payments for six government departments. Those departments are the Executive Council Office, the Department of Justice, the Public Service Commission, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Environment, and the Department of Highways and Public Works.

The remaining departments are all able to manage the retroactive payments from their existing department votes and therefore do not require additional appropriations as part of this bill.

Overall, this change in spending would result in a revised annual surplus of \$28.6 million, or a change of \$15.3 million from the second supplementary estimates, as well as a revised net debt of \$313.8 million.

Keep in mind, Mr. Speaker, that these variances reflect forecast end-of-year figures. The final figures, which will be published in the Public Accounts in a few short weeks, will still vary as they will reflect end-of-the-year accounting standards, such as the reflection of environmental liabilities and other treatments.

This brings me back to the point that I wanted to talk about earlier. As members know, the Government of Yukon is currently working hard to wrap up the 2022-23 fiscal year in order to table its Public Accounts by October 31 of this year — a couple of weeks.

I encourage and welcome any and all debate on this bill so we have time that we need to prepare for our final year-end documents by the required date.

At this point, I will wrap up my remarks; however, I do encourage members to seek any clarification on this vote bill in a timely fashion, as time is of the essence. Once again, I would also like to thank everyone for their work on negotiating this agreement, and I look forward to continue to work with the Yukon Employees' Union and its members.

Mr. Cathers: I am pleased to rise to speak to this as the Official Opposition Finance critic. Our understanding from the briefing with officials is that all of the spending contained in the supplementary estimate for the last fiscal year is due to retroactive increases as the result of the collective bargaining agreement being settled. If there are any amounts that are due to other costs or changes, I would ask the Minister of Finance or one of his colleagues to identify them.

I would note as well that government practice is to include in the fiscal framework funding to cover the estimated costs of ratifying a new collective agreement after that occurs. It is typical government practice not to publicly announce those exact amounts beforehand, but the fact that we are seeing this retroactive spending of so many millions of dollars is clearly an indication that the government settled the contract at a far higher amount than they had planned to do and, as a result, they underestimated previously what those costs would be.

I would also ask, Mr. Speaker, if the minister could indicate — in this area, because these amounts are retroactive, it results in departments going over vote for the fiscal year. In the normal course of business, a department going over vote is not in compliance with the *Financial Administration Act* and is considered a breach. I would just ask the minister to explain his understanding, from a legal perspective, of whether this retroactive settlement results in any lack of compliance with the *Financial Administration Act* by departments — and, if not, if he could just explain why they believe that this is in fact compliant with the *Financial Administration Act*.

Ms. White: Today, in speaking to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 3*, my only point would be that if negotiation for a new collective agreement takes 18 months and we see this

happening again in the future, I think we will have to re-evaluate how that process goes.

In recent memory, this has not been the common practice. Typically, agreements are able to be negotiated within the time frame so it doesn't cover multiple budget years, but, as per the briefing, my understanding is that this is to meet the new requirements of the collective agreement and so we will have no questions.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I thank my colleagues across the way for their comments today.

One of the comments from the other side was about compliance. That is exactly why we have a special warrant here today. It is for that compliance issue. Being able to book in the fiscal time, the fiscal year, is a requirement from the Office of the Auditor General. That's the necessity to get this done.

I believe the retroactive pay will be this week. I will double check that with my officials — that money now being spent compared to it being spent in every single cheque during that time is the difference, I guess. Really, this is why we have a special warrant today, compared to booking the money in the regular course of events in the supplementary that we would be discussing after we pass this special warrant.

I will say for the record — again, I won't necessarily comment on the time frames. I hope that this is not the new normal. I suspect it wouldn't be — this would be an anomaly. A lot of different things were happening at that time. Again, I'm not going to talk about the negotiating process. We never walked away from the table. I stated that earlier. We definitely worked with the board chair.

With that being said, there is an issue about legislative grants that I would like to address in second reading. There is no other extra financial, necessarily, but because we have the special warrant open and we want to book inside of the right fiscal time frame, there is an opportunity to provide an additional vote authority for two legislative grants under Health and Social Services. The grants were for the Yukon seniors income supplement, and it is basically a regional subclassification.

So, the required budget for these two grants will be offset because it's just basically expected lapses from a Whitehorse subclassification of the social assistance program and other regional subclassifications. That reclassification resulted in a net zero when it comes to any budgeting considerations — more clerical than anything else.

Because we had the special warrant open, we might as well book it in there as opposed to later on and the Office of the Auditor General saying that subclassification should have been done during the time frame. So, it would have either come up in the Public Accounts in their comments or we have an opportunity right now to just deal with it, and the subclassification is here so that would be the only thing else.

But again, to reiterate, this results in a net zero increase to the budgetary items.

With that, I will sit and look forward to Committee of the Whole.

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: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 210 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Ms. Blake): The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 210: Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I'm pleased to rise this afternoon to begin Committee of the Whole debate for the *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*. Before I begin, I would like to introduce and welcome my Deputy Minister of Finance, Jessica Schultz, into the Assembly, and I want to thank her for her tireless work, and the whole team in Finance as well.

I'm going to keep my remarks very brief; however, I would like to cover two items before turning to the floor. First, I would like to provide some further details on the breakdowns included in this appropriation act, and secondly, I would like to reiterate the piece about timing that I spoke about earlier. So, I will begin with some details.

So, I will begin with some details. As part of the supplementary estimates, we will see an increase of \$15.3 million in O&M expenditures. The entirety of this amount, as I mentioned previously, is included to cover those retroactive payments to six Yukon government departments for 2022-23 fiscal year. For clarity, this funding does not cover the complete retroactive payment totals under the new collective agreement. Retroactive payments for 2023-24 fiscal year will be included in the supplementary estimates for that year.

At this point, I would like to just break down the funding per department as part of the bill: \$8.7 million is included in the Department of Health and Social Services to meet its retroactive payment commitments; \$2.8 million is needed in the Department of Highways and Public Works; \$1.6 million will be allocated toward the Department of Justice; \$1 million toward the Department of Environment; \$970,000 is needed for the Public Service Commission; and \$318,000 will be directed toward the Executive Council Office.

Madam Chair, I mentioned previously that all other departments are able to manage their retroactive payments for 2022-23 within their existing vote authority. Therefore, they are not included as part of this appropriation bill.

These changes in annual spending result in a revised surplus of \$28.6 million for the 2022-23 fiscal year and a revised net debt of \$313.8 million. These conclude the changes proposed in part of the bill, but I would like to now remind members of the timing considerations surrounding this appropriation. As the members know, the Yukon government is working, as we speak, to wrap up the 2022-23 fiscal year in order to table its Public Accounts by October 31. While I am very pleased to answer as many questions as are needed on this bill, I will remind members that the work on the 2022-23 fiscal year does not end with the passing of this bill.

For now, Madam Chair, I will turn things over to the members opposite to begin the debate on the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Cathers: Just as noted earlier, our understanding is that this spending is related to retroactive increases as a result of a collective bargaining agreement. I asked the question that I had earlier — the two questions — regarding this in second

reading. The minister did answer the one regarding the *Financial Administration Act*. The other question was related to whether there was anything outside of those amounts that were provided, and he did make mention of one adjustment internally. Again, unless there is anything else that the minister would identify as “other matters” contained in this spending, we really don't have any questions. Since it is related to retroactive funding, we would focus our attention on the government's supplementary estimates related to the current fiscal year.

I will hand it back to the Minister of Finance. I don't know if the Third Party has questions, but unless there are other questions from others, we are also prepared to request unanimous consent to clear this budget and move on to other matters.

Again, I will pass the floor back to others before actually making a motion.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I have nothing else to add.

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Seeing none, we will proceed to departmental debate.

Mr. Cathers: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all Votes in Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, carried.

Unanimous consent re deeming all Votes in Bill No. 210, Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23, carried

Chair: The Member for Lake Laberge has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all Votes in Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, carried.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$15,348,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$15,348,000 agreed to

Mr. Cathers: Madam Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses, schedules, the preamble, and title of Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses, schedules, the preamble and title of Bill No. 210, Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23, read and agreed to

Chair: The Member for Lake Laberge has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses, schedules, the preamble, and title of Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clause 1 and Schedules A, B and C deemed read and agreed to

On Clause 2

Clause 2 agreed to

On Preamble

Preamble agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Klondike that the Chair report Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — Second Reading — adjourned debate

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 211, standing in the name of the Hon. Sandy Silver; adjourned debate, Mr. Cathers.

Mr. Cathers: I am pleased today to rise, as the Yukon Party Official Opposition Finance critic, to speak to this supplementary budget for the current fiscal year that the government has tabled. I would note that, while my colleagues and I will be saving many of our questions and comments for department debate, I will begin with a few remarks.

We continue to be concerned with the government's financial management, including increased spending that we

see encompassed within this budget as well as continuing to take the territory further into the red with net debt, but I do want to begin my remarks by talking about some of the things that we do agree with in the budget.

I am pleased to see the government increasing funding for the Yukon Hospital Corporation. We were pleased to see that in the handout provided by officials. I would also note, as members will recall, that this is an area where I have raised concerns on many occasions with the Liberal government for their chronic underfunding of our hospitals. The Minister of Health and Social Services and I had a fair bit of discussion on that topic in the spring of this year as well as last fall, and in some previous sessions as well.

According to the information provided to us by Finance officials at the briefing, this budget contains \$14.9 million for the Yukon Hospital Corporation that is described as — and I quote: “core funding increase”, as well as \$2.3 million for what they describe as pension solvency.

I would note that, in the spring when I expressed concerns about the ongoing chronic underfunding of the Hospital Corporation, I cited what the chair and chief executive officer of the Hospital Corporation told this Legislative Assembly about their needs when they appeared in the House last fall, in November 2022. At that time, we heard from them that the hospital's core O&M needs for that fiscal year was \$103.5 million. Quoting from what they told us that day: “... annual O&M budget for the fiscal 2022-23 is \$103.5 million. It is expected that is a core increase of approximately 3.3 percent...”

As I noted in the spring, unfortunately the numbers we saw reflected in the supplementary estimates for last year, as well as the budget for this fiscal year, fell short of what the hospital witnesses told us that they needed.

Again, just going back for the reference of members to the comments as recorded in Hansard from earlier this year, I made mention of the quote from the hospital CEO, which is found on page 2846 of Hansard from November 22, 2022 — and again, I would urge people to refer to what the CEO said at that time. We heard from the hospital witnesses that what they needed in O&M core funding from government for that fiscal year was \$103.5 million. In fact, however, what we saw in this current fiscal year — and the number tabled in the spring as shown on page 13-4 of the main estimates for this current fiscal year — was that Yukon Hospital Services had \$93.6 million in O&M identified for it. That number, of course, is \$10 million lower than the number that the hospital CEO told us was the hospital's O&M need for the previous fiscal year. Of course, at a time of rising inflation — when the Yukon has been leading the country in inflation, in fact — while growth in costs in the health field tend to be higher than the rate of inflation, it is simply not plausible that the hospital would need \$10 million less in O&M core funding than they did in the previous fiscal year.

In the spring, I asked the minister several times what the hospital's budget request for O&M funding had been for the current fiscal year — that being 2023-24 — and after the minister repeatedly sidestepped the question, she indicated on April 6 during debate — this is found in Hansard, page 3493 —

the minister said — and I quote: “I believe the other question was how much the Hospital Corporation asked for, for the 2023-24 budget. I can indicate that some of what was included in their initial request were things that had not yet been approved by Management Board.”

The minister, in her response, further went on to say — and I quote: “We have provided core funding from Yukon government to the Yukon Hospital Corporation for the beginning of the process in 2023-24 of \$93.6 million.”

Again, not only in reference to the quote from the hospital CEO indicating that the amount for the previous fiscal year was \$103.5 million in core funding needs, but, by the minister’s own acknowledgement, some of what was included in their initial request was not actually approved by Management Board at the time this budget was tabled in the spring.

As a result, I am pleased that they have finally provided this amount in core funding to meet the hospital’s needs. It is unfortunate, however, that it has taken so long since, based on normal budgetary timelines, unless the government has changed them significantly without our knowledge, the request from the Hospital Corporation, as with any department, would have been made over a year ago in anticipation of the budget since the budgetary call letters would typically be out in late summer or early fall. So, it is unfortunate that it took so long for them to make it right to provide the hospital with their needs.

I do hope that we will have the opportunity to ask the Hospital Corporation witnesses this Sitting whether the government has actually provided all of the amount they need for core funding for this year or if there is still a shortfall.

We also learned from Finance officials at the briefing — and just for the record, I would note that we have not yet had an opportunity for the individual department briefing with Health and Social Services, so we are told by the Finance officials that they were not in a position to provide some of the detail that we had asked for, which I understand, at that time, but until we have that detail, we will not be able to fully understand what the changes in this budget are, absent that information.

Finance officials indicated in the handout that they provided to us regarding the Department of Health and Social Services that there was a \$10-million increase in insured health. I am just curious about what that is related to. We in the Yukon Party, of course, support funding our health care system and meeting the needs of Yukoners as well as reducing wait times, but an increase in insured health of that amount of money, based on the variance report four months into the fiscal year, is a significant variance, and we are looking for an explanation of what that is due to.

As noted in the information provided to us by government, this *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the current fiscal year forecasts an increase of \$132.7 million in operation and maintenance spending and no increases in gross capital spending. We are also concerned that the annual surplus that they had projected in the spring of \$48.2 million has now dropped to \$3.6 million.

Even more concerning, that net debt forecast has grown significantly from \$378 million, as referenced in the main estimates, to \$423.8 million in projected net debt. We would also appreciate information on the current debt that the government has classified as long-term debt as well as short-term borrowings. I did ask for that information from officials, but it was clear that they were not at liberty to share that. I would appreciate the government updating Yukoners because the further this government goes into long-term borrowings and short-term borrowings, especially at the rising rates of interest, that increasingly becomes very relevant public information and it does not serve this territory or this Assembly well if the government refuses to share that information until the Public Accounts for the current fiscal year are tabled and audited by the Auditor General because that information is, Mr. Speaker, then over a year out of date.

Mr. Speaker, we were also pleased in the spring of this year that the government did finally commit to developing a health human resources strategy. This is following our efforts of championing the need for such a new strategy for years, and we were pleased that the government has finally recognized the need for it and that some work on it has begun. I would ask for an update on the work that is proceeding as well as what results may be happening, Mr. Speaker, because this is a matter of some urgency. There are many Yukoners across this territory who do not have access to the health care they need when they need it. This includes growing wait times for important procedures as well as specialist appointments. The fact that thousands of Yukoners do not have access to a family doctor — and this year we have seen the ongoing series of rural health centres closing as a result of staff shortages, including carrying forward into the fall in a number of communities, and it is really disappointing that it wasn’t until the rural nursing vacancies reached almost 50 percent by the government’s own admission that they finally acted in this area, which we have been calling on them to take action in for years and which health professionals have been calling on them to take action on for years. This Liberal government has been shockingly slow to respond — until the situation was very much a crisis that is preventing Yukoners across this territory from accessing health care that they needed, in many cases.

I was also concerned to see, in terms of the growth of spending, that spending increase, compared to the previous fiscal year, based on the information that the government has provided us, now stands at an increase of over nine percent in spending over the previous year. This Liberal government is continuing to grow government more than necessary or appropriate, and what is worse is that they are neglecting important areas that matter to Yukoners, such as health care and others that I’ve mentioned, while continuing to spend money in areas that do not reflect the priorities of Yukoners but may reflect the priorities of this Liberal government.

I won’t get into an exhaustive list now. We’ll have more time in the session to get into examples, but every time I look at the parking lot outside this building, which the government spent \$2.7 million on ripping up and repaving, it is an example in the minds of many Yukoners of how this government

unnecessarily spends significant amounts of money on doing something that really was not a priority when many Yukoners would rather have seen those investments in improving our roadways, improving road safety, hiring more nurses, increasing funding to the hospital, repairing our highways, to name just a few of the many areas that are being neglected.

There are many of my constituents who continue to complain about the money that the government spent on the digital signage over highways that are widely disliked by many people but they spent millions of dollars on.

This government also is spending in areas such as spending millions of dollars on installing electric vehicle chargers while literally neglecting highway repairs and maintenance and closing down outhouses beside our main highways. This morning, I note that Yukoners in Whitehorse and the surrounding area dealt with the snowfall that we had. I personally witnessed a situation where school buses and many of my constituents were driving on highways that would have benefited from some plowing this morning, while unfortunately that had not occurred, at the busy time of the morning. Again, the list of areas where government has wasted money or spent on low priority items — we have listed some of that in the past and will in the future, in addition to the examples that I gave here today. We will continue to press, on behalf of our constituents and other Yukoners who contact us, for the government to focus its resources on addressing their needs and their priorities.

Mr. Speaker, I will not spend much longer in my remarks here at this stage, but I will just note that, according to the information provided to us both in the government's budget as well as the interim fiscal and economic update, we see that the government's expenditures have increased significantly, even over what their own typical spending increases are. Ultimately, while we do agree that some of that spending may have been necessary, such as spending on fires and floods, there are other areas where we believe that government has been wasteful with taxpayers' money and has demonstrated, from the Cabinet level, a very casual attitude toward spending the public resources on matters that are not a high priority for Yukon citizens while neglecting other areas that are.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would just wrap up my remarks here at second reading. I look forward to hearing comments from others during debate on this budget. As I mentioned, my colleagues and I will largely focus most of our questions and comments during debate on individual departments, just in the interest of expediting that, as well as due to the fact that, in most cases, we have had a high-level explanation of the expenses and programming changes within individual departments but have yet to have a briefing on those individual departments to fully understand what those changes entail. Once we do have those briefings, we will be in a better position to ask questions related to those matters.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks and would note that, as is our practice as the Official Opposition, we will continue to vote against the government on each and every confidence vote, including on budgetary matters. That is, of course, quite common across the country for Official

Oppositions to do that. Despite the Premier and other ministers attempting to point to specific items and trying to confuse those who may not have been paying close attention to debate into thinking that we have specifically voted against those items, the ministers know that such conclusions and attempts at spin are not well-based in fact and that we will continue to support the individual initiatives that we believe are worth supporting, we will reflect that in our comments here in this Legislative Assembly in many cases, but overall, we will continue to vote against this Liberal government on all confidence matters because Yukoners are asking for an election and are seeing a situation where the territory is currently being governed by a Premier who no one actually voted for in that role. It is a convention across this country that a new leader, a new premier, seeks a mandate from the public to govern.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important that we ground this in context, because I was elected in 2011, actually almost 12 years ago. Next week is my 12th anniversary. The Member for Klondike, as well a couple of folks in the Yukon Party as well — 12 years — 12 years ago, just about. The reason why I bring this up is that one of the frustrations that I have had since the Liberals have changed the budgeting process is that a lot of the questions that you want to ask in budget debate are actually around departments and you want to ask about programs and you want to ask about direction. It is challenging to do, because since the budgeting process changed and it has been improved so much, the supplementary budget is far smaller and it doesn't include every department across the entire government spectrum, which is actually an improvement.

So, the difference with the one we see today is that it does cover every department, which is a real pleasure for me, because it means that I can ask questions all across the spectrum, but the reason it includes it is because, as we know, it has to do with the new collective agreement.

I find it incredibly, incredibly just a little bit amusing that my colleague from Lake Laberge is talking about the spending, because in the first supplementary budget in the year 2013-14 — the supplementary at same time this time in 2013 was actually \$71 million, and it was \$71 million without even a collective agreement. I have to tell you that, for the first five years that I was in this House, supplementary budgets just meant that I got to debate every department again and ask questions across the full spectrum because the accounting process was so poor that there was always money being revoted on in the fall — always. That's how come I find it so frustrating when the process changed, and I'm sure that the Member for Klondike also felt that because we would ask questions and he would say that he was unable to answer them because it wasn't part of the supplementary budget.

It's important to note that things have change drastically. So, to have my colleague suggest in the way that he has — it's just that revisionist history. It's the ability to talk about maybe our different remembering, but it is important to note that you can find the supplementary estimates from 2013-14 online, and it will remind you that it was \$71 million this time, you know, that many years ago. It's wild — sometimes it's wild to listen

to. So, I just wanted to bring us back and remind us of the changes.

Interestingly enough, I don't actually have a lot to comment on the budget overall because, really, I'm more interested in asking those questions about departments that I would typically be asking. We haven't been briefed yet, but I know that we will have that opportunity as we go forward.

As for comments today about the supplementary estimates as a whole, there are a lot of things that have been explained. We already understand that a good portion of it has to do with the collective agreement, but there are other things that have come through in programs and, you know, I think there are some priorities that I would have liked to have seen funded in this supplementary budget that we have. I look forward to asking those questions of the ministers when they are on their feet.

As far as comparing the two, I would say that things have changed, and even though I find it frustrating, it's changed for the better. When we talk about the new budgeting — well, it's not even new anymore — but we talk about how budgeting happens now, which is departments doing their best to figure out the money they need for the entire calendar year and not coming back with a substantial ask in the fall. So, this is a bit of an anomaly — and again, an anomaly I'm grateful for because I have lots of questions across the spectrum. But this is unusual, and it's important to give credit where credit is due.

There have been great efforts made by the Department of Finance, by our current deputy minister who has been involved in numerous processes in different roles and now he has taken that lead, but it's important to note that what was done in the past was different, but it was also worse. So, if we're just talking about a budgeting process, let's acknowledge that there is a better job being done across the spectrum of government to make sure that the budget that is required for departments — they are doing the best that they can to estimate, the best they can to ask for it in the spring, and it's far better than it used to be.

We just have to go back to budgets in the 33rd Legislative Assembly to see those changes. I just wanted to note that today because I think it's important. Today, we are talking about an \$84-million budget request with an entirely new collective agreement, but in 2013-14, they were asking for \$71 million and it wasn't with that collective agreement negotiation, so there is a difference.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the time and I do look forward to getting into those department debates.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is my pleasure to rise today to speak in the second reading for Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*. I want to start, of course, by saying that it continues to be an honour to serve the constituents of Mountainview as their MLA and to serve all Yukoners in my capacity as Minister of Education, Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, and, most recently, Deputy Premier. These past five months have been busy between the Spring Sitting and Fall Sitting with a lot of great opportunities for me to connect with constituents and Yukoners

throughout the territory and, of course, I have also had some really great opportunities to meet with my provincial and federal counterparts to advance important files. It's really great to get back to having those opportunities to meet in person and we have certainly taken great advantage of that.

I am going to speak a little bit about education and women and gender equity today. Both are part of the supplementary budget. The member opposite, the Leader of the New Democratic Party, is very correct in that all of our departments are part of the supplementary budget. The majority of our requests are in line with the collective agreement. There is also a request for resources to go toward enhanced French language education, moving resources in different ways within the department.

Some of that has to do with the new First Nation School Board and the work that they are doing. Through Education, we're really working to transform our education system to better serve all Yukoners, working in collaboration with First Nations and our education partners. Our primary goal really is to make our schools more inclusive, safe, and attuned to our diverse communities while improving outcomes for all learners.

This school year, our focus is on our ongoing commitment to safer schools and our broadened vision for inclusive and special education. For us, safety and inclusion aren't just words; they are foundational elements to the work we are doing every single day. We're working to ensure that every student feels a sense of belonging and connection. Our efforts to evolve Yukon's education landscape are very much collective. Every school community shares a mutual aspiration to make schools welcoming, safe, and supportive spaces. Teachers, students, families, and other stakeholders play crucial roles in ensuring that our schools are nurturing environments where students can realize their potential.

A lot of our work has been around reimagining inclusive and special education. Learning thrives in an inclusive setting where every child feels valued and empowered. This is the foundation of reimagining inclusive and special education — or what folks may hear, the term "RISE". That's what that is referring to. RISE is a collaboration with the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education. A key component of RISE is the Ready-to-Learn Schools initiative, which was formally introduced in 2022. Ready-to-Learn aims to foster an environment of safety and calm so students can learn more effectively. We are training educators to recognize how trauma and stress can affect a student's learning so we can meet all students where they are at.

This is very key, and a lot of time and effort has been spent on this. This school year, there are 14 schools that have adopted this approach, enabling teachers to better address individual student needs. We are making tangible strides. Over the next three years, 81 new full-time roles — including school wellness specialists, educational assistants, and learning assistants — will be introduced.

In addition to school wellness specialists — this is a key change — these staff will offer tailored supports to meet the

distinct needs of our school communities. This will support comprehensive mental health and wellness for students.

On August 4, we announced the dedication of \$1 million annually, subject to legislative approval, to holistic student support. A large part of this funding will be used to work with Yukon First Nations, bringing in elders and community leaders to provide culturally appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students. By working collaboratively, we are not just reimagining education but really shaping it, Mr. Speaker, ensuring that every student in Yukon thrives. That is truly the goal.

Making schools safer and school safety planning is also a substantial part of our work. We believe that student and staff safety within schools is crucial and that everyone should experience an environment free from fear or abuse. We recently implemented all 23 actions from the safer schools action plan. Focusing on safe environments, transparency, and collaboration, the plan emphasizes victim-centred approaches and promotes reconciliation in schools. Though safety is an ongoing mission, the plan marks significant progress, reinforcing trust and partnership.

Over the past two years, our government has been working to bring about meaningful, systemic change at the Department of Education, improving accountability and oversight in Yukon schools with the goal of making schools safer for students. We continue this work. The importance of fostering a safe and inclusive learning environment that nurtures the academic and personal growth of students has been communicated to all department staff. The education leadership team is working to support staff in providing this environment.

Since 2021, we have enhanced training for staff in crisis intervention, behavioural management, and fostering a healthy work environment. We have also launched new preventive procedures and increased support for school leaders. Another important part of our work is, of course, early learning and childcare, which is something I'm so excited about because the investments that we're making — and we're making historic investments into early learning and childcare and really investing in our youngest Yukoners in a substantial way. Quality early learning education is the foundation for every child's success. Our focus is on supporting high-quality, accessible, culturally relevant early learning. Together with Yukon First Nations and key partners, we're enhancing early learning and childcare in Yukon. Our goal is to ensure that quality, affordable early learning is accessible to all families in the Yukon.

Recent highlights of our progress include: raising educator wages to among Canada's highest, reflecting our respect and commitment; offering a comprehensive benefits package for operators; and boosting funding for continuous education of educators and ensuring programs are culturally relevant.

Investing in early learning educators is an investment in the future of our childcare system. We have made a number of key investments. This was a major topic in our provincial-territorial-federal ministers meeting in Iqaluit this summer where we talked. This is a new ministers' table that has been

established. It includes ministers most responsible for early learning and childcare throughout Canada. I can say that Yukon is definitely performing well in terms of our implementation of our early learning and childcare agreement with Canada — and had opportunity to present on some of the work that we've done.

This is an exciting area. I know that it's not frequently spoken of in this Legislative Assembly. I've managed to bring it forward through ministerial statements and in other ways because we generally do not get a lot of questions about it. It's something that is going very well — and again, huge investment in a range of \$43 million this year in early learning childcare. That is historic and very important to the better outcomes for our children long term. This is such a critical area that we continue to improve and invest in.

We've enhanced early kindergarten program supports for students with the transition to regular kindergarten. So, early kindergarten is a literacy-focused, play-based learning that fosters academic readiness and a love for learning. Nearly all rural Yukon schools offer early kindergarten. We are discussing the program with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government and the Robert Service School. We are considering bringing early kindergarten to Whitehorse schools, extending the early academic foundation to even more young learners. This is exciting work that's ongoing.

Effective teachers are one of the most important factors in student success in our schools, and we are working to attract and retain the best educators that we can. The Yukon government has allocated an additional \$1 million in each of the next three budgets to enhance recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals across the Yukon. This ties into our goal of finding staff with the best combination of qualifications, experience, and suitability for our communities.

A major part of our work, of course, is transforming Indigenous education. Starting in the 2023-24 academic year, the First Nation School Board has assumed governance of an additional three Yukon schools, bringing the total to 11. This is not just an administrative change but a profound shift toward an education system where Yukon First Nations regain enhanced ownership of the education of their children.

We believe in the promise and potential of the First Nation School Board. The trust is demonstrated in our 15-month funding agreement, where we have committed over \$35 million. This investment ensures that the school board has the resources needed to realize their vision. Our collective path forward aims for a more inclusive educational experience for all Yukon students. Three additional schools have joined the board this year, as I have said. As a result of this, approximately \$2.8 million is earmarked for operations for these three schools, which will be moved to the school board from the department's existing budget.

Some other exciting work around literacy and numeracy: Developing and improving literacy and numeracy skills throughout life is essential to an individual's right to an education and is a top priority for our Department of Education. We provide individual adult learners with flexible supports that best meet their needs. We recognize that every individual's

journey and needs are different and encourage interested Yukoners to come and talk to the training programs team to discuss the support available to them. This summer, we launched a new online student financial assistance platform, streamlining applications and tracking for post-secondary students. This modernized system enhances the application experience, reflecting our dedication to making education and support more accessible for Yukoners.

There has been much discussion around the SOGI policy. Every Yukon student deserves a learning environment where they feel respected, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. To reinforce this, we have updated the sexual orientation and gender identity policy, also known as “SOGI”, in line with Yukon’s LGBTQ2S+ *Inclusion Action Plan*. This fall, we will be speaking again with stakeholders to provide further feedback, as we continue to refine this policy. In partnership with the BC-based ARC Foundation, we are introducing SOGI 1 2 3. This initiative provides educators with specialized resources to promote inclusion for all students, highlighting its importance. Our educators started the year with a dedicated SOGI training session, which I understand went very well.

Another huge area, of course, that we are working on — we are investing in school capital. We continue to work with our school communities on planning for their short-, medium-, and long-term facility needs. The Government of Yukon’s five-year capital plan includes school replacements and renovation projects to ensure that all buildings are safe and suitable for many years to come. We are pleased that work is underway on the new schools in Whistle Bend and Burwash Landing. Planning has started for the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. Engagement with the broader Whitehorse community and partners on school capital planning took place this spring.

The public had access to an online survey between March 14 and May 15. This included public open houses that were held throughout April. The result of this public engagement will be available this fall in the form of a “what we heard” report on yukon.ca/engagements. This feedback will inform future planning in Whitehorse schools, renovations, and replacements. I will note, as well, that I have certainly had some targeted discussions with the Chiefs Committee on Education and will continue the discussions with the First Nation School Board, as many of our rural schools are now under the operation of the First Nation School Board.

In terms of women and gender equity, through the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, we continue to make trailblazing progress on several major initiatives where we see the Yukon being a leader among the rest of the country. We continue to support our Yukon Advisory Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit People in developing and releasing the strategy and the implementation plan, which was released this summer. We certainly stand firm in our commitment to our government’s *Inclusion Action Plan* on 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. We collaborate with Justice in the engagement and planning for the expansion of the sexualized assault response unit services

beyond Whitehorse to Yukon communities. There are many other — we will obviously have an opportunity in general debate and Committee of the Whole to talk further about the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* and more detail around the implementation plan.

Thank you for allowing me a bit of time to speak today. Again, I had a great opportunity this summer to connect with my constituents and certainly look forward to more discussions with a focus on community safety in the Mountainview area. I am looking forward to the general debate in Committee of the Whole.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am truly honoured to speak to Yukoners as the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I will expand on the work that this Liberal government is doing for the benefit of all Yukoners.

Over the summer, I had the pleasure of travelling across the Yukon to witness the hard work occurring and meet with the staff who make the work of this government possible. I would like to start by praising the work being done on converting our remote northern grader stations from noisy and ineffective diesel generators to — for a large portion of the year — silent and top-of-the-line bifacials, which are double-sided solar panel farms, which I had the pleasure of attending and seeing both of those on a trip in September. By this fall, we expect to have substantially completed the construction of the two solar array systems at the Klondike and Ogilvie grader stations. These projects will offset more than 100,000 litres of diesel fuel each year and reduce emissions by approximately 280 tonnes.

The solar farms in these remote locations — particularly the Ogilvie grader station, which is located near Engineer Creek — are truly a sight to behold, and if anyone does — to all Yukoners, if you do have a chance to travel the Dempster Highway, either this year or next year, I would certainly encourage you to do so. They are big — they are large solar arrays. I was surprised how large they are.

We are also moving forward with solar energy projects at the Tuchtua and Blanchard grader stations, which will be tendered in the coming months. Once all of these solar array systems are installed, the four systems will offset a total of approximately 200,000 litres of diesel fuel each year, which is a reduction of over 500 tonnes of greenhouse gases, and, of course, the completely intended consequence is that you will have far fewer B-trains of fuel having to travel on the Dempster Highway to supply both the Klondike and Ogilvie grader stations.

On this recent trip, I also witnessed the ongoing work on the Dempster fibre line. The Dempster fibre line project, which commenced in July 2021, is progressing steadily to extend 800 kilometres of high-speed fibre line along the Dempster Highway from Dawson City, Yukon, to Inuvik, Northwest Territories, thereby creating a redundant fibre loop for all of northern Canada, as there is already a fibre line between Inuvik and Yellowknife.

This year, installation work resumed in May with the aim of installing conduit between Eagle Plains and Inuvik before

the end of summer. As of September 2023, 780 kilometres of cable conduit have been installed, and 405 kilometres of cable have been installed inside the conduit. This includes the installation under three major rivers: the Mackenzie River, the Peel River, and the Arctic Red River.

Work on the Dempster fibre line is seasonal, with crews usually demobilizing from the work site in November. For those of you who are familiar with the Dempster Highway, you will know that the construction takes place in sometimes formidably challenging terrain. This includes the use of specialized equipment and construction methods to minimize the impacts to the environment.

Of course, not all the work on the Dempster is seasonal, and I would like to take this opportunity to praise our hard-working grader station workers and grader operators working throughout the winter to keep our roads, or the Dempster Highway, open and safe. I had the opportunity to meet with grader staff in various places in the Yukon — but at the Klondike grader station and the Ogilvie grader station — and also spoke to some grader operators who were grading the Dempster in September.

As most of you know, our highways and roads see considerable weather challenges that can pose safety risks to drivers. This is, of course, most acute for the Dempster Highway where frequent snow, rain, freezing rain, and, as we hear often, full-on hurricane force winds and major temperature fluctuations can make the highway conditions extremely challenging. Throughout the year, our crews are out there maintaining the highway daily, plowing, grading, and fixing issues as they arise.

Once again, I take the opportunity to thank all grader operator staff across the Yukon.

As we head into winter, I urge all drivers to use caution when travelling along our network of highways, and particularly the Dempster Highway. Please drive to the current road conditions and do not forget to check 511 Yukon for the latest updates.

Over the summer on a number of trips, I had the opportunity to meet with many of the employees of Highways and Public Works and Environment working in the Klondike area. I also met with Klondike park staff and was shown — and assessed — the damage caused by violent winds in the Klondike River campground. I was impressed with how quickly the staff had fixed up and removed significant hazards, such as fallen debris — and, might I say, not insubstantial trees — to keep the campground operational.

As well, in the spring of 2023, there were some significant washouts along the Klondike Highway that caused traffic disruptions, some highway closures, and understandable concern for Klondike residents.

Washouts occurred near the Dawson airport, Henderson Corner, and Clear Creek bridge. As well, a culvert washout occurred near the Dempster cut-off at kilometre 670. Highways and Public Works crews effectively and quickly repaired the washouts and opened the roads to traffic in a mere few days.

We also had flooding within the Dawson airport perimeter, and our crews worked industriously to keep rising waters from

reaching the runway and from spreading into the nearby Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in farm. Thank you to everyone who worked so hard in those situations.

I was given a tour of the airport perimeter recently and could visualize the lowland areas there. I was advised that pumps had to run essentially continuously for the better part of 30 days in order to ensure that the airport was operational. Once again, many thanks to the hard-working crew at the Dawson airport, Highways and Public Works, and all Dawson residents for your industry and support of each other.

While in the Klondike as well, I also met with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in government — once with chief and council and once in the presence of the northern chiefs. It included Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Vuntut Gwitchin, and the Gwich'in Tribal Council, and we had fruitful discussions.

I would also like to mention the ongoing work to complete the Dawson regional land use plan. Our government and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in are making progress on consensus discussions regarding the decision on the Dawson land use recommended plan. We continue to work together and we continue those discussions.

As well in the Klondike, I also took the time to visit the Dawson humane society. Our government provided the Humane Society Dawson with an additional \$25,000 in funding in fiscal year 2022-23 and we were pleased to do so. Our government provides annual funding to the territory's two registered humane societies supporting their mandate to rehome unwanted animals and to promote responsible pet ownership. The Department of Environment also supports both humane societies through a contract to offset the cost of rehoming companion animals that become the property of the local or territorial government when they are not reclaimed by their owners. Last year, we provided an additional one-time emergency support payment of \$135,000 to the Humane Society Yukon due to the increased funding pressures that they were facing. This was in addition to the \$110,000 in base funding that had been provided. In the coming months, we will contact municipal and First Nation governments and humane societies in order to better understand their needs for animal care and to identify additional partnership opportunities.

Moving along to another part of the Yukon, I had the opportunity to visit Teslin several times in the past months to meet with the Teslin Tlingit Council and the Village of Teslin. In Teslin, our government is supporting the construction of the Nisutlin Bay bridge. The \$159.96-million contract was awarded on May 3, 2022 to Graham Infrastructure LP. Infrastructure Canada's Building Canada fund committed \$41.25 million to the project. Transport Canada will also contribute \$52.5 million through the national trade corridors fund to the project.

The capital plan indicates that the approximate spending in 2023 is \$40 million to \$45 million, for fiscal year 2024-25, it is between \$45 million and \$50 million, and in fiscal year 2025-26, it is \$25 million to \$30 million. These numbers are subject to change as the work progresses.

I continued to be very impressed by the close engagement occurring on this project. The Department of Highways and

Public Works continues to work collaboratively with the Teslin Tlingit Council and to engage with the Village of Teslin, the public, and specific stakeholders on this project as it moves forward. One of my trips to Teslin was specifically to meet on this and a few other topics.

The Yukon government project team meets with the Teslin Tlingit Council on a biweekly basis in order to discuss the project and to troubleshoot and identify any challenges together. This is a megaproject for the Yukon and it is critical to have close engagement with the community. This is without a doubt one of the measures determining whether this project is a success.

For Yukoners who have had an opportunity to travel to Teslin and beyond, the physical work occurring in Teslin is impressive. The contractor is constructing a temporary trestle bridge, which will serve as a working platform for the construction of the new bridge. As of now, 21 of the total 30 spans have been completed and are facilitating the construction of the new bridge, starting with the piling. As well, the following work has been completed to date by the contractor: site mobilization and permanent pilings of the north and south abutments; installation of permanent pile casings for two of the piers — P2 and P3 — out of the total of six piers; and the concrete pouring for four of the eight piles of pier 2. The remaining four piles of pier 2 are scheduled to be poured in October of this year. The concrete pour for the south abutment, including abutment C, back walls and wing walls of the south approach embankment, is approximately 75 percent complete, and clearing and grubbing for the new road on the south side and also the installation of two of six cofferdams required for the construction of the new bridge, granular pit development, and rock production at kilometre 1238 near Teslin and environmental measures — such as hydro-acoustic monitoring, fish salvage, and water sampling — are ongoing.

As well, I was also in Teslin over the summer to celebrate the partnering with the Teslin Tlingit Council on a heat purchase agreement for the Khâtinâs.âxh Community School which will reduce emissions by approximately 106 tonnes each year.

I had the opportunity to celebrate this agreement with Deputy Chief Alex Oakley, and instead of cutting a ribbon, Deputy Chief Oakley and I sawed a log. That was a fitting ceremony for confirming the heat purchase agreement. We toured the impressive biomass facilities in Teslin and were certainly impressed by the level of sophistication and efficiency of these modern biomass systems.

I would like to take this opportunity to praise the Teslin Tlingit Council for being a trailblazer in the Yukon in developing the various biomass district heating systems that they have in their community. I would also note that I had the opportunity to tour their supply yard for incidental biomass which is very close to the Village of Teslin. That provides an economic opportunity for various Teslin Tlingit Council and Village of Teslin citizens.

Speaking of biomass, investing in renewable energy projects is part of many initiatives that the Yukon government is taking to meet the goals of *Our Clean Future*. Biomass

systems are renewable fuels to displace the use of fossil fuels and to reduce our overall emissions. Our government has made significant investments in biomass heating systems this past year. A new biomass heating system was recently installed at Elijah Smith Elementary School in Whitehorse, which will reduce the school's emissions by approximately 180 tonnes annually. I had the honour of attending the opening and launch of that system this summer.

The Yukon government is also expanding the biomass heating system at the Whitehorse Correctional Centre in order to reduce emissions by approximately 271 tonnes annually. Construction is expected to be completed this winter. These three biomass systems combined will reduce emissions by approximately 550 tonnes each year.

Touching on another significant project in the Yukon, I would be remiss to not mention the work that we are doing at the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport. A \$160.7-million contract to reconstruct the main runway was awarded to Flatiron Constructors Canada Limited on May 19, 2023. The proposed work is scheduled for the 2023, 2024, and 2025 construction years, with anticipated substantial completion by 2026. While this is a large project, we expect there to be minimal disruptions overall for the travelling public. We will be working closely with aviation stakeholders to minimize impacts on their operations during the construction period. This year's work involved preparation for the main runway reconstruction, including airfield drainage improvements, water and sanitary line extensions, fencing to secure the work site, and construction of two access roads to the parallel runway in preparation for next year's construction season.

These, Mr. Speaker, of course, are only snippets of the work that the Department of Highways and Public Works and the Department of Environment are carrying out this year. I would certainly, at this point, close by thanking all of the public service for the work that they do year-round with the Department of Highways and Public Works and the Department of Environment in sometimes very challenging conditions, keeping Yukoners safe, and providing a lot of incredibly valuable service to Yukoners, both in creating resilient infrastructure and lots of outdoor significant and world-class opportunities for both Yukoners and for the rest of the world.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, I would just like to acknowledge that it continues to be an honour and a privilege to serve here in this Assembly and to serve the residents of beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes.

A couple of nights ago, I was at a meeting in Mount Lorne; last night, I was at a community meeting at Marsh Lake; and tonight, there is a community meeting in Tagish, but I think I am going to end up going to the Golden Horn Elementary School annual general meeting tonight. It is really wonderful to get to represent folks from Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes. I was just reminded of it yesterday, when a young person came into the Assembly. I didn't know what their career had turned out to be, but it turns out that they are an energy advisor. I knew this young person when the Marsh Lake Community Centre first

opened, and they used to come and put on an annual dog show when they were not even yet a teenager. I have been reflecting on how we have grown and changed as a territory.

Last night, at the meeting in Marsh Lake, there was this group of people from a couple of the neighbourhoods who are working hard to provide advice to government around how to best invest to make our communities more resilient in the face of climate change — in this case, in particular, about flooding. We had quite a few residents there who had invested quite a bit of time to provide that advice to us. We had members of our local advisory council there. We had lots of government folks there. The Emergency Measures Organization had a couple of folks there. There was Community Affairs; Highways and Public Works had staff there. The Water Resources branch from Environment had someone there. We had members of the private sector; we had Yukon Energy there. The Minister of Community Services attended; the deputy minister and me, as MLA — all dealing with these tough issues, but it really impressed me how far we have come as a territory.

I remember the flood that happened in 2007. I remember, both as a resident of Marsh Lake and as a climate scientist, arguing with the government of the time that climate change was real, that this was change that we could anticipate. Now, we understand that it is not the status quo; things have changed, and there is a lot of challenge that we have to face.

I just want to begin by giving a shout-out to those members of the government and of the community who spend a lot of their time to help improve the lives Yukoners. It's quite something.

Just before that, I stopped by a neighbour's place. We carpooled out for the meeting. I had loaned a button press to a young student from Golden Horn school, who had done some entrepreneurial artwork with some friends using my button press at our fall fair. I think that the Leader of the Official Opposition was at the fall fair. It was just heartwarming to me to see all of this investment in our communities to make them vibrant, healthy, and inclusive.

The one community that I haven't mentioned from my riding — I just want to give a little bit of a comment about Carcross. Just recently, I was talking with Haa Shaa du Hen Benoit about the work that's happening with the missing schools project, especially around the Chooutla school. These are very tough subjects for our communities, and because Chooutla is located in Carcross, I think that there are some challenges for the community.

There are some very difficult emotions to navigate — grief, loss, also possibly moving closer toward some sort of type of closure. I just want to reflect on a sacred fire that was lit at the Chooutla site. I was in conversation with Mr. Harold Gatensby, who had lit the fire for the community to give folks a chance to share some of their stories around the fire.

As Harold was lighting the fire — he and I were there a little earlier — he shared this wonderful story about his daughter Violet and how she had painted a piece of art, which is now hanging in the courthouse and depicts the Chooutla site but also depicts all these forget-me-not flowers that are around

the site as a reminder of the children whom we are looking to find. Again, it was a hard story but a heartwarming story.

This summer — summers in the Yukon are always great, and as a minister, you often travel to many communities — I went to Old Crow, to Haines Junction, Carmacks, Mayo, Keno, Dawson — I was in Dawson a few times. One of them, I was asked to sit for a dunk tank to raise money for the Klondike Placer Miners' Association. Apparently, I raised the most money, which I think is both good and humorous for me. I wanted to share a couple of stories about travel this summer.

In particular, I want to mention going to Atlin for Haa Kusteeyí, for the Tlingit festival. There was a moment this summer when there was a 200-year-old Chilkat blanket that was being repatriated into the community of Atlin. I tell you, as I sat there to witness that event — my wife and I talked about it afterward — you could feel the hair on your arms stand up as it was happening. It was such a privilege to get to witness that and an extremely powerful moment.

I had another amazing moment. I had never been so far down the Porcupine River, but there was a wonderful opportunity where many members of Vuntut Gwitchin, the community of Old Crow, travelled downriver to Rampart House. We were marking Rampart House being designated as one of Yukon's historic sites. It was a great community event. We travelled back, and I was shown afterward some great footage of folks jigging as they were waiting for their boats to leave. They had a little community jig; it was great.

Another highlight for me was travelling to Dawson recently to acknowledge and witness the inscription of the Yukon's second UNESCO world heritage site and the first UNESCO world heritage site in the territories that is focusing on a cultural site — and this is, of course, the Tr'ondëk Klondike inscription. I felt so incredibly proud to be there to cheer on Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in on behalf of Yukoners. I think that it is going to make such a huge difference when we have visitors now come to Dawson. I think that they are going to — it is a completely different story. It is not just the gold rush story; it is also the story of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, how they have lived in the Klondike region for millennia and their story of how the gold rush impacted them and their resiliency through that story. I am so happy that it will be a much richer story for visitors to the Yukon to learn about and to appreciate.

One last lucky trip for me — I got to go to Herschel Island this year. I think that, for me, I will count that as kind of a trip of a lifetime. The heritage branch was there doing work to try to lift up the whaling station because, as sea ice is melting and as the sea level is rising, the whaling station was getting wet from underneath and we needed to get it up. So, just a couple of big shout-outs to our heritage restoration team. They did great work and I got to see them just as they were completing their work.

Also, a shout-out to both Tourism and Parks interpreters who were setting up to receive cruise ships now coming to Herschel Island to see the historic site — in particular, I want to give a bit of a shout-out to Ranger Richard Gordon, who was such a great guide and so informative. I really felt I got a lot of inside scoop about the place. It was very, very lucky for me.

I want to talk about how we are investing in the Yukon a little bit and how we are trying to make life affordable and sustainable. Just a couple of days ago, I had the privilege of being invited to witness a ribbon cutting for the four new turbines up on Haeckel Hill. The project is called Thay T'aw. It's our first 100-percent Indigenous-owned independent power producer wind project north of 60. You have the Chu Níikwán Development Corporation and the Eagle Hill Energy LP. There are a few things that other speakers from the development corporation said that I would just like to acknowledge. First of all, they called our independent power producer policy "historic". They said that when they started planning this wind project, we didn't have such a policy in place, and they needed a policy like the one — well, it would have been the Premier who helped to get that in place — but it was the key to getting to these projects. After that, we talked about the use of the Innovative Renewable Energy Initiative fund. Those are dollars that we provide to help groups like Chu Níikwán to do energy planning. After that, there was some serious investment, both through the Investing in Canada infrastructure plan and through CanNor and the federal government, where they invested up front in this energy project as a piece of infrastructure. Then finally there's also the energy purchase agreement that was needed to be put in place so that Yukon Energy can buy the electricity, which then enables the revenue to flow back to pay for the project.

So, my big congratulations on this wind energy project. Of course, wind is an intermittent renewable, so you still need to find ways to fill in the gaps around wind, but in terms of renewables, wind is stronger in the winter, which is so important for us because we have more need for energy in the winter — so a super-impressive project.

One more story that I will share about an initiative led by a First Nation but one where we are working in support to try to assist — and I heard this one on the radio just the other day, but I had been in meetings earlier in the summer. It's a project being led by the Liard First Nation where First Kaska Construction Limited Partnership purchased Heartland Timber Homes, and they are using that business to work to build affordable homes in Watson Lake. We were working with the Yukon Wood Products Association — we being the Forest Management branch — so the two governments were at the table, working with our wood harvesters in the area and the new Heartland Timber Homes business to talk about wood supply and how to support that. These are great examples of how we have been investing in ways to advance reconciliation, to invest in a more sustainable future for the Yukon, and to build — sort of broadly — healthy communities.

I always recognize that the job of the opposition is to criticize government, to look to try to probe to see how we can do better and what we can do, but there are always a few things that strike me that don't completely add up.

For example, today, I heard the Member for Watson Lake saying that there is an infrastructure deficit and that we need to see more investment in our communities, but when I look back over time, capital budgets under the Yukon Party were

\$100 million to \$150 million — sometimes getting up to around \$300 million —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Well, at least in presentation of the budget, maybe not in delivery of it — thank you, Mr. Speaker — yet our capital budget was \$500 million. When I was a city councillor, I understood about that deficit, so I am always trying to square the differences between — that the Yukon Party believes in climate change but also wants to invest in fossil fuels or fossil fuel subsidies. I can't see how that squares — that the Yukon Party believes that we have too much long-term debt, but they also suggest that we should be spending much more money on a whole bunch of fronts. You can't have it both ways.

Anyway, I look forward to having that fuller debate in Committee of the Whole. As always, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to Yukoners.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It's great to be on my feet this afternoon talking about the budget here in Whitehorse.

Over the last several months, it has been a really great summer. I have heard from virtually everyone I have spoken with — and I have spoken with a lot of people over the last several months — about how great the weather has been in the territory over the last summer. People are harkening back to the 1970s. I can go back to the 1990s and say that this is probably one of the better summers I have had in the territory since the early 1990s. That, for me, is both a blessing and a curse, because as good as the summer has been, bringing us warm weather, it also brings us threats with wildfires and the flood in Dawson. So, it has been a very busy year but a great summer.

I really enjoyed speaking to my constituents in Whitehorse West this summer. I had an event at Elijah Smith recently with my colleague the MLA for Mountainview. We had a great attendance with many constituents and hearing the insights I get from my constituents — speaking to them — it is always heartening. I mean, they are like a microcosm of the entire territory as a whole. They have the best interest of so many Yukoners at heart and speaking to them and hearing the advice and the context that they provide me — the intelligence, wit, and empathy with which they deliver their messages to me — is always heartening, and I want to thank them for that candour and for their thoughts, opinions, advice, and their praise, frankly, and the incredible support that they have given me over the last several years.

I have also been meeting with municipalities and local advisory committees across the territory over the last several months. Again, I am heartened by the leadership I have seen in municipalities across the territory, and I applaud the selfless service I see in municipality governments that I have visited throughout the territory. I have told them as much, but I think it bears noting this afternoon here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly how important that service is. It is a thankless job, and a lot of these people have been doing it for a long time — helping their communities, taking them through some really challenging times — and they deserve thanks for that work. I think that it is important that we recognize it, because they have

really done a good job, and I will be talking a little bit more about this later on when I talk about some of the events that we have had in the territory and how some of our community leaders have addressed that.

For now, I am going to be talking about floods and fires a little bit, but before I get there, I would really like to start talking about some of the other work that Community Services has been doing since this House sat last spring. These are things that are happening, really, behind the scenes, but they don't get a lot of attention, but I would like to bring a little bit of a spotlight on them right now, talk about them and get them on the record because they deserve to have their place in the sun.

I am going to start with the comprehensive municipal grant. This provides core support to municipalities. It was first reviewed and updated by our government and municipalities in 2018, Mr. Speaker. The grant is built around principles of adequacy, certainty, equity, transparency, and accountability, which is a fancy way of saying we want to make sure our municipalities are whole — that they have the money they need to provide the services — that I was just lauding — to their citizens.

Now, changes were made in 2018. That included the establishment of a funding floor at the 2017 level. From 2018 to present, municipalities have also seen grant payments increase every year, and that trend is expected to continue in 2024 and beyond. However, in 2020, Community Services' Community Affairs branch formed a joint review working group with the Association of Yukon Communities. So, as early as 2020, we decided to take a look at whether or not the grant was meeting the needs of municipalities. That was done by my predecessor, and the work has continued under my oversight.

Between 2020 and 2022, the group met 17 times to discuss the efficacy of the current comprehensive municipal grant formula and its various components, and that work is well underway today. In late 2022, the Association of Yukon Communities board identified the need to hire a consultant to assist in gathering, analyzing, and summarizing information developed by the review committee since 2020 and to develop recommendations for amendments. The Association of Yukon Communities hired that consultant to undertake the work, and Community Services contributed more than \$8,000 to support the association and its work.

I received a copy of the resulting report this summer, and the department is currently reviewing that report to see how it will apply to the review process. The goal of the overall review is to ensure that the core purpose of the formula is still being met. The consultant's work just completed will factor into that assessment.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that in 2023, the comprehensive municipal grant totalled more than \$22 million for municipal governments and is expected to grow significantly, perhaps surpassing \$27 million in 2024, due to the current escalators built into it around inflation, as well as other matters that the formula takes into account automatically.

Also, on the municipal side, as suggested by the Association of Yukon Communities president and its members, we are looking at the tax rates paid by citizens living outside of

municipal boundaries, which have not been touched since the 1980s. So, we are looking at maybe taking a look at that.

We have now fully transitioned to the new *Societies Act*. We have updated our online resources, hosted monthly workshops, and resourced a societies advisor, who is dedicated to answering questions and providing guidance to NGOs. I hear from my officials that this transition has been smooth for most non-governmental organizations. However, some have found it difficult, there is no doubt. As I have said in the past, I encourage any organization having trouble to reach out to the societies advisor. I really want to thank the team at Corporate Affairs for making this as seamless a transition as possible over the last two years. You're really doing great work.

We have also launched a review of the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* in June of 2023, and that work is now underway. This, of course, has been a topic of much interest in the territory, given the rental crunch across the country and specifically here in the Yukon. I am happy to say that civil servants within the department are diligently collecting the information needed for this review and giving it the upmost attention. To those Yukoners out there waiting for this work to be complete — and I know there are lots of you — some of you are currently facing some difficulties, be they tenants or landlords. I empathize with you and I ask that you give us the time needed to get this new law properly balanced, drafted, and passed. A team at Community Services is working on this as we speak with the goal of tabling the legislation in the spring of 2025.

We are also working to review the health professions regulations and improve how we regulate health care service professions. Modern regulations will make the Yukon an even more attractive place for health professionals to work and allow us to provide Yukoners with access to new and innovative ways of accessing health care. We are developing specific psychology regulations in the Yukon which are expected to be completed in the spring of 2024. I know that this has been something the local psychology community has been advocating for, and we agree on its importance for many reasons. While those are underway, the department has rolled out a public awareness webpage on how to select a psychologist. This site includes a voluntary list of psychologists practising in the Yukon, indicating who holds a valid license in other Canadian jurisdictions. I thank the psychological association for their advocacy and continued work with Community Services to bring the new regulations to fruition next year. I know this has been a long time coming.

As well, this session, we will be discussing the act to amend the *Registered Nurses Profession Act*. Again, I want to thank our very busy Corporate Services team, which has pulled this law together. They have so much on their plate and they're still managing to deliver great and important work with verve. I thank them from the bottom of my heart for all of that work.

The legislation will give Yukon more flexibility to hire nurses, a goal I think we agree unanimously in this House is necessary for the territory.

I'm now going to move on to sports and recreation. I'm happy to reiterate that this government has agreed to support

the City of Whitehorse in its bid to host the 2026 Arctic Winter Games. Our support will include financial and in-kind contributions of up to \$4.35 million. We will work with the City of Whitehorse and territorial support organizations on formalizing the roles and responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, after the heartbreaking but necessary decision to cancel our last games due to the COVID pandemic in 2020, I know that many of these athletes will have moved on, so this latest Games is cold comfort, but I'm pleased that a new and upcoming group of athletes will get the chance to compete in front of their friends, families, and fellow Yukoners here in Whitehorse. This is going to be an important event for all here in the territory.

We have also been making progress on the safe sport file, which largely began in 2019 at a federal-provincial-territorial meeting that I attended. All jurisdictions across Canada worked to have all athletes and participants in Canada protected by an independent third-party mechanism and identified a targeted date to achieve this by the end of the year.

We have also had a maltreatment in sport working group established nationally to identify problems, guiding principles, and/or to develop recommendations to support jurisdictions in the establishment of independent third-party mechanisms. We want to make sure there is a forum for best practices and key learnings from safe sport efforts across the country and we'll be pulling on that in the future.

In July, Team Yukon, consisting of more than 130 athletes, coaches, mission staff, and supporters, travelled to the North American Indigenous Games in Halifax. Team Yukon proudly represented the territory and home communities in 11 sports and brought home an incredible 39 medals: 20 gold, 10 silver, and nine bronze. I congratulate them for doing Yukon proud and bringing home all that hardware from those Games.

I was profoundly disappointed that I was unable to attend those Games because of the wildfire situation here in the territory; however, my good colleague the MLA for Mountainview was in the region at a separate meeting and was able to support our athletes during the opening ceremonies. I thank her for that, along with the staff who accompanied her from Community Services.

I am going to move on to something else that has taken up a lot of public discussion over the last couple of years: solid-waste regionalization. This whole process began after the Association of Yukon Communities presented the Yukon government with a report outlining the need for a plan to deal with community landfills that were becoming huge environmental liabilities for them, difficult to manage. Our government, among other things, moved to provide more funding to municipalities so that they could install electric fences, scales, gates, and the ability to collect tipping fees from users. We have a plan in place to modernize the way that we are dealing with landfills in the territory to make them more efficient and controlled so that we actually have a mechanism to start to reduce the amount of garbage that we're creating in this territory and handle it in a way that's more responsible and easier for municipalities to do so, which reduces not only their

costs to operate them but also reduces the future liabilities that we will see on these sites in terms of insurance and other things.

Municipalities across the territory asked for this to be done and my colleague the MLA for beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes took this on and I have now taken on that role from him. We now have agreements in place with many of the communities on this file. I am really heartened to see how many municipalities are coming on board with the plan that we worked on with the Association of Yukon Communities. We now have interim regional agreements with Watson Lake, Teslin, Mayo, and Carmacks. Dawson has operated a regional solid-waste facility for approximately 20 years. These agreements provide financial support to municipalities to modernize their solid-waste facilities and extend their waste management services to unincorporated residents within the regional boundary. The goal is to make sure that nobody has to travel more than 50 kilometres to dispose of their garbage. In doing so, we are going to make sure that we are reducing methane production in the territory, which is a great contributor to greenhouse gases, because we are going to be working to separate organics from the garbage and manage it better so that we actually have a much better run regional landfill system that runs very similar to those we see in jurisdictions across the country.

We haven't got everybody signed on to these interim regional agreements yet — we have Haines Junction and Faro, two communities that haven't signed. In my meeting with Faro in the last couple of weeks, they were very supportive of the regionalization initiative and those talks are still going on but are close to conclusion, and I am going to be talking with Haines Junction soon on the very same topic. The end result, Mr. Speaker, is that all Yukon municipalities will have more modern waste management systems, and that is great news for all Yukoners.

What I am running into is opposition from the benches opposite, and that is kind of unfortunate but that is fine. This is how we refine our arguments and make sure that the system runs well; that is part of our democracy. In closing four transfer stations — these are unsupervised dumps on the side of the road, where people can dump whatever they want into it, into these things. This uncontrolled free dumping is really a dodge around the accountable system that regional landfills are there to create — a place where all tipping fees in the territory are fair and reasonable. As soon as you have a place where you can dump without paying that tipping fee, it is going to collect scofflaws who want to go down and dump in those free sites. We are trying to end that practice, and we are working very, very hard with communities to make sure that this is done in a humane way, to make sure that we cause as little disruption to those folks as we possibly can.

Now, I'm not going to pivot to wildfires, because we have had a lot of that, and flooding. I was just at a meeting last night, as a matter of fact, out at Marsh Lake with residents there, where they were talking about the flood that we had in 2021, the measures there, and how to get ahead of any new events that we might see so that we are not reacting but we are proactively taking steps to prevent an event like we saw in 2021, 2022, and

2023. There is a pattern emerging here, and we all have to do better.

I have been working with municipalities — talking to every one of them over the last several weeks about this. I have also been talking to citizens, both at my constituency events and any public gathering I'm at. I talk about the various pillars of responsibility in this territory, and it begins with every one of us, Mr. Speaker. Every one of us has a responsibility to prepare for an event, be it a wildfire, flood, or other climate change-caused event in the territory. We talk about us having a 72-hour kit for all citizens, making sure that, when you're travelling through the territory, you have food and water and perhaps a sleeping bag and a shovel in your car, even in the summertime — taking precautions we normally take in the wintertime in the summertime now to prepare for unexpected events; making sure you look around your house and identify the things you want to preserve in the event of an evacuation order; keeping your gas —

Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Today, it is my privilege to rise as the MLA for Porter Creek South to speak to the 2023-24 supplementary estimates. Again, in the months since we last sat together in the Assembly, we have all been working hard on behalf of Yukoners, speaking with people in Yukon's communities — local leaders, First Nation representatives. I had the chance to listen and advocate on behalf of Yukoners on the federal and international stages. I have met with First Nation leaders on their traditional territories, attended their general assemblies, held two Yukon Forums, and met with mayors in municipalities.

I want to thank those who have given me the opportunity to meet with them in their communities over this last summer. First of all, I would like to thank the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation for having the opportunity to sit down with Chief Frost in Old Crow this summer. They had an opportunity to open up their new seniors centre, an absolutely beautiful building, which I think many Yukoners have heard the nation speak about. It's a critical piece of infrastructure for them to be able to support the individuals in their community.

During Caribou Days they open it up and it was a chance to be in the community and to really take a look at all the work that has been happening there, the investment by the nation, the Yukon government, and the federal government. It was an opportunity to see what the vision of the nation is for their elders and the support systems that are in place, to hear about the good things that are happening there, and also to understand some of the things that the nation feels needs to be prioritized.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, also in Dawson City — it was good to meet with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in as well as with mayor and council this summer. I want to thank both levels of government for the opportunity to listen to — of course, there is new leadership with Chief Taylor — Hähkè Taylor — and I think that gave us a good sense of what they're thinking about — their focus on land planning, their focus around mining legislation, and their focus on investment in their communities. Of course, I met with the municipality and heard from mayor

and council, having an opportunity to hear what their priorities are for infrastructure and housing and the things that are going well.

I know there has been a lot of talk about some of the interim measures that have been put in place for housing. We put a fund together in support of those housing initiatives, which were really what they were calling the "old tent city". It's like the old tent city but a brand new set of structures that can help offset some of the pressures for the tourism season.

I also had a chance to meet with the Selkirk First Nation. I have had a chance to work with their chief in the past — Chief Nelson. There is young vibrant group of individuals who have joined the chief on the council now. There is a lot of energy. Of course, we did talk about some of their priorities. We talked about Minto and their concerns but also about some of the thoughts that they had about that project continuing on and what they would be looking for in potential partners and what they want to see from the Yukon government. They commended us and the minister for his quick action in collaboration with them on the Minto site. Also, we talked about infrastructure, the goals and aspirations of the nation. All these conversations are ongoing, but it was a good chance to be in Pelly.

I want to thank the Chief of Little Salmon Carmacks. I had the chance to be in Carmacks on a couple of occasions this summer, meeting with the mayor and having the mayor attend the opening of our new duplex — our investment from Yukon Housing. I think it was appreciated. I had a bit of a chance to talk to Mayor Bodie and also spend some time with Chief Tom.

We were in contact today, and I know that she really wanted to talk about the further development of the roads to resources, some of their thoughts about them, and making sure that we understood some of the concerns they have and areas where they want to see mitigation, but also discussing infrastructure investment, their focus on heritage and resources, and their interest in making sure the right infrastructure is in place to have more citizens come home.

I commend them. They bought a very significant structure — a beautiful house that sits in Carmacks — and they have citizens who have worked in British Columbia in addictions and trauma counselling now moving back to Carmacks, and they're looking to repurpose that home for some of that work. I think that is going to be a significant addition to their community, and it was good to spend time there.

Ross River Dena Council pulled citizens together to meet with me as well as their elected officials in the off-season from the Assembly. We were commended for being able to bring our team out there and had a good discussion with them. We went through short-term goals for the First Nation that were really around, of course — there was a lot of emotion in the community as they were looking for, and continue to look for, Ramona Peter. That was a key focus of the conversation, but we also talked about their interest in making sure they had the right infrastructure in place to do more land-based activities to focus on their culture. They talked to me about their concerns around some illegal activity coming in and out of their community, and we committed to supporting them in the

endeavours to try to ensure that those things come to a halt or slow. We also talked about their bigger aspirations of the nation. They have been very open about their own interest in doing some level of supportive type of land planning, which they have talked about publicly. They are interested in working with the mining sector more closely, and they're interested in making sure that their traditional undertaking of hunting, trapping, and fishing will be there for generations to come.

I had an opportunity — it has been a long time since we have had representation from government at the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council General Assembly. I was happy to be able to attend their general assembly at Helen's Fish Camp. The focus really was a lot of conversation around housing, infrastructure, and some of the interest of collaboration with the First Nation. Our officials have been following up on that conversation which has been great.

I have had a couple of occasions to sit with Chief Smith of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, as well as the development corporation. The new administration is coming in and will be meeting with all elected officials, but it was a good opportunity to be at their new administration building and also to have an understanding of what direction the chief is looking to focus on with his new elected officials. The development corporation is doing significant work. I know that I and maybe members of the Official Opposition have had a chance to see their portfolio work. It's pretty impressive. With their land development, their acquisitions, and their buildings, there has really been a tremendous amount of work that they are focusing on, as well as their collaboration with the Yukon Energy Corporation on land leases and investment in infrastructure.

I had a chance to meet with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations as well in Haines Junction. I appreciate having the opportunity for them to host and really go through some of their key areas of focus with Chief Joe and the new leadership, and also at the same time, having the chance to meet with the mayor in Haines Junction and understand some of the areas of interest there. In some of the things, they are doing a great job with their focus on infrastructure, but also some of the things that they want to work on with our Community Services, of course, those will be ongoing conversations.

In Watson Lake — meeting with the Liard First Nation before. They were getting close to going into their election, but I had the chance to meet with the elected officials at that point in time to get a sense of what they were thinking — and, of course, a commitment now that they have a new group of people elected. They will want to sit down. I know that, this week, we were happy to see the housing company that they had bought was highlighted on national news. I know that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources has been able to contribute to that endeavour. We are happy to see just one of the many things that are happening in Watson Lake. I had a chance to jump in the truck with the mayor and go down to look at Frances Lake and some of those lot developments that we have helped to support and undertake. It's something that we haven't seen in the Yukon to that level where you have the municipality on a couple of streets, then you have the First Nation, which is not a self-governing First Nation, as well as

the Yukon government coming in to de-risk and provide some capital toward the horizontal infrastructure, and then putting more lots out — a really significant number of lots — to the community. There were really good ideas from the mayor. I appreciate that conversation and continued conversations with the mayor in Watson Lake.

The CYFN General Assembly, which most political leaders had a chance to attend, was held in Klukshu this year. That was a very good event that had significant attendance from nations right across the Yukon. It was a chance for us to have some discussions, hear the priorities of nations, areas of focus and priority, as well as just continuing to be committed to reconciliation and to the Yukon Forum and the work there. The two Yukon Forums that we attended — one was on June 19 and that took place at Helen's Fish Camp, and then we just finished up on September 26 and 27 in Dawson City. We will be hosting one more Yukon Forum to continue to keep our commitment of our quarterly meetings later this year.

When it comes to the municipality of Mayo, the conversations were really under a bit of pressure because that is when the evacuations were happening. The Mayor of Mayo, Mayor Ellis — what an incredible Yukoner — what grace under pressure, what unbelievable forethought to be able to do pre-planning in that area, which he did, when it came to some planning around evacuations. I know that he and the MLA for Mayo-Tatchun have a great working relationship. It was a chance to see him in action and thank him for his work.

I am just trying to give a quick overview of some of the work this summer that was happening, and just for a sense for Yukoners, it was just important to get out to all of these communities. There are a couple of communities that have changed schedules for events that they were going to have this summer. I have been talking to their leaders and I look forward to being able to, over the fall, have a chance to meet with them and have discussions about their thoughts and priorities.

The supplementary budget that we are tabling is our ability to use some of the funds that we believe should be put in place in the spring. I think that the budgeting process this spring took into consideration what we believe could have been some unanticipated challenges. What we have seen year over year is more pressure when it comes to flooding and fire. I want to commend my colleagues and the work that they did this summer. There were a lot of extremely long days by public servants, volunteers, leaders, and communities across the Yukon, specifically when you think about Mayo and Old Crow — not to say that we didn't see, when it came to flooding early on this season, the challenges in the Klondike and the community of Dawson City coming together and so many good leaders making sure that the citizens in those communities were well supported.

I do want to commend the ministers and specifically the Minister of Community Services. When it came to the fire season, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and the Minister of Health and Social Services were doing tireless work. I am not saying that my other colleagues — there was work that had to be done through Highways and Public Works and I am aware of that. It was not a one-person approach, but

one person took on a lot of the challenges in Dawson — and that was, of course, the MLA for Klondike — early on just working with the community. Flooding season — I thank him for that — and then going into the fire season, which was a bit more prolonged.

Every time I was on the line or asking for help or checking in with those ministers, whether it was 7:00 a.m. or 12:00 at night, specifically the Minister of Health and Social Services — I think about the time when folks were coming in from Mayo at 11:30 or 12:00 at night, and she was coordinating the appropriate spots for those elders to be at a time when — yes, the City of Whitehorse and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation did incredible jobs to step up, but when you have an elder who is pretty shaken, leaving their home and community to come into Whitehorse, that individual needs a good, comfy place to be — and watching the minister do everything that she possibly could to ensure that those folks had a comfortable place — putting that all together within hours was absolutely incredible and I want to thank the minister for that and for the ongoing work that was done by other colleagues in the House during that time.

I also think that it was extremely prudent fiscal planning that was done when it came to the consideration. We had lots of debate during the mains about how we were going to allocate funds. We said in the House that we had the potential for unanticipated cost pressures. What we have been able to do is put together a very significant program to offset the cost impacts from flooding. In the Klondike, I was just meeting with officials today to discuss the uptake of our programs and money getting out the door to support individuals through that program.

This summer, I had a chance to be in Nova Scotia. For the record, I did take about two weeks with my family. My children had not had a chance to spend time with their grandparents collectively since 2019. During that, I took two days, and one day I drove to Halifax while I was away, and I signed an agreement with Premier Houston. It was really about a sharing of health care information. It was about — Nova Scotia has done a really good job on reducing red tape within the health care field. I made a commitment to ensure that the Yukon Medical Association can garner some information from that, but also, they were going through major floods. Some really devastating things had happened, and it was really incredible for me to be able to sit there and say, you know what? Yukon, a small jurisdiction, already went through flooding; we built a program in just a very short period of time, and I'll call our officials in Intergovernmental Relations and make sure that program gets shipped out to you — which it did right away — so that a bigger jurisdiction, like Nova Scotia, could have a framework of a flood program that was built by Community Services and Finance here in the Yukon. I think our public servants should be extremely proud of their ability to do incredible work. I think that was something that was, again, quite a — I was just proud to be part of Yukon government and see our ability to share that work.

The other things that we took into consideration, if you'll remember — and I mentioned this to the media yesterday when we talk about floods and fire — the Minister of Community

Services and myself went up to the airport early in the spring, and we had Wildfire come out. What we were trying to do is to ensure that we could bring as much emphasis as possible to preparation by individual Yukoners for unanticipated challenges from climate change. That day, you know, we had Wildfire there, and we talked about the 72-hour kit, and one of the things I said was — I pleaded with the media. I said, "Please, try to take this message and amplify it as much as you possibly can."

We know that these risks are always just around the corner for us, and, you know, I will never stop saying that. This summer, we had an extremely professional public service that did an incredible job — and community leaders, and First Nation leaders, and volunteers. Like, it was Yukoners coming together to support Yukoners, but there is always that threat that we could be in a situation like our neighbours in the Northwest Territories or British Columbia. It's always there, so we can't stop these discussions.

I will go back and say I remember some great dialogue with the Leader of the NDP and the MLA for Lake Laberge about firesmaring and fire breaks and that stuff. Now that we have political will and social licence, we need to focus on those items.

Other than that, I just want to say, I thank the Minister of Finance for the ability to build and future-proof our budget. We are going to have an opportunity to get into general debate on this. I think you will see that our spending was solid. We have taken our surplus down because we need to put money out there for individuals to offset the pressures of inflation, so there is just a modest surplus at this point in time. I think Yukoners want us to be putting that money into their pockets to support them, and I appreciate the opportunity to have had the right tools in place this summer to keep Yukoners safe and sound.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am pleased to be able to rise again here today to close debate at second reading of Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, also known as the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the fiscal year 2023-24. I am trying to rack my brain to think if there was ever a time since I have been in the Legislative Assembly that this second reading debate began and ended on the same day. It is an interesting approach, but maybe we will expedite the whole process.

I was also listening to the Leader of the NDP, the Third Party, talking about the supplementary debates. I agree quite a bit about — I want to thank her for her comments about our deputy minister and the team at Finance. I concur; they work extremely hard, and I am really thankful for those comments.

I am just looking over those years with us in government and the different approaches that we did try in a general-debate avenue — seeing that we were budgeting up front in the spring and not having as much of a budget debate in the fall or not as much of a budget in the fall. We did try a whole bunch of

different approaches. Sometimes we would have all of the ministers available, or if I was not available during the general debate — we tried different things on this side to accommodate, but I do concur with the member opposite, understanding my time in opposition, that you do want to have as many opportunities as possible to talk to the departments at either session, either in the fall or in the spring.

General debate was interesting, as far as the processes of the Legislative Assembly — if there is not a dollar value for the department, they're not going to appear, and then general debate becomes a lot of questions for a lot of departments. I have to say, though, that opportunity to work closely with all those departments, prepping for these conversations — it was a great education. As Premier and as ministers, we do a lot of — you have to spread yourself quite thin sometimes to know all of the issues and all of the departments — let alone your core departments. To be able to have that much more time with deputy ministers, ministers, ADMs, directors, as we prepare for these general debates, it really does wonders for your knowledge of not only the individual line items but the dedication of those individuals — the people, the public servants — who run this place.

It is quite an honour, actually, to be able to engage with them on a regular basis anyway, and we just found that general debate was just another avenue where we would spend a lot of quality time getting to know the people who work so tirelessly for this government, and I tell you, even more so during a pandemic, to see the dedication of the public servants, it really manifests itself in weekends, evenings, without a lot of talk — just a lot of yes, we have to get these things done. I'm thinking about times where we have to make really quick decisions involving a whole bunch of different departments in the best of times; then add to that the COVID-19 pandemic; add to that, as well, a general debate where you're really working with those folks as well — so, it is those moments that you really appreciate where we live and the dedication of those public servants.

Speaking specifically of the second reading, again, supplementary estimates are about responding to those unanticipated areas, needs, pressures, and those supplementary estimates are, like the ones introduced here — they're here to support Yukoners and support services and institutions that Yukoners have grown to depend on and trust, and it is important that any territorial government approaches them with seriousness of the accounting and the budgeting that Yukoners deserve and demand.

These are the first supplementary estimates that I have brought forward since our Yukon Liberal government was elected in 2016 that I have not been the Premier for, so that is an interesting role for me now. The role of Premier in this territory that we all love is an incredible duty, an incredible responsibility, and an incredible honour, and I applaud the current Premier of the Yukon — the Member for Porter Creek South, the Minister of Economic Development, and the Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation — for the way that he has approached this role so far.

However, I continue to have the responsibility for, and opportunity of, seeing these supplementary estimates, our entire budgetary process, as well as my other roles as minister and the MLA for Klondike through the eyes of being the Minister of Finance — a role that I feel tremendous honour in filling. It is a very unique role, that is for sure. I continue to be immensely grateful to the people of the Klondike and the people of the territory for allowing me this time to sit with this team in these chairs and pursue good governance and stewardship on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke in my opening second reading remarks that supplementary estimates provide an opportunity to test our ability to respond to changes. This is a government and a team that has responded to immense challenges — both unique to the Yukon and also facing issues that have been faced on a wider national and international scale throughout our time. This is a team that has experienced thoughtful ministers who respond to the challenges and difficulties of the COVID-19 pandemic and are responding to the unprecedented health and economic consequences borne of the pandemic. This is a team that is responding to the gravity of a substance use health emergency and thoughtfully, maturely and compassionately addressing not only the root causes but also other facets that make recovery and healing extremely difficult for some very good people, but it is always worth it.

This is a team that protected Yukoners and their property when natural disasters struck, whether it be flood or fire, and that is ensuring that we prepare for natural disasters that will come in future years and which have left our northerly neighbours with the most harrowing of circumstances that they could ever envision this year in Yellowknife. Our hearts, prayers, and thoughts go out to all of our fellow northerners in that situation that we all find ourselves in. It was Yellowknife's unfortunate experience that really keeps us all up at night, because these are not once-in-a-century situations anymore; whether they are floods or fires, this seems to be the new normal.

This is a team that is responding to a worldwide climate emergency by looking into our own backyard and addressing our own climate and ecological footprint, ensuring that Yukoners can be proud of the impact of our territory in this important fight, all the while utilizing the opportunities and skillset to grow our economy and financial opportunities by participating in the green economy. This is a team that's approaching the territorial government — a colonial government — the territorial government's relationships with Yukon First Nation peoples and their governments and doing so not in a checking-of-a-box type of situation, but doing so as invaluable partners, friends and neighbours in this land, which is their traditional territories, their lands, who have immense knowledge and insight on the most effective, sustainable, and appropriate ways to move the Yukon forward.

When I talk about partners, friends, and neighbours, nowhere is that more relevant than at the Yukon Forums. Remembering back to the very first Yukon Forum and seeing how it has matured, pivoted, and really blossomed into new and exciting opportunities — that's a really great feeling to see that,

27 forums later, maturing in that way. I have said it in the Legislative Assembly before that it's sometimes hard to get folks to sit, because we get together, and it's all the public servants from all the different governments and all the chiefs and ministers who are now spending much more time in the parking lot talking together or over by the buffet table. It's great to see these relationships form with people who are all trying their best to do common pursuits and goals. We don't all necessarily agree all together all of the time. I mean, the people on this side of the Legislative Assembly don't necessarily always agree all of the time, but it's the effort, it's the respect, it's the relationships that really — it's important, and it is an honour to be at those tables working with such dedicated Yukoners.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very seasoned, mature, and diverse team that cares deeply about the Yukon. Given my previous position, I had the pleasure of meeting all of these ministers before they got into territorial politics. I grabbed them away from their comfy lives in order to — for a higher purpose, I guess — a higher challenge. Each and every one of them were all really very successful in their own pursuits and all from different walks of life. It's a lot of memories in that time frame. I have learned about their passions. I have learned about their families and the issues that they — well, the issues that drive them — the issues that get them excited and, you know, bring forth their communities' concerns. I have watched ministers from different departments, you know, caring more about the complete Yukon than, you know, politics or specific ridings, and I think that's the important piece — is the honour, and a lot of people on both sides of the House, they know this honour of being representative of people whom you have barely met, whether they are your neighbours and your constituents or leaders in other jurisdictions.

It's a very, very powerful position that we are all in, in this Legislative Assembly to know — some of my favourite moments are when, you know, you look up to somebody who doesn't know you, and then you get into a position as an MLA, and they are demanding your time and demanding your ears to listen to their perspective on the Yukon. As individuals, we just grow — every single one of us in this Legislative Assembly grows through that opportunity. It's powerful; it's daunting sometimes, because it's a huge responsibility, but I know everybody in this Legislative Assembly relishes the opportunity to fight for Yukoners.

With my team here — you know, watching us all kind of come together and, you know, working around the Cabinet table, as I said, 27 forums later, and, you know, we have heard them advocate for Yukoners who live in every corner of this territory. I have been reminded that they really are truly passionate — a tested and seasoned team that this territory has — and I'm just very grateful to be part of it.

Yukon will continue to face some very difficult challenges, as we move forward. There is no downtime, that's for sure. It's in these moments like this that we — that our territory needs, you know, our experience — needs people who are driven and forward-thinking to make decisions at the helm.

I am very proud that we built a team that takes good ideas from all sides — a team that sees that a strong economy is critical to the success of a healthy environment and that a healthy environment is critical to a good economy and the participation of — and respect for — First Nations is the highest responsibility of this Yukon government.

Successful teams don't just happen by chance; they are built, and this team is built and driven and committed to moving Yukon forward to being even better than yesterday and much better tomorrow.

Through the pandemic, as well, it was very interesting to go from — sometimes I get a little cranky when we have to travel. I would much rather be home and hanging out with friends and family and that type of thing, but pre-pandemic, I would get pretty cranky with all the touring and travelling that we had to do. Then the pandemic happened, and no one was moving at all, and you have perspective. When people can move again, you feel, "Okay, stop being so cranky." These are responsibilities, and you should relish the opportunity to go to these other jurisdictions but afterward, as well, being able to come back from those travels and see how other communities in Canada and around the world fared in the pandemic. I have had this conversation with many people at the gas station or wherever in Yukon about that perspective after the pandemic.

If we didn't know already before the pandemic how amazing the place that we call home is, that perspective afterward really did hit home — for me, for a lot of my constituents and a lot of people I talked to in the Yukon — not having to shut down as much as other jurisdictions — schools, businesses, being able to keep our economy going with the good work of the placer miners, the good work of the mining community, the good work of the people who were in those critical frontlines. We really did show our true spirit as Yukoners, taking care of each other in this small neck of the woods that we call home. That perspective was really interesting. It made me very grateful. It made a lot of my constituents very grateful to know that we have something really powerful and unique here in the Yukon. It really is a true honour.

Like many of my colleagues in this House, since we have commenced the Sitting, we have been able to reflect, as well, on the busy summer we have had here in the Yukon.

It was great to be able to connect with people all across the Yukon this summer. Back in the Klondike, as well, people who have been able to graciously spend their time sharing their thoughts, concerns, ideas, hopes, and sometimes some meals and beverages and some music as well, with me — it is always great to reconnect that way. One really amazing thing that we all got to do this summer was being able to be in Dawson with our Special Sitting and all the other Members of the Legislative Assembly. This was big and this was a thing that we all shared together: a Special Sitting of the Legislative Assembly in the original capital of the territory. We are still kind of angling to get that back some day, by the way. The Dawson Museum is such an amazing building — those halls, you know — you can just imagine the history, the conversations back at the burgeoning of the governments and the administration of the

Yukon back in the day — on June 13. I was touched to hear colleagues from all parties in this House recognizing the 125th anniversary of the creation of the Yukon as a Canadian jurisdiction and acknowledge the importance of the Klondike, the history of Tr'ondëk — Klondike — in our territory. That history goes a lot further back than 125 years, of course, as the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in in the Klondike and every Yukon First Nation could readily remind us, but a day like that was one when Yukoners could reflect on those 125 years. As our Premier spoke so passionately about, it is important and I once again extend my thanks to you, Mr. Speaker, and your team with the Legislative Assembly and to all colleagues in this Chamber for making that day a success for the Yukon and a success for Dawson. I would also like to express my thanks to other non-MLAs like Mayor Bill Kendrick, Senator Pat Duncan, and everyone else who came out on that warm July day to make it a success.

I do have a lot more comments that I could get into, but I am running out of time, so we can get into some of those conversations during Committee of the Whole. What I will do is sum up now by thanking you for the time today and thanking all of my colleagues who have spoken today for all of their comments on second reading, and I will cede my time now.

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. Mr. Streicker: Agree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 211 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:21 p.m.

Written notice was given of the following motions October 5, 2023:

Motion No. 762

Re: mental wellness supports for children and youth
(Blake)

Motion No. 763

Re: Yukon Energy Corporation funding (Tredger)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 138

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Tuesday, October 10, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, October 10, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Speaker's statement in recognition of artwork exhibits in the Chamber

Speaker: Today, I would like to take the opportunity to describe the new artwork in the Assembly, starting in order from the back of the Assembly to my right and moving counter-clockwise.

The first is a piece by Florence Moses called *Arrival of the Dog Team*. It is made of melton material, canvas backing, wool and cotton yarn, silver bells, seed beads, and vintage beads. Florence Moses is a traditional artist who creates wearable art from diverse materials ranging from Czech beads to triangle beads, porcupine quills, fish scales, sweet grass or abalone buttons to commercial fish skin and furs. She is inspired by her Gwich'in, Northern Tutchone and Han nations' ancestry, her research and time spent listening to stories of elders about survival and sustenance in northern environments. This dog blanket is one of a set of 10 created by Yukon artists. The blankets were showcased at the 2017 Yukon Quest where they were worn by a ceremonial dog team that proudly started the 1,000-mile dogsled race. The project was inspired by the tradition of dog teams being dressed in decorated blankets with bells to announce their arrival in communities. These elaborate blankets also showcased the artwork of family matriarchs.

The next piece is a woven hat by Heather Bell Callaghan entitled *Sea to Mountain Trade Route*. It is made of red and yellow cedar, Hawaiian Job's tears, tooth, tusk, and shells, sea otter, abalone, and leaves of the hala tree. Heather Callaghan is a Tlingit artist whose family comes from a long line of spruce-root weavers in the Yukon and Alaska. She finds inspiration in the way that Tlingit artists have used traditional materials in combination with more recent trade items to create artwork reflecting their world and documenting historical and cultural shifts. This hat is part of a woven ensemble that includes a matching robe and was inspired by travels in southeast Alaska, Hawaii, and the Yukon. The title *Sea to Mountain Trade Route* references the legacy of the people who travelled throughout the mountains on trail networks that led them between the ocean and the interior for social ties, trade, and harvesting.

Next, we have a piece by Karen Bien entitled *Electric Mukluks*. It is made of commercial tanned hide, melton cloth, beaver fur, seed beads, artificial shearling, and nylon thread. Karen Bien is a member of Kwanlin Dün First Nation and was born and raised in Whitehorse. Karen has been sewing for nearly 40 years, creating all kinds of pieces. She learned from her mother, Alice Bien, and through teachings of elders and by watching others. She creates from her imagination, often deciding on colours and patterns as she works, and is always

excited to try new techniques and designs. She describes her process of creating through sewing as therapy, through which she finds a sense of peace and calm.

Next, we have a piece from Kimberley Edgar entitled *Trying to Help*. It is a watercolour using gouache and acrylic ink on paper. Kimberly Edgar is a queer settler living on Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in territory, Dawson City, Yukon. They are an artist, cartoonist, illustrator, and designer. Their works have been acquired for numerous Canadian public collections nominated multiple times for best comic with the Broken Pencil Zine Award, and in 2019, their comic *The Purpose* won best comic at the Broken Pencil Zine Awards. In this drawing, Kim reflects on their relationship to their own body and the analogies found between body and land. The central figure lays in the rocky landscape of the tailings piles on the outskirts of Dawson City. Native plants growing between the rocks represent resilience in finding a way to flourish in a harsh environment. A caribou approaches the figure with kindness, reflecting relationships and interdependence.

Finally, we have a piece by Cheryl Rivest entitled *Miles Canyon Bracelet*. It is made of sterling silver and Yukon placer gold from Davidson Creek, Mayo. Cheryl Rivest is a northern artist who was raised in Atlin, BC, and has now lived in the Yukon for the past 30 years. She has studied and worked as a goldsmith and silversmith for over 25 years, creating unique wearable art. In her work, Cheryl seeks to evoke the emotional response she feels in her experiences in the natural environment. The *Miles Canyon Bracelet* was inspired by the basalt columns of Miles Canyon. The columns in the bracelet were formed using the chasing and repoussé technique, which involves hammering into the front surface, then hammering into relief from the reverse.

The shapes and surfaces in the piece replicate the experience of viewing the canyon formations from the water, the cracks and angles in the sentinel-like columns suggesting faces and personalities. Yukon placer gold is tucked into the crevices between the columns to honour the many people who have travelled through the canyon on the Yukon River.

We thank the Department of Tourism and Culture for displaying these artworks in the Assembly for all Yukoners to enjoy.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Today, I would like to welcome Devin Bailey, the fire marshal, and Christopher Green, the deputy fire marshal. These two individuals travel the territory all the time, helping to put out fires both real and metaphorical. I really want to thank them for those efforts. Please join me in welcoming them to the House this afternoon.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Clarke: For the Circular Economy Week tribute, we have today in the gallery from Raven ReCentre: Heather Ashthorn, Raven ReCentre's executive director; Steven Parker, the office administrator; and Megan McLeod, the zero waste coordinator. As well, from the Yukon government, we have Bryna Cable, the director of Environmental Protection and Assessment branch. Welcome.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming back to the gallery today my husband, Rick McLean, who is accompanied by his sister, Corinna Reimert, and nephew, Andrew Reimert. They are visiting from Alberta. Please help me in welcoming them.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Fire Prevention Week

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today to talk about fire safety. Fire Prevention Week kicks off on October 8 each year. It draws our attention to the essential steps that each of us must take to protect ourselves and our families from fires that are easily prevented. I want to thank Yukoners who are making fire safety and prevention activities a priority. This year's Fire Prevention Week theme is: "Cooking safety starts with YOU! Pay attention to fire prevention."

Most home fires start in the kitchen. When cooking, always keep an eye on the stove and keep a fire extinguisher nearby. If you see smoke, turn off the heat and take the pan off the burner. Know how to use your fire extinguisher. Home fire safety also includes preventing fires from starting, having working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms, and knowing how to get out fast if those alarms sound. Make sure you install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms outside all sleeping areas and on every level of your home, including the basement, and, if you're a tenant, make sure your landlord installs them. It is the law. Test your smoke alarms once a month and replace them after 10 years. Next, create a home escape plan and review it with your family. Make sure everyone in the home understands how to get out of the house from any room. Plan for all your family members, including those with sensory or physical disabilities. Don't forget to include your pets. In the event of a fire, listen for the smoke alarm. Everyone should know that when you hear that alarm, it's time to get out. Leave calmly but quickly. You could have only minutes to escape safely once the fire alarm sounds. Go to your outside meeting place, which should be a safe distance from your house, and once you get out, dial 911.

This fall, the Fire Marshal's Office and partners and municipal and volunteer fire departments will be visiting schools to talk about fire safety and distribute activity packs for households and families. I want to take a moment to commend and thank all of Yukon's firefighters. They work tirelessly to protect our lives and homes from fire. Together, we are building healthy and safe communities across the Yukon. More

information about fire safety and prevention is available online at preparedyukon.ca. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 9 to 14 as national Fire Prevention Week. In elementary schools, fire safety is taught by encouraging children to plan escape routes and emergency responses with their families. However, not every home has a plan and not every family has gone through this important exercise. Fire Prevention Week aims to educate families on ways to quickly and safely deal with fires, escape a house fire, and the steps to take to limit the risk to you and your family.

While Fire Prevention Week is a wonderful opportunity to go over fire safety in the home and on your property, it's important to mention that natural and human-caused fires can happen throughout the summer months. We have seen some beautiful weather this year, but often with the heat and dry conditions, we are at risk for considerable fire activity. Fire etiquette is key: extinguishing campfires, safe burning on your property, following fire bans, and exercising caution with anything that may cause fires, including cigarettes.

I would like to give a special thanks to all those involved with wildland fire suppression and to those who travelled outside of the Yukon to help neighbouring jurisdictions deal with wildfires this year. I would also like to recognize the ongoing work done by the Yukon Fire Marshal's Office and municipal and volunteer fire departments across the territory. These groups work to educate and raise awareness about fires this week in addition to the important work they do throughout the year to protect our homes and communities. Thank you.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to acknowledge Fire Prevention Week in Canada. Every day, we are grateful for the folks who work and volunteer in fire halls across the territory, but today, we get to tribute these great people here in the Assembly. Whether we talk about the oldest department in the territory celebrating their 125th anniversary this year — congratulations, Dawson City — or to the biggest fire department, the City of Whitehorse, or to one of the 16 community volunteer fire departments, with over 200 volunteers, we know that the staff and volunteers who have taken on the task of keeping their neighbours safe each and every day deserve our thanks. So, thank you to these special people — the firefighters — who run toward danger when most of us run from it, saving both hearts and homes.

Applause

In recognition of Circular Economy Month

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I rise today to recognize the month of October as Circular Economy Month. Building a circular economy is about moving away from the current linear model of production and consumption and moving to a model where products are meant to be reused, refurbished, and properly dismantled. The environmental benefits of a circular economy

include greenhouse gas reduction, cleaner waterways, and increased biodiversity. Diverting plastics from the landfill means fewer plastic goods are exposed to the environment and fewer microplastics are generated. We are fortunate to have local businesses and vendors, including The Yukon Refillery and Riverside Grocery, which promote refill and reuse practices leading to less product packaging waste.

Raven ReCentre and Zero Waste Yukon are currently piloting a reusable takeout container project aimed at reducing single-use packaging by keeping already existing products in circulation. I would also like to recognize P&M Recycling, Whitehorse Blue Bin Recycling, Association of Yukon Communities, and the community depot and free store operators who help make recycling and reuse possible around the territory.

As we embrace sustainable practices to curb single-use and plastic waste, the collective commitment to environmental stewardship paves the way for *Our Clean Future*, reinforcing dedication to the territory's ecological well-being.

Our Clean Future outlines the Government of Yukon's will to address the impacts of climate change while building a green economy, ensuring access to reliable, affordable, and renewable energy for residents.

Our Clean Future includes a goal of moving toward a more circular economy. It commits the Government of Yukon to designing and implementing an extended producer responsibility program by 2025. The EPR is a regulatory framework that places the financial and operational responsibility for end-of-life waste management of products and packaging on the producers of products and packaging. Mr. Speaker, we have already begun the process of bringing EPR forward, and I am pleased about the progress made on this file.

Recycling is a key part of a circular economy, helping to protect our natural resources and to support biodiversity. A circular economy helps increase biodiversity because the more we can reuse, refurbish and not dispose of items means fewer items in the landfill and less need for extraction of new resources from nature.

Local thrift and free stores also contribute to reuse efforts by reducing textiles in the landfill.

This month challenges us to think about resources — not waste — when it comes to the goods around us. I invite Yukoners to learn more about and embrace circular-economy initiatives. Research and review your purchases; support companies that create products designed to consume less raw material and are meant to stand the test of time.

I encourage all Members of the Legislative Assembly to think about what we can do to reduce waste and how we can support and empower Yukoners to adapt new, sustainable practices. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to discuss the circular economy. The thinking behind a circular economy is that we should be trying

our best to ensure that materials, products, and services should be kept in circulation for as long as possible.

The intent is to reduce the lifecycle impacts of materials, including climate impacts, reducing the use of harmful materials and, to the greatest extent possible, extending the lifecycle of products that do get purchased and used.

In a place like the Yukon, which is geographically distanced from other areas where so much of the goods we consume are produced, it only makes sense to find ways to ensure that we get the most out of the products that are shipped up here.

For our part, we are certainly supportive of any efforts to make our economy more sustainable and to ensure that we are limiting the waste that is produced by economic activity in the Yukon. Thank you.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the upcoming Circular Economy Week. Shifting from a linear economy to a circular one is not about any one fix. It is about the entire system being redesigned. The hierarchy of zero waste starts with the best-case scenarios: rethinking, redesigning, reducing, and reusing. This could be selling products with minimal or no packaging, designing goods to be easy to repair, or finding new homes for the things we don't need anymore. It includes garage sales and free stores at transfer stations. Businesses contribute as well, to name just a few. We have consignment stores, a thrift shop, a second-hand sporting goods store, and a used book store that all contribute to a circular economy.

Next on the zero-waste hierarchy is recycling — for those products that we haven't been able to avoid consuming and haven't been able to repurpose. Recycling can't just be checking a box to get waste out of sight and out of mind. We need to invest in recycling practices that are safe and sustainable for workers and accomplish the goal of getting materials all the way into new products.

For years, the Yukon has relied on the staff and volunteers of non-profit organizations and businesses to manage recycling in the territory. They have done incredible work, but it is past time for governments to take on that responsibility. We look forward to when the producers of products are responsible for making sure that those products go full circle.

We appreciate all the Yukoners working hard to reduce their waste through little and big actions, and if you're looking for somewhere to start, this month, Raven ReCentre is hosting a "make your own Halloween costume" workshop out of recycled materials at the recycling depot. I actually tried to sign up and discovered that it was meant for children, but I cannot wait to see the creations.

Happy Circular Economy Month, everyone.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Ms. White: Today, I have for tabling a letter addressed to the Premier entitled “Proposed Closure of Silver City Transfer Station” that was signed by 130 residents.

Speaker: Are there any further reports for tabling?
Are there any reports of committees?
Are there any petitions to be presented?
Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 28: *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I move that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by Minister of Environment that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 28 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House condemns Hamas’ horrific attacks on the people of Israel.

Mr. Dixon: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges all governments in Canada to denounce the unprovoked attacks on Israel and on innocent civilians by the terrorist group Hamas and affirm the right of Israel to respond and defend itself.

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

THAT this House celebrates the second anniversary of the supervised consumption site that has assisted 335 individuals who have used services 6,312 times, demonstrating the pivotal role that this site serves to provide harm reduction and safety in our community.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House:

(1) acknowledges that the Official Opposition has made it known that they do not support the recently negotiated collective agreement; and

(2) urges the Official Opposition to reconsider their position on the collective agreement with the Yukon Employees’ Union by voting in support of the supplementary budget that will provide more than 3,500 public servants with the compensation they deserve.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House supports the Government of Yukon’s community tourism destination development fund that is supporting local businesses, First Nation governments and development corporations, municipalities, and not-for-profit organizations to realize opportunities for increased tourism visitation, encourage new and emerging tourism businesses, and rebuild capacity lost during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide medically managed alcohol and drug withdrawal support for people living in Yukon communities.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to install lighting at the two pedestrian crosswalks on the Alaska Highway in Porter Creek.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Wildland Fire Management

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are coming to the end of a wildfire season that saw 218 wildfires burn more than 220,000 hectares of land. Today, I am honoured to share more information about our response in this ministerial statement, which will provide insights and serve as a valuable resource for future generations.

Mayo, Old Crow, and the Yukon’s largest gold mine — Eagle Gold mine — were evacuated, and households in the Ibex Valley and the Silver Trail were under evacuation alert. During it all, hard-working Yukon wildfire crews kept communities safe. All wildfire crews — whether they are under the Yukon government, Yukon First Nations Wildfire, or First Nation governments — work shoulder to shoulder through the season as a single and cohesive team under the Wildland Fire Management program. Together they do all they can to manage the effects of wildfires near communities and valuables. They work long hours fighting fires. On top of that, they conduct prescribed burns and other FireSmart treatments that reduce wildfire risk to neighbourhoods and critical infrastructure.

With expert support, overhead and program staff at the six Yukon fire centres, our wildland firefighters protect lives, land, and livelihoods. During this summer that saw so much damage in other parts of the country from wildfire, it is not lost on anyone how fortunate we have been.

The Yukon did not lose any structures or suffer any losses of life. This is an important, poignant point to recognize as climate change alters our world and wildfires become more common. Our crews served beyond our borders to help our neighbours as we always have.

This summer, Yukon crews deployed to the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Québec, and British Columbia. We are proud that Yukon personnel could support our neighbours in

need. Thank you to everyone who participated in these missions.

Likewise, we were fortunate to receive help from Nova Scotia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador during our own period of high fire activity. Across Canada, communities coped with devastating fires, mass evacuations, and wildfire smoke. Tragically, this season has been deadly for wildland firefighters. The community is mourning the loss of eight firefighters and wildfire personnel in Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and British Columbia. In the Yukon, our flags stood at half-mast to recognize and mourn each of these deeply felt losses. It is a reminder of the risks that our wildland firefighters and emergency responders take every day when they go to work.

Thank you to all those involved in the response to the territory's wildfires this season for your courage and commitment. From our homegrown fire crews to the crews who came here from other jurisdictions, Yukoners are truly thankful. Thank you also to all Yukon First Nations and Yukon communities, particularly those that have been impacted by wildfires this year. We are proud to work together to respond to emergencies, keep Yukoners safe and informed, and create wildfire-resistant Yukon communities. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cathers: I am pleased to rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to thank everyone who helped with the wildfire response in the Yukon this year. It was a busy season, and while we are fortunate to have avoided the loss of homes and other buildings seen in other parts of Canada, including our neighbours to the east and south, the threat was there and it came much too close for comfort. Fires in the Ibex Valley and near Mayo and Old Crow put hundreds of homes at direct risk. We are thankful to everyone who worked so hard to protect Yukoners' homes and our communities. This includes crews from Wildland Fire Management, Yukon First Nations Wildfire, and volunteer firefighters. I know that a number of volunteer firefighters from the Ibex Valley, Hootalinqua, Golden Horn, the SHOT team, and Mayo all worked hard as part of the wildfire response, often late at night. I would also like to thank anyone else whom I may have missed listing.

We also thank crews who came from other jurisdictions and staff from the Canadian Inter-agency Forest Fire Centre and everyone who assisted with evacuations of Mayo and Old Crow. In the case of Mayo, we saw the Canada Games Centre in Whitehorse used as a place for evacuees and, a short time later when Old Crow was evacuated, some of those people also relocated to the CGC. In the case of Old Crow, we thank Air North for juggling their summer schedule to accommodate the airlift of residents from the Yukon's only fly-in community and note that Air North was also called upon to assist the NWT with evacuations.

As we pass along our condolences to the families of firefighters who lost their lives protecting Canadians this year, it is a reminder of the danger that firefighters may face every time they put on their uniforms. What happened in the NWT served as a stark reminder that wildfires are a threat to northern

communities and should serve as another wake-up call to us all. There are steps that the Yukon can take to be better prepared for future fire seasons.

Following the fire in Fort McMurray, we supported calls of local groups, including FireSmart Whitehorse and the Yukon Wood Products Association, for targeted harvesting in and near communities to reduce wildfire risk. We appreciate that the Yukon government did work with other governments on a firebreak project, but much more action is needed. We call on the government to work with First Nations, municipalities, and local advisory councils on a plan to reduce wildfire risk in and near communities, including targeted harvesting.

It is important to have short-term actions taken, while a longer term plan is being worked on, including taking action before the next fire season.

We also encourage Community Services to do a review of communications, procedures, and practices. Much was done well, including updates by staff working very late at night, but there is room for improvement regarding frequency of updates, communications with community leaders, and some of the information shared with residents. There is also an interest in seeing more done to help people understand what they can do to firesmart their own properties and set up home fire-suppression systems.

Again, we want to thank everyone involved for all their hard work, but this is also a time to recognize how close we came to a more serious outcome in Ibex Valley, with Whitehorse and the Hot Springs Road area right next to it, and in Mayo and Old Crow and to take action to be better prepared for future years.

Communities, including Ibex Valley, also want to see an emergency plan in place for their area that reflects their needs and steps taken to better address issues such as livestock being moved if an alert or order is issued.

Ms. White: This year saw an unprecedented wildland fire season in Canada and, sadly, a devastating loss in the wildland fire community with the death of eight firefighters and wildfire personnel, but this is not a tribute; it is a ministerial statement, and the minister has not provided any new information or helped ease the anxieties of those Yukoners who worry that we might be next. If the minister rightly wanted to pay tribute to the work of our wildland firefighters and emergency workers, there is a space for that. So, I have questions and I hope that the minister will be able to provide answers.

Here at home, the communities of Mayo and Old Crow were evacuated and we saw resources in Whitehorse activated with an evacuation centre at the Canada Games Centre and the mechanisms for the rollout of support. A lot of good things were done, but evacuees said that it wasn't without challenges. In 2022, the census said that Old Crow had a population of 236 people and, according to their website, Mayo has an average population of 450 people, and then there were those who nearly had to be evacuated in the Ibex Valley and the Silver Trail. That means that, in Yukon, we evacuated and relocated less than a thousand people, but our neighbours to the east in the

Northwest Territories evacuated 68 percent of their population due to wildland fires — nearly 26,000 people — 20,000 out of Yellowknife and an additional 6,000 from the rest of the territory.

What lessons can we learn from their experiences? What lessons are we learning from their experiences? What would the Yukon do if the entire City of Whitehorse needed to be evacuated? Where would they go? And what about the entire Klondike region? Where would we direct those in Watson Lake to go? When we look at the changing nature of the climate and the increase in both intensity and duration of wildland fires, what direction do we, as the decision-makers of today, make for the future? Is the Yukon government working with the City of Whitehorse to create more large-scale fire breaks? What is the broad-strokes evacuation plan for Whitehorse and other Yukon communities?

We're not talking about the minute details, but people want to know where to look to get an idea of what those steps could look like. I heard a lot of people asking those questions this summer.

Maybe the minister doesn't remember actively campaigning against presumptive cancer coverage for wildland firefighters, but I still have the letters to show that, instead of working to get additional coverage for the individuals who do so much to protect people and property, he chose to leave them behind. He compared the risk to smoke inhalation from sitting next to a campfire. So, I wonder, if the minister spent weeks working tirelessly next to the burning boreal forest, if he might feel differently.

He also told Yukoners that no one else was contemplating this type of coverage for wildland firefighters, but he was wrong. BC, Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and soon Manitoba will all provide presumptive insurance coverage for wildland firefighters for heart problems and several cancers.

So, I want to know why the minister actively left wildland firefighters behind when he brought forward presumptive cancer coverage for structural firefighters in 2021 and when he will be introducing amendments to right this wrong.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Our government is prepared for emergencies, and we work closely with our partners to protect the health and welfare of all Yukoners. We have great systems in place with our Incident Command structure through the Emergency Measures Organization so resources know where to go during an emergency. We regularly hold tabletop exercises as part of emergency management training and planning. These can be small-scale, with just a dozen participants, or they can be much larger, like Operation Nanook. Every year, we assess how the season went and how we can do better, taking cues from places like Fort McMurray, Alberta, or, in this year, it would be Yellowknife.

In May, the Premier and I spoke with media at the air tanker base in Whitehorse, flanked by many members of the team at Wildland Fire Management to encourage Yukoners to have 72-hour kits ready, take steps to firesmart their properties, and stay informed ahead of the season.

It was another opportunity to thank the response teams, including duty officers, fire and weather behavioural specialists, administrative staff, warehouse people, and air crew. Throughout the year, they are hard at work tackling mitigations like the impressive south Whitehorse fuel break project, community and wildland fire protection plans, and so much more.

Communities have the responsibility to review their emergency and evacuation plans. This is a municipal or community responsibility. I have been talking to communities about this all summer and will continue to do so over the coming months and years. We work with communities to create and update their community emergency plans and complete a hazard identification and risk assessment.

During emergency incidents, the Emergency Measures Organization is in regular contact with communities, municipal and First Nation governments, and other agencies.

We offer support as required and help where local capacity is insufficient to assist with logistics, communications, or other elements of emergency response. The City of Whitehorse and the Government of Yukon are reviewing their joint emergency response processes, evacuation plans, and incorporating lessons and observations from other jurisdictions. This includes a review of how we communicate with residents before, during, and after an emergency, how we inform people of evacuations, and how we work together through the territory's Emergency Measures Organization. We can never be too prepared for a natural disaster.

Our government knows that being prepared, intervening early, and acting quickly can mitigate emergencies and prevent damages from natural disasters. Our government recognizes the invaluable contribution of every Yukoner who fights fires — whether full time or part time, professionally, or as a volunteer.

A regulation covering presumptive cancer coverage for firefighters under the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act* came into force on July 1, 2022. We have been studying this, and wildland firefighters are currently excluded from the cancer presumptions in this piece of legislation. Wildland firefighters in the Yukon are not typically exposed to burning manufactured materials that structural firefighters deal with or wildland firefighters deal with in Québec, BC, Manitoba, and other jurisdictions. We have a lot fewer urban wildfire interfaces here in the territory, so there's little evidence of an increased risk of cancer for wildland firefighters working in the Yukon bush.

It is important to note that a new study calls this assertion into question and we will be looking into that. As I committed to during debate on that piece of legislation, we are going to continue to review the legislation in light of new developments in this field. That is responsible decision-making. We are making decisions based on science and documented evidence.

I will end it there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for your time this afternoon.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD**Question re: Affordable housing and land development**

Ms. Clarke: The affordability and availability of housing continues to be one of the biggest challenges facing Yukoners. We also know that the Liberal government has struggled with this file.

Last year, the Auditor General found that the Liberal government was not providing Yukoners with the greatest needs when it came to adequate and affordable housing, so it was surprising that, when the Minister of Finance tabled the supplementary budget last week, it included a \$6-million cut to the capital budget for the Yukon Housing Corporation.

Can the Minister of Finance explain why there is a \$6-million cut to the capital budget to the Yukon Housing Corporation during a housing crisis?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I think that, first of all, we are going to have an opportunity to have a further discussion on our supplementary budgets over the next number of weeks. Essentially, what we have been looking at is that some of our projects — our one in Watson Lake, which we're very proud of right now, is our tenplex — which has come in more expensive, which we are seeing across the board on our builds — is underway. We are also, in some cases, waiting for partners to be ready to build their projects, so we are looking at a number of multi-unit builds here. We are still working with Vimy to be able to de-risk their project and with First Nation development corporations. The prudent thing to do at this point in time is to continue to focus on the projects that are going forward within this fiscal year and be able to reallocate funds to appropriate priorities when required.

Ms. Clarke: Well, the supplementary budget is very clear that there is a \$6-million reduction in the capital vote for housing. Last year, the government made an announcement that they were expanding the developer-build loan program to include financing for land and infrastructure development necessary to construct residential housing. In the Spring Sitting, the Minister of Housing said that the \$5 million they had budgeted for this program would — and I quote: "... support community development partnerships that increase housing supply in the territory." However, in the supplementary budget tabled last week, the Liberals cut the funding to this program by 40 percent.

Why are they cutting money for housing during a housing crisis?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The program is undersubscribed, so the prudent thing to do is to move funds to where they should be prioritized. There have been applications that have come in. They still have to be looked at from a risk perspective. Of course, the developer-build program and our other programs continue to be marketed to the public, but it takes a developer to come in the door and want to build to see a project going forward. I want us to use as much funding — and I would love to be coming back with a supplementary budget to increase that program, but, at this particular time, it is undersubscribed.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, in the supplementary budget that was tabled last week, the Liberal government cut

\$6 million from the capital budget for housing. They did this less than a year after the Auditor General found that they were not providing adequate or affordable housing to Yukoners who need it most. The biggest part of the cut they made was to the northern carve-out, which saw its budget cut by \$4 million.

Why did the Liberals cut this money from the capital budget for housing?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I would like to go back to the developer-build loan. I think that it is important to speak to Yukoners to let them know that, again, this is because it is undersubscribed. It is not being used. We want it to be used. We will continue to look at the program to see if there are ways for us to tweak it, to make it something that is of interest to developers, but, at this particular time, they are going out and finding their financing through normal institutions.

For the last question concerning the northern carve-out, what we have done is that we have shifted the ability to spend that money — the vote of the money. We haven't cut it; we are reallocating it to future projects.

So, again, it is important to be clear to Yukoners. That money is still going to be used for housing, but when you are working with partners, which I think we have done very well — I mean, the developer-build loan alone has supported almost 80 new housing units since 2018, so these programs are working, but again, you have to be walking alongside with your partners. You can see it across the territory — these projects — but we have to be ready to support them when they are ready to build.

Question re: Rural solid-waste transfer stations

Mr. Istchenko: So, Yukoners living in rural communities continue to be frustrated by the Liberal government's plans to cut solid-waste disposal services in rural Yukon. The Minister of Community Services' plan to close four rural solid-waste transfer stations has not gone over very well with anyone. The YESAB page for the closure of the Silver City transfer station, for instance, has been inundated with submissions criticizing the decision and the lack of consultation.

So, my question for the minister is: Why is he charging ahead with this decision to cut services to rural Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we are implementing recommendations jointly developed by the Government of Yukon, Association of Yukon Communities, and the City of Whitehorse. The recommendations were informed by discussions with all partners as well as previous work, such as the Association of Yukon Communities solid-waste management vision from 2016 when members opposite were in government.

The committee's recommendations were then handed over to an implementation advisory group, which included the executive director of the Association of Yukon Communities plus representatives from four different municipalities.

We are doing this because the territory is creating way too much garbage, and we are working to modernize and improve the way we handle garbage in the territory. It's part of a far-reaching plan that will force everybody in the territory to go to

regional landfills that are monitored, controlled, and managed properly in the best interest of all Yukoners. We're going to continue with that plan.

Mr. Istchenko: The minister may think this is a good idea, but pretty much everyone else in the territory affected by these changes disagrees. Here's what the Kluane First Nation said about this minister's proposal — and I quote: "The proposed changes to Silver City solid waste transfer station and Destruction Bay waste management facility are unacceptable." Here's what the Village of Haines Junction had to say — and I quote: "The Municipality is concerned about the closure of the Silver City and Canyon transfer stations and believes it will negatively impact the residents."

So, my question is this: Is the minister aware of a single user group, stakeholder, or other level of government that actually supports this decision?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, I really think it's incumbent upon all members of the House to be getting accurate information into public hands, and the member opposite is absolutely correct that we are looking at stopping and removing a waste bin from the community of Silver City so that residents can then go either to Haines Junction or to the landfill that's between Destruction Bay and Burwash. That landfill is going to continue to exist; as a matter of fact, it's going to be improved and managed properly as a regional landfill.

The member opposite is simply wrong when he starts to foster that people in Burwash or Destruction Bay are going to lose their landfill, because they are not. It's going to be managed properly and will be controlled, just like every other landfill will be in the territory. As for the member opposite saying, "Is there anybody?" Yes. Teslin has signed on to our interim agreement; Mayo has signed on to our interim agreement; Carmacks has signed on to our interim agreement. All of these municipalities are taking charge of their landfills and buying into this plan, which was brought to the Yukon government in 2016 and again in 2017 by the Association of Yukon Municipalities. We are following through with that request from the Association of Yukon Communities.

Mr. Istchenko: Since the minister has made it known that he plans to charge ahead with these changes regardless of what anyone else tells him, he has pointed the finger at the Association of Yukon Communities.

However, even the association has taken issue with the minister's comments and has submitted a letter to YESAB criticizing the government's consultation on this issue. In the letter, the AYC says that the Yukon government's comments about consultation were — and I quote: "... incorrect and misleading statements". The letter says that the AYC believes the Yukon government has mischaracterized the AYC's involvement.

So, Mr. Speaker, why does the minister continue to mischaracterize the role of AYC and try to shift the blame for a decision that he himself has made?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will say this afternoon that, as a matter of fact, it was my good colleague the MLA for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes who actually started this process at the

request of municipalities, not myself. And I thank you for the credit because I think it's a great initiative, but it was really my good colleague who started these negotiations. I applaud him for it because what he is trying to do is improve the way that the territory manages all the garbage that we produce. It's important that we get there because, as we have heard today with the tribute earlier, we are producing far too much garbage. We have to do better.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite mentioned AYC. Well, the president of the Association of Yukon Communities, who is also a Whitehorse city councillor and a former Yukon Party caucus staffer, has gone public and made some assertions about the association that he is president of. Well, Mr. Speaker, again, I encourage all of us to make sure that we make accurate public statements because, in a letter to the editor, the president of the AYC said that they do not represent unincorporated communities and, in fact, they do. So, Mr. Speaker, we all have a responsibility to get information into the public domain that is accurate and I encourage everybody to please be careful when they are speaking in this House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Question re: Teacher staffing

Ms. White: School councils are very concerned about this school year. They don't have enough staff allocated to their schools to meet the needs of children. Their most vulnerable students are being shortchanged by the Department of Education. All they are requesting is the supports that the Liberals promised via the confidence and supply agreement signed with the Yukon NDP: additional education assistants, learning assistance teachers, and one wellness counsellor per school. Schools, teachers, and parents deserve to know what the Liberals are doing to meet their obligations to students.

As of today, how many schools are short on the education assistants, learning assistance teachers, and wellness counsellors that they have requested?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today to speak about education in terms of our recruitment of teachers and education assistants.

I know that the member opposite is aware that there is an ongoing national labour shortage along with other issues arising out of the pandemic. This continues to be an issue across the country.

For the 2023-24 school year, we were able to take many strategic recruitment actions. We posted positions earlier to be more competitive with other jurisdictions. We participated again with online career fairs. We have worked with a number of social media platforms. We have visited Canadian universities. To date, teacher recruitment has attended seven online job fairs.

We are getting to a better place, I think, than we were last year. I think there were more challenges last year. In terms of numbers, I can get into some of the numbers that I have, as of September 26, in the next question.

Ms. White: I am glad that the minister mentioned a labour shortage because we hear over and over again from teachers who have left the profession or the territory because of

burnout. This is concerning on so many levels because without a functioning education system, we put at risk the very future of our territory. One of the main issues is the lack of teachers on call or, as they are known by students, “substitute teachers”. Every year, they need to reapply to the Department of Education. Educators are being denied training that they really need because no one can replace them. Even taking a sick day is tough when no one is there to replace you, but substitute teachers are tired of this government’s dysfunction. They are tired of being asked to reapply for their own jobs every year, and they are tired of having to teach almost full time with little support and half the pay.

Several substitute teachers told us that they just stopped applying because they don’t want to deal with these issues anymore, and there is one quick fix to all of this dysfunction: Will the minister allow teachers on call to stay in the system year after year and show them that their experience is valued?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will continue speaking about the work that we are doing to recruit and to ensure that the positions that we have added — we have added 81 new positions over the next three years. That will include wellness counsellors; it will include education assistants.

We are working hard to really reimagine education in the territory. I believe that the work we are doing is cutting-edge across the country and that our issues around recruitment will begin to subside.

In terms of temporary vacancy management, operational management of schools routinely requires regular adjustments by administrators, and I commend the administration teams with their ability to effectively make adjustments where temporary vacancies have put increased demands on staff resources. Certainly, the Government of Yukon offers a variety of supports to staff to address workplace challenges, including health and safety and well-being resources to assess, protect, and promote psychological safety in the workplace.

Again, a lot of work is going into reimagining education in this territory for Yukoners for the future generations —

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. White: Unfortunately, we didn’t get an answer to an easy solution about keeping teachers on call registered throughout the years.

So, every day, administrative staff spend time calling around for substitute teachers to fill the gaps in their classrooms. Better solutions exist when it comes to having substitute teachers available to fill in many gaps of our education system. Other places in Canada are using what they call “supply teachers”. They are teachers permanently attached to a school but not to a classroom so they are able to rotate to different classes as needed. It’s a great way to recruit new teachers and show them the ropes of a learning environment. It would be a great way to slow down the burnout epidemic that full-time educators are facing, and it would mean that administrative staff would not need to go through a call list every morning to fill the gaps.

Will the minister commit to creating permanent positions for supply teachers in Yukon schools to ensure that students are not being shortchanged any longer?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will just give a few of the numbers that we have right now in terms of teachers on call. As of September 26, we had registered 159 teachers on call in the Yukon. That is 129 in Whitehorse, 30 in rural communities, with an additional 19 applications pending, 14 being in Whitehorse and five in rural communities. Again, those numbers are up.

I really will point the House’s attention — and I think what is really important to know is that we are working hard to reimagine education overall, but we are working to address the Auditor General’s report of 2019 by the work that we are doing on reimagining inclusive and special education. There are a number of working groups that include Yukoners from across the territory to really dig into each of the areas. This is certainly one of the areas around the recruitment and retention of teachers.

We have a number of initiatives that are underway now. This is something that our Department of Education and administration are looking very deeply into.

Question re: Big Creek bridge replacement

Ms. McLeod: I have some questions for the Minister of Highways and Public Works about the Big Creek bridge. In the Spring Sitting, the minister told the Legislature that the original planned completion date was in 2022 but that the contractor had been given a one-year extension to address the deficiencies. That contract ended at the end of September and we have yet to hear anything from the government.

So, can the minister tell us what the plan is for the Big Creek bridge?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Big Creek bridge is located approximately 65 kilometres west of Watson Lake, as the Member for Watson Lake will know, on the Alaska Highway and is an important part of the Yukon’s transportation network. In 2020, the tender was awarded to Julmac Contracting Limited and the original planned completion was in 2022. However, unfortunately, in 2022, defects within the concrete deck were discovered during inspections of the new bridge.

Due to performance issues, the contract was terminated in May 2023. On August 11, 2023, Julmac Contracting Limited filed a statement of claim with Yukon Supreme Court. That matter is now before the courts. We will not be commenting generally about the litigation. However, the Yukon government is exploring all options available to complete the project. Until the project is ready, we will continue to perform regular maintenance and inspections of the existing bridge to verify that it remains safe for the travelling public.

Ms. McLeod: In the spring, the minister confirmed that there were no additional taxpayer dollars that would be needed for this project. So, can the minister confirm that this is still the case, and what is the new timeline for the bridge?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: To fully answer the member opposite’s question in due time and in order to better understand how these deficiencies that I have indicated in my first response might impact the structure, we are working with the consultant engineer of record for the project to perform a full assessment of the bridge. The assessment will provide

details of what additional work is required to allow the bridge to be open for public use.

Julmac's contract was terminated on the basis of delay and the deficiencies that I also indicated in my first response — of deficient work. As I indicated, the Yukon government will be exploring all options in order to recoup costs of that project and will make best efforts to complete the Big Creek bridge project, certainly conceding that there are unforeseen delays with respect to this project, but all efforts are being made to ensure that the Yukon, international, and national travelling public is able to use the currently existing bridge safely.

Ms. McLeod: Not too many answers there.

Earlier this spring, my colleague asked the minister whether or not all the subcontractors on this job have been paid. It's my understanding that in order to be paid by the Yukon government, the general contractor needs to complete a statutory declaration that they have indeed paid all of the subcontractors involved. Has the contractor on the Big Creek bridge, Julmac, made such a statutory declaration, and how much of the original \$10 million has been paid to Julmac so far?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the member opposite's question in this regard. I will certainly endeavour to get back to the member opposite with respect to those specific questions on contract administration and will do so during the Fall Sitting.

Question re: Resource Gateway project

Mr. Hassard: Six years ago, Prime Minister Trudeau travelled to the Yukon to make a major infrastructure announcement. The Gateway project would see a total investment of \$360 million in highway projects throughout the Yukon. At the time, the Prime Minister said — and I quote: “This is a big announcement and I'm excited about the impacts it's going to have in the coming months and coming years,” Trudeau said, calling the project ‘an investment in Yukon's people.’” Unfortunately, the Yukon Liberal government has been incredibly slow to deliver on this project, with only one project actually seeing shovels in the ground so far.

Can the minister tell us what the revised budget is for the Gateway projects and when they are expected to be completed?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As the member opposite indicated with respect to the first successful Resource Gateway program, in the spring of 2019, a project agreement for the Carmacks bypass component was signed with the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. This project included the construction of a new road and bridge that will allow industrial vehicles to bypass the community of Carmacks, creating a safer flow of traffic for residents. The new road connects the existing Freegold Road with the Klondike Highway. This project will also improve access to mining activities while enabling the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation to benefit from contracting, education, and training associated with the project. This project is a key component under the Yukon Resource Gateway program, and this is the first project to be awarded under the program.

The Carmacks bypass project is a collaborative effort between the Yukon government and the Little Salmon

Carmacks First Nation. Pelly Construction was awarded the \$29.6-million contract to construct the new road and bridge on November 3, 2021. This project is now substantially complete, and I can happily report that an opening ceremony for the new bridge and the road is tentatively scheduled to take place in October at the site.

Mr. Hassard: Unfortunately, we didn't get an answer to the question that I asked, so let's try again. One of the roads that was included for these upgrades, of course, is the North Canol. This past summer saw an increased amount of traffic on that road due to mineral exploration activity in that area. The road was in such poor condition that we heard from a number of Yukon companies that severe damage was done to their equipment from travelling on it, resulting in thousands of dollars worth of repairs.

We are now three and a half years since the project agreement for this portion of the project was signed with the Ross River Dena Council; however, the minister told me in an August letter that discussions are ongoing with RRDC to determine the timelines and next steps.

When does the minister expect the work to begin on the North Canol?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I know that, from his experience and from what I did on my summer vacation, he spent a little bit of time driving the North Canol. I had an opportunity on Saturday to spend a bit of time in that area as well.

What is important is to take a look at the original proposal that was submitted by the members opposite. I think that approximately \$100 million was to go into a road in 2016 to a mining project that, under the current circumstance of our country, would never be permitted. So, we would be finishing a \$100-million project in the Selwyn project that would never be permitted because of the ownership model. So, that would be one.

The second thing that it is important for Yukoners to remember is that not one First Nation ever signed off on any of the plans for the road, but yet, in the final days of the Yukon Party, they amended their agreement to say that nothing could be built without a First Nation signing off.

So, yes, we have been working with a number of nations. We are still looking forward to moving some of the projects forward with the Ross River Dena Council, as well as with the Liard First Nation, as well as with Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and I think that has been really good planning. But again, you have to do it with your partners before the money can be deployed.

Mr. Hassard: Unfortunately, we didn't have any more success with the Premier than I had with the minister, but we will persevere.

As mentioned, the North Canol is in very poor condition. We hear complaints from Yukoners and Yukon companies that rely on that road. The Gateway project involves repairs or replacement of 27 bridge structures; however, brushing, grading, and ditching as part of O&M expenditures need to be done as well. Reports are that little or no money was spent on O&M in recent years, so can the minister tell us how much was

allotted to the North Canol in this fiscal year, and has he asked the department to increase that amount for next year?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I want to highlight again that, over the weekend, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I spent time on reviewing the North Canol, taking a look at some of the key areas of infrastructure that need to be done. I also want to commit to the folks who are working there that we are reviewing opportunities, but I also want to thank the team, the leadership, at Highways and Public Works because they have been working on looking at ways to also improve those roadways within their budget.

So, yes, there is a tremendous amount of work that needs to be done, but again — the folks opposite can laugh, but you signed an agreement with Canada for, I think, over \$300 million, and then you amended it — the person who is actually speaking out amended it in June 2016, when you were still in government, and said that all the roads would need a project sign-off by First Nations, but then you didn't talk to anybody.

So, yes, there's a lot of work that needs to be done, and you can tell that it's getting under their skin because they know of the mistakes made on this project, and then they planned roads to projects that will never be built, so we have reallocated that. So, yes, we will take the money, we will do the good work, and we will do it in partnership with First Nations because that's how things should be done in the Yukon.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members' business

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, October 11, 2023. They are Motion No. 756, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge, and Motion No. 759, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek North.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, October 11, 2023. They are Motion No. 762, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, and Motion No. 761, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 210: *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23* — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 210, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 210, entitled *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief here. I thank all members for their contributions on debate in this bill, those who did speak for recognizing the expediency required to ensure that we have time to prepare the 2022-23 Public Accounts once this debate concludes. Once again, I want to thank the negotiation teams who helped us reach a new collective agreement between the Yukon government and the Yukon Employees' Union.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, as Official Opposition Finance critic, I just would note, as I did earlier in speaking to this budget bill, that we will be voting against this, as we do with all budget bills, because it is a confidence vote, and we don't have confidence in the Liberal government. We will continue our record of voting against the Liberals on each and every confidence vote.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, as indicated previously, we will be voting in favour of this budget, especially as we believe that the public servants deserve the pay that they have been missing since they were in negotiation for the collective agreement.

We look forward to getting on to the rest of the business of the day.

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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, eight nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.
Motion for third reading of Bill No. 210 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 210 has passed this House.

We are now prepared to receive the Commissioner of the Yukon to grant assent to a bill which has passed this House.

Commissioner Webber enters the Chamber announced by her Aide-de-Camp

ASSENT TO BILLS

Commissioner: Please be seated.

Speaker: Madam Commissioner, the Assembly has, at its present session, passed a certain bill to which, in the name and on behalf of the Assembly, I respectfully request your assent.

Clerk: *Fourth Appropriation Act 2022-23.*

Commissioner: I hereby assent to the bill as enumerated by the Clerk.

I am really pleased to be here in my new role and I just wanted to say that I look forward to your discussions. I listen carefully to what is happening in the House and I am really pleased with the debate. It is really important, speaking on behalf of Yukoners. I just wanted to say that, today, I am also now heading off to Dawson City, and it is going to be a nice little visit to the community. It is the beginning of my visits to the communities.

Have a good session.

Commissioner leaves the Chamber

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It is my pleasure to rise to begin the Committee of the Whole debate on Bill No. 211, which represents the second appropriation act for the 2023-24 fiscal year or the first supplementary estimates for that period.

Before I do, I would like to reintroduce, in the seat to my left here, Jessica Shultz. As Deputy Minister of Finance, Jessica and her whole team work extremely hard to produce the most up-to-date financial documents and statements that are debated in this House. I want to thank her and also the entire Finance department for preparing this material and also for their diligent tracking of hundreds of moving pieces on a daily basis. I would also like to draw attention to the interim fiscal and economic update, which the department has released in coordination with the first supplementary estimates. I will speak to this document and its update outlook a bit later in my remarks. But, suffice to say, this is a regular business that we do now — taking these moments in time out and pairing that with our budget time.

I spoke to the rationale for the supplementary estimates in my second reading speech so, to avoid too much repetition, I will dive right into the contents of this appropriation bill.

At a high level, the first supplementary estimate proposes a \$132.7-million increase in spending. This includes \$132.7 million in proposed O&M spending and no gross increase in capital. The first supplementary estimates also include some changes in recoveries and revenues. This increase includes \$26.8 million in new O&M recoveries and a \$5.8-million reduction in anticipated capital recoveries. Revenues will see an \$18.7-million increase. All of these changes result in a revised fiscal framework resulting in an updated surplus of \$3.6 million as well as a revised net debt of \$423.8 million. The ability to remain in a surplus position is largely owed to the use of the Yukon government's \$50-million contingency fund, which has been exhausted as a result of unanticipated expenses while at the same time maintaining our healthy fiscal position.

I will now go into a little bit further detail about each of these items. I will begin in operation and maintenance, where we see the largest change in proposed spending as part of this bill. As I have mentioned, we will see \$132.7 million in new funding in this area. The largest change impacting O&M spending represents increases related to retroactive payments stemming from the new collective agreement between the Yukon government and the Yukon Employees' Union.

Across all government departments, this represents \$36.9 million in new spending and covers the period from April 1, 2023 to present, as retroactive payments for 2022-23 were included in the third supplementary estimates for that fiscal year.

The next largest change is represented by increases in the Department of Health and Social Services. In total, this department will see \$52.8 million in new funding, with \$17.5 million of this amount made up by the collective bargaining increases that I just spoke about, specific to their department. This will ensure that all EMS, home care, mental health and wellness staff, community nurses, continuing care practitioners, and all other union staff within the department see the retroactive payments and higher wages that they are entitled to.

The remaining amounts cover several important adjustments. We continue to work closely with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to identify and meet their core funding needs as new and emerging pressures are identified to ensure that Yukoners have access to the services that they require. As part of the first supplementary budget, we are providing an increase of \$14.9 million over the 2023-24 main estimates to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. This additional funding will respond to funding needs identified by the Yukon Hospital Corporation for the 2022-23 fiscal year due to unanticipated costs, partially a result of global shortages of health care providers. This additional funding will also address growth in hospital services and also surgical services this year. Government of Yukon is also addressing growth and increased spending requirements to deliver legislative programs through Insured Health Services. The increase of \$9.8 million will be used to ensure that a healthy and sustainable insured health system contributes to the overall health of the territory's population. This includes additional funding for areas such as hospital claims, physician claims, and pharmacare.

As the Yukon's population continues to age and to grow, we are experiencing increased costs within hospital claims. \$6 million of the \$9.8 million will go toward hospital claims to ensure that Yukoners can access necessary and timely care provided by specialists outside of the territory. This \$9.8 million also includes \$2 million to address costs associated with administering our pharmaceutical programs to provide access to medications for Yukoners.

As part of last year's *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* and as part of budget 2023-24, we have provided additional funding for physician claims to reflect changes negotiated as part of the memorandum of understanding with the Yukon Medical Association.

In this supplementary budget, the overall request for Insured Health Services includes \$1.85 million for physician claims to meet rising growth. We will continue to work with our health system partners to respond to rising costs, ensuring that our health care providers are supported and Yukoners have access to the care that they require to lead healthy and happy lives.

Additionally, these supplementary estimates include \$2.5 million for initiatives under the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. This funding is spread across several departments, as the Women and Gender Equity Directorate makes up \$1.9 million of this increase, which is 100-percent recoverable by the Government of Canada.

Ensuring we address Yukon's substance use health emergency remains a top priority, \$1.3 million in the supplementary estimates will go directly toward work included in the substance use health emergency strategy. This work is also supported by \$645,000 for the supervised consumption site, which will add 3.5 additional FTEs to the roster, which will help extend the opening hours at the site.

Finally, the bill includes proposed increases in the Department of Health and Social Services of \$727,000 for the Cornerstone supported independent living facility, \$200,000 for increases to Yukon seniors income supplement, and \$230,000 for increases to the pioneer utility grant, which assists Yukon seniors with the cost of heating their homes, regardless of whether they own or rent.

Moving on from increases within the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources will also see a notable increase in spending. This is largely a result of the \$25 million in increases due to the abandonment of Minto mine. This funding allows the Yukon government to undertake water management and treatment activities at the site as we work closely with the Selkirk First Nation on the planning for early reclamation and closure.

As a regulator, the Yukon government's focus has been on ensuring that the environment is protected at the mine site. The Yukon government currently holds \$75.2 million in financial security for the site. Further work is underway to determine how it will be applied to the expenditures incurred by government. In the meantime, we will continue to work in coordination with the Selkirk First Nation to do what is necessary to ensure environmental protection in the best interest of Yukoners.

A further \$6 million in the department's supplementary budget will go toward transfer payment agreements and contract commitments under various good energy projects — 75 percent or \$4.5 million of this amount is recoverable from the federal government. These projects cover a range of energy-efficiency initiatives and support the government's contributions and commitments under *Our Clean Future*.

Another very visible and required increase as part of these estimates can be found in the Department of Community Services. This department will see a \$19.6-million increase as part of its budget to address direct wildfire costs. This summer has been one of the worst fire seasons on record across the country. In Yukon, while the level of damage and destruction was not as high as in other jurisdictions, we remained on high alert in terms of mitigation, evacuation, and suppression activities to keep residents safe.

We have seen that all levels of government need to be involved to ensure effective responses, which requires adequate funding to implement. With the Yukon's climate continuing to change, we may find that our fire seasons continue to be more severe and require additional resources. In keeping with environmental and climate-related expenses, we are also proposing a \$1.1-million increase to the Department of Highways and Public Works budget for emergency washout and flood relief efforts.

Before I move on to O&M, I want to quickly draw attention to a few other items included in the first supplementary estimates. In the Department of Education, we are proposing a \$763,000 increase for enhanced French first language programming in Dawson City through the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon as well as \$927,000 for other French language programs, which is 100-percent recoverable.

We will also see \$1 million added to the Department of Economic Development's budget to create a temporary assistance program for Yukon landlords to support a stable supply of rental units.

Finally, within the Executive Council Office, we are proposing several smaller but no less important increases. Approximately \$1.4 million will provide funding to support multiple reconciliation commitments with Yukon First Nation governments. This includes \$1 million to support consultation and engagement, bilateral negotiations, and implementation of agreements. It also includes \$330,000 for the Council of Yukon First Nations to commemorate the 50th anniversary of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*.

With these outlined changes to O&M expenses, there are also several notable changes to recoveries, which I have not yet mentioned.

As with expenses, the most significant changes to O&M recoveries are within the Department of Health and Social Services. \$7.3 million is included as new recoveries as part of an agreement with the federal government that will see funding directed toward the Yukon substance use health emergency strategy and the supervised consumption site.

The Yukon government will also receive \$3.2 million as recoverable funding under the federal proof of vaccination fund for the development of the territory's proof of vaccination credential system.

We also see \$3.3 million in federal recoveries for carry-over amounts from the 2022-23 territorial health investment fund agreement, or THIF for short.

Finally, the Department of Community Services will see \$2.1 million in recoverable funding as part of Wildland Fire Management for the export of staff who were dispatched to help in other jurisdictions.

I am also pleased to say that many of the expenses that I have covered in the last few minutes are able to be absorbed by the Government of Yukon's \$50-million contingency fund. As part of the first supplementary estimates, we are proposing to exhaust the fund to cover unanticipated expenses for the fiscal year. The breakdown of initiatives covered by the fund account for nearly \$50 million, and they are as follows: \$25 million to go toward Faro mine maintenance; \$19.6 million to be used for wildland fire expenses; \$1.2 million will cover costs for evacuees related to wildfires in the territory; \$1.1 million is included in the fund for emergency washouts and flood relief efforts; and \$1.9 million will be directed toward the substance use health emergency response.

I will now speak to changes in capital as part of the bill. We evaluate capital budgets on an ongoing basis to determine if and when and where we can improve the efficiency of capital spending in alignment with the territory's capital infrastructure

needs. These adjustments are reflected periodically in the latest iteration of the five-year capital plan.

The supplementary estimates also provide a chance to respond to new and emerging opportunities. As part of these revisions, on a gross basis, we are not proposing any increases on capital spending; on an individual basis, however, we are making necessary adjustments to several projects. Most notably, we are including \$21.4 million for the Skagway marine service platform. We are currently engaged with the Municipality of Skagway on the construction of an ore export terminal for Yukon mining companies as part of the municipality's port redevelopment project. This is an important project to secure long-term tidewater access for the Yukon's mineral industry. It also helps to promote Yukon's position as a significant jurisdiction contributing to Canada's supply chain security and also green energy targets, critical minerals goals, and so much more.

As a result of this funding opportunity, the Government of Yukon has identified other projects that may be progressing at varying stages of development to accommodate this project without any gross changes to the capital program. The first supplementary estimates include a reduction across several departments that is reflective of uptake to various programs, updated timelines, and progress on various capital projects.

There are also additional full-time-equivalent positions as part of the supplementary estimates; 69.5 FTEs are proposed as part of this bill, which will help meet government's commitments in several areas. Forty FTEs are included as a reflection of a commitment announced in August toward building a strong, resilient future by investing in students' academics, wellness, and cultural needs and beliefs in prioritizing the mental wellness and well-being of school-aged Yukoners across the territory. As part of that commitment and the ongoing work to reimagine inclusive and special education, the Government of Yukon is investing significantly in student well-being and learning. This includes the addition of 81 new full-time student support positions over the next three years. These new positions will include school wellness counsellors, education assistants, and learning assistance teachers who will be hired from 2023 to 2026. In addition, three FTEs are included for enhanced French first language programs in Dawson City.

We are also proposing to increase six FTEs as part of the Yukon substance use health emergency strategy, as well as 3.5 FTEs in assisting in managing the supervised consumption site and two FTEs as part of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*.

Lastly, 13.7 FTEs will support the implementation of the bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. The bilateral nature agreement establishes the framework for the protection, conservation, and recovery of biodiversity, habitat, and species at risk in Yukon.

I am pleased to report that these supplementary estimates include an increase in revenues of \$18.7 million, mostly from increases in grants and transfers from the Government of Canada. The jump in revenues includes an increase of \$15 million, which represents the Yukon's share of an

agreement with Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to support affordable housing and related infrastructure in the Yukon.

This is the second instalment of a \$30-million grant announced by the Government of Canada in their 2022 budget. The Government of Yukon received the first \$15 million in 2022-23. It also includes \$2.3 million added to the Canada health transfer to address critical needs in hospitals in the north. Revenues from personal income are also expected to go up by \$3.2 million because of higher wages built into the collective agreement with the Yukon Employees' Union. Finally, taxes from tobacco have decreased by \$1.8 million to reflect decreasing rates of tobacco use.

Finally, Madam Chair, I am proud to say that we have released an interim fiscal and economic update to coincide with the 2023-24 first supplementary estimates. I think it took some people in the media by surprise. I'm not sure why. Overall, it shows that the Yukon's economy remains healthy three-quarters of the way through 2023. Tourists have returned in numbers not seen before the pandemic, and there are also strong opportunities for employment as demand for workers remains strong.

Seeing as I am running out of time, I will leave it at that for now, and I will check through my notes to make sure that if there is any other extremely important information pertinent to this conversation, I will include it in my first response from members opposite.

I want to thank you, Madam Chair, for the time today.

Mr. Cathers: I would note that I will be relatively short in my remarks and questions here in general debate since I have already spoken to this at second reading and due to the fact that, unlike in recent years with the current government, we do see most departments having appropriations in the budget bill, so we will ask questions regarding those departments and corporations at the time when they appear here instead of having to address them in general debate.

I would just note, in response to the Finance minister's comments during his speech, a couple of corrections. One, he made reference to roughly \$20 million in Faro mine maintenance from the contingency fund. I believe he meant to refer to the Minto mine in that situation. The second correction is related to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. I would remind the minister that, although he referred to those costs as — quote: "unanticipated costs". As I noted at second reading, the Minister of Health and Social Services acknowledged, after repeated questions from me during the spring on April 6, that some of the Yukon Hospital Corporation's core budget requests for the 2023-24 fiscal year — quote: "... had not yet been approved by Management Board." That is found in Hansard on page 3493 from April 6 of this year.

Again, as I noted earlier in debate, considering that we knew, as we heard from the CEO of the Hospital Corporation, that their core funding needs for the previous fiscal year were \$103.5 million, as he told this House on November 22, 2022, it was simply not plausible that the hospital would need \$10 million less for the current fiscal year, which, of course, is what is found on page 13-4 of the main estimates for this

current fiscal year, which allocates \$93.6 million for Yukon hospital services.

Again, just a correction for the Finance minister — that request would have come in prior to the start of the current fiscal year and shouldn't be characterized as unanticipated costs, but we are pleased to see that the hospital is receiving that \$14.9 million in necessary core funding as well as amounts to address pension solvency, which, of course, meets the obligations of the federal regulator.

I would note, as well — just to briefly recap my remarks from second reading — that we continue to be concerned about the trajectory of spending with the Liberal government continuing to take the territory further into the red with net debt, as well as to see that the annual surplus for the current fiscal year has declined significantly. The operation and maintenance spending has increased by \$132.7 million. According to the information in the interim fiscal and economic update provided by government, that increase of \$132.7 million brings it to \$1.59 billion in O&M spending for the current fiscal year — quote: "... reflecting a 9.1 per cent increase from Budget 2023-24." So, that is quite a significant increase from the spring, Madam Chair, since it's not just an increase over the previous fiscal year, but again, as stated in the government's own document, it's a 9.1-percent increase from budget 2023-24.

We are concerned by the trajectory in spending. As I noted earlier at second reading, we are also concerned that, while we see some spending on areas that we regard as either wasteful for a very low priority for Yukoners — one of the famous examples being the ripping up and repaving of the parking lot outside this building at a cost of \$2.7 million and the infamous digital signs over the highways that are so unpopular with many Yukoners — we also see other areas that are neglected. That includes the lack of funding for addictions treatment. This government, some 20-plus months after declaring a substance use emergency, is only now finally starting to allocate increased resources for addictions treatment. We see a continued lack of funding for the RCMP. The money has not grown to keep up even with the growth of the Yukon population, not to mention the growth of organized crime and drug dealing connected with the illegal drug trade, which we have heard from the RCMP — in an update that they provided last summer, they indicated that organized crime encompassed at least 250 individuals and five networks, both in and out of the territory. Of course, Madam Chair, that is directly connected to the impact that we see in terms of opioid use and fatalities due to opioid use — where the Yukon sadly has the worst rate of fatalities in the entire country.

As noted on previous occasions, but it does need to be emphasized, we have also heard specific requests from governments in rural Yukon for increased police resources in their communities. That includes the request made both by the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun First Nation and the Village of Mayo for increased police resources in their area. They have yet to see that increase, Madam Chair, and the request made by the Municipality of Watson Lake for increased resources there, and again, they have yet to see that increase.

We have also seen, unfortunately, a decline in certain areas of highway maintenance as well as the capital maintenance on those roads. That has been both evident in dealing with the delay in responding to snowfall incidents, such as the one we saw recently, and the fact that we continue to hear concerns from Yukoners about the state of Yukon highways, whether it be the Klondike Highway or the Dempster Highway or roads such as Takhini River Road — where, again, I continue to hear from constituents on a regular basis about the state of that road, especially after a heavy precipitation event. I understand that there was an incident last week where a horse trailer spun out on the one large hill that could have resulted in a much worse outcome, and as well, I have just received another photo from constituents of the poor condition of that road, which is home to hundreds of Yukon families — so, again, just a few of the many examples of where there are real needs and priorities of Yukoners that are not being addressed by this Liberal government despite the record spending that they are engaging in.

Of course, my colleague the Member for Kluane brought the issue of the Liberal government's insistence on shutting down garbage transfer stations in rural Yukon to the House again. It is disappointing how consistently, despite repeated calls from rural Yukon to keep those garbage transfer stations open, those pleas fall on deaf ears with this Liberal government, and the Minister of Community Services keeps trying to blame it on the Association of Yukon Communities — or now today, he blamed his predecessor, when there is a much simpler answer, which is simply listening to the requests of Yukoners and keeping those basic services open for rural Yukoners.

And I would be remiss if I didn't note, as well — as I mentioned at second reading — that we have seen within the last year the very serious situation of rural health centres being closed due to lack of staff. By the Minister of Health and Social Services' own admission, the rural nursing vacancies reached almost 50 percent. As I noted at second reading, while we are pleased that the government this year did finally commit to developing a health human resources strategy — for which we had been championing the need for years — it is unfortunate that it is not until rural nursing vacancies reached that crisis level of almost 50-percent vacancy before the government finally saw the need to act and to listen to health professionals and to ourselves on behalf of Yukoners recognizing that need. So, Madam Chair, those are just a few of many areas.

In the interest of time, I will keep the list short for the moment, but I do have some specific questions for the minister related to the budget that I hope he can provide information on. The Minister of Finance has, on previous occasions, often urged us to refer to the Public Accounts for any given year to understand the government's current long-term debt situation as well as borrowing costs. The Public Accounts, though, for those who are not familiar, are released about 19 months after the end of a fiscal year, so they reflect a point in time, and by the point when this Legislative Assembly sees that information, that point in time is over a year and a half past.

Rising interest rates and the spikes from both the Bank of Canada and lending institutions have created serious challenges

for people, for individuals, for businesses, as well as for governments both in Canada and beyond. It is relevant for people to understand what is happening at the current point in time, not just a year and a half ago.

My two questions for the minister relate to, first of all, a previous Sitting where he indicated that the government is regularly engaging in short-term borrowing through departments to cover payroll costs. Can the minister indicate what the current amount of those borrowings has been to date for the fiscal year and what is anticipated for the remainder of the fiscal year, as well as the interest charges associated with that?

Secondly, can the minister indicate what the government's current long-term debt situation is? So, not long-term debt from over a year and a half ago — but what is the current long-term debt position, as well as how much in interest charges is the government expecting to pay for that debt this fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I appreciate the member opposite correcting the record in my reference to Faro. So, sorry to Hansard — I meant to say "Minto". If you heard me say "Faro" anywhere, replace that with "Minto". I appreciate that from the member opposite.

I don't think I misspoke when it comes to the Yukon Hospital Corporation funding. I know that the member opposite has a particular vent on this particular issue and it has been debated by me and also the minister responsible for a long time. Again, in preparing for today, we prepare with all agencies to make sure that what I am saying is accurate. I don't think I misspoke when it came to the Yukon Hospital Corporation — definitely did when I said Faro, though, that's for sure.

I will also point out that, in 2023-24, we are providing \$108.5 million in operation funding to the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which is an increase of 20 percent over last year. This funding includes \$93.6 million allocated in the 2023-24 main estimates and an additional \$14.9 million, which I spoke about in this supplementary estimate, to address those emerging pressures in our health care system. This funding increase has supported the hospital core funding needs as well as the development of new programs and services.

Between 2017-18 to now — 2023-24 — operating funding has increased from \$70.6 million to \$108.5 million, which is an increase of 54 percent. We are also providing \$12.26 million in capital funding in 2023-24, as identified in the main estimates, which will help to ensure that the Hospital Corporation has necessary infrastructure in place to care for Yukoners.

A couple more statistics for the members — we are also allocating \$2.3 million to the Hospital Corporation through the supplementary estimates to support the pension solvency payment required under the federal regulations. This funding will promote a smooth transition when the new health authority is established by ensuring that the hospital pensions are adequately funded.

Also, we have a \$2.9-million increase from the mains now to implement the 1Health programming. This is a modernized health information system that will very much improve care across the Yukon by enabling timely and secure access to medical records.

Madam Chair, we have had this conversation before with the member opposite about Public Accounts. Public Accounts are a great encapsulation of the final numbers as they get completely scrutinized — rightfully so — with the Office of the Auditor General. They represent a comprehensive plan when it comes to the spending of what we said we were going to spend to where the final numbers come out. I don't recall the Yukon Party providing spoiler alerts for their Public Accounts, so I will not do that either. I will respect the process that is in place when it comes to the finalization of those numbers.

We talked a bit here about net debt. The 2022-23 main estimates projected \$374.8 million in net debt on a non-consolidated best basis. The *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* forecast revised that to \$423.8 million and the change in that net debt is based upon a few factors — one being the \$105.9-million increase to the net O&M spending, which we are debating on the floor of the Legislative Assembly and through the departments as they appear here in Committee of the Whole, a \$5.8-million increase in net capital spending, and a \$6-million increase related to accounting adjustments. These impacts were partially offset by an \$18.7-million increase in revenues and the use of the \$50-million contingency fund.

Net debt — I feel obligated to explain — is measured by a government's ability to pay all its liabilities if they were due immediately. This is why it's considered a debt — a ratio — because that is something that is not going to happen. The majority of the net debt is for long-term liabilities that will not materialize all at once — for example, severance entitlements. When we are looking at Yukon's net-debt-to-GDP ratio — you know, this anchor — the territory is among the lowest in the country. The higher the ratio, the longer it will take for a government to return to a net financial asset position.

In Yukon, our forecast net-debt-to-GDP ratio for the 2022-23 fiscal year is 7.7 percent, and for 2023-24, it is 9.6 percent. The 2023-24 forecast is up from the budget figures of 8.5 percent, with an increase due to higher than anticipated net debt for 2023-24 and also a downward revision of the forecast in nominal GDP for 2023. I mentioned that a bit in my opening comments and that was related to the closure of Minto mine in May.

Even with the increase in the current net-debt-to-GDP ratio for 2023-24, it still compares extremely favourably, compared to our peers right across the country, and is significantly — significantly — lower than many jurisdictions. We will continue to actively monitor and review our financial position, as it relates to the management of government operations, and will do that in a timely fashion. This allows us to plan ahead and to ensure sustainable and effective capital spending to make sure that we are meeting our infrastructure needs, as we did during the pandemic. You know, that was an extremely important time for government to take care — working with the community, working with the business partners, and making sure that we stayed open as much as possible, but knowing full well that a business that is being asked to be open at 50 percent needs some financial help from its government — and the taxpayer dollars that we are on the till of.

I still have some more things to say about borrowing and a little bit more on the investments that we have done in the Yukon — spending on roads, bridges, schools, health facilities — to grow our economy and to provide the vital public services, but I will leave it at that for now, and then we can switch over to the second part of that conversation — borrowing — when I get to respond to the member opposite again.

Mr. Cathers: Again, I do have to correct the Minister of Finance regarding the issue of hospital funding. As I noted in the spring, it simply is not plausible that the hospital's core O&M funding needs were going to drop by \$10 million compared to the last fiscal year, and the chronic underfunding by the Liberal government during its time in office of our hospital's needs continues to be a concern for me, and they can be assured that I will continue to raise it until I don't need to raise that issue.

I would also remind the Minister of Finance, in citing some of the numbers regarding funding to the Hospital Corporation, that, at times, he was mixing O&M and capital, and in going back a number of years in time, he glossed over the fact that the new emergency department opened after that point in time that he referred to. There were very large O&M costs associated with opening that new facility, but I won't spend a lot more time on that here today. We have covered it in detail in previous Sittings, and we will return to it as necessary.

I am pleased that the \$14.9 million in funding that the hospital had requested for their core funding has been provided and look forward to having the opportunity to ask witnesses in the Hospital Corporation about their current needs when they next appear in this Assembly, which I hope will be this fall.

With regard to the issue of the Public Accounts and long-term debt and borrowing costs, what the Finance minister is dancing away from is the fact that the situation has changed dramatically in Canada, compared to previous decades. We are dealing with the highest interest rates that we have faced in many decades here in this country, and, therefore, the costs associated with both short-term borrowing and long-term debt directly become an increasingly relevant budget consideration that, if — the government has the legal ability to share that information with members, based on its most current understanding, at any point in time, Madam Chair. They can legally get away with not providing us a more recent update than one from over a year and a half ago, but that is not in keeping with transparency for the public.

I would urge the Minister of Finance to talk to the Premier and his colleagues about this. I am sure I am not going to get a different answer this afternoon, but I would urge the government to provide it, as quickly as possible, because it is very relevant information from a budgeting perspective on what the short-term borrowing is looking like for the current fiscal year, as well as the interest costs that are expected to be associated with short-term borrowing to cover payroll and other matters, and secondly, what the current long-term debt is — not the long-term debt from over a year and a half ago — and how much the interest charges on that are expected to cost this fiscal year.

I am guessing that I am not going to get a different answer from the Minister of Finance here this afternoon on that, but I would encourage him to talk to his colleagues and to come back with that information, instead of choosing not to share it with Members of the Legislative Assembly and the public.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I will just agree to disagree with the member opposite as far as openness and transparency, as the member opposite sits out of government, asking us to do something that they would never contemplate and then saying that it is us being less transparent. It's an interesting way of presenting today, but I am just not going to take that bait. I'm going to go back into the concepts.

We still hear from the member opposite a blending-in here of net debt compared to debt borrowing, or debt, and there should be no confusion between the two. Our current borrowing limit — if we were to borrow — is \$800 million. That is set by regulations under the *Yukon Act*, which is federal legislation. The limit was increased by the Government of Canada in September 2020 from \$400 million to \$800 million. At that time, the member opposite was very concerned about that increase, yet their government increased it several times in the past.

The bulk of the current total external debt is \$216.4 million, as reported in the 2021-22 Public Accounts, and that's held by — these should not be any surprise to the member opposite, because almost every one of these debts are from the Yukon Party borrowing back in the past before our government — the Yukon Development Corporation, \$143.4 million; Yukon Hospital Corporation, \$22.6 million; Yukon Housing Corporation, \$1.3 million; and also, the university of \$1 million. Current borrowing of \$216.4 million — which is just over 27 percent of the limit — leaves \$583.6 million of the available borrowing limit authorized by the federal government, which demonstrates adequate borrowing room for the near future.

Again, we do recognize that, if there was an opportunity to invest certain monies for certain projects working on energy futures, working on a lot of different files, as we modernize the government and come into compliance and continue to create a modern government, there will be times in the future where we will have to consider a long-term debt, but to alleviate some of those concerns, you are not going to see any of those right now. We would be debating them in this budget if we had any of those considerations currently.

We do borrow periodically; that is for sure, and most of the debt that we have on our books right now is from the Yukon Party. We do have financial instruments that provide lines of credit, for example, and I don't mind getting into some of those conversations with the member opposite. We can talk about that, but, again, the member opposite continues, for all these debates, to push an agenda or push a theme that might not necessarily be completely accurate, including starting with, when the borrowing limit went up to \$800 million, that right away, we were going to rush to increasing that debt, which did not come to fruition.

I think I will just leave it at that unless the member opposite has any specific questions. We could go back and forth about

our differences of opinion on certain things, which is fine, but I will keep it specifically to some of the questions asked and will get back to the member opposite with any other information that I missed today, if it is information that is in the public domain already.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*?

Seeing none, we will proceed to departmental debate.

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 53, Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Energy, Mines and Resources

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Chair, I would like to begin by welcoming Deputy Minister Lauren Haney — this is her first time in the Assembly — and also Assistant Deputy Minister Patricia Randell from Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships. It is not her first time in the Assembly, but it is her first time here with Energy, Mines and Resources. So, welcome to them.

Just a few opening remarks on the budget and then looking forward to getting into questions and answers. Overall, there is an increase of just over \$33 million to the operation and maintenance budget, bringing 2023-24 budget from \$82 million to \$115.4 million for Energy, Mines and Resources. This increase is primarily due to the changes in our Mineral Resources and Geoscience Services division, and really, this is all about Minto mine — roughly \$25 million for reclamation and closure of Minto mine.

Under our main divisions, all of them have had increases due to the collective agreement. I won't list those off, but I will mention a couple of other things. Under Mineral Resources, I said \$25 million for Minto. There are also increases due to the collective agreement. Under our Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships, there is an increase of about \$6.5 million and this is largely due to the — I am still going to call it the "low carbon fund", but it is a low carbon economy leadership fund, and the \$6 million that is in here is 75-percent recoverable from Canada.

There is no change to our capital budget, but overall, I just want to say that there is a significant role that the department continues to take in leading actions under *Our Clean Future* and ensuring ongoing health, safety, and environmental protection at the Minto mine.

I just want to give a shout out to the teams of various branches at Energy, Mines and Resources: Assessment and Abandoned Mines, Compliance Monitoring and Inspections, our Energy branch, forestry branch, geothermal, the Land Management branch, planning, our minerals group, Yukon Geological Survey, and the small and mighty corporate group which includes IT, communications, Human Resources, policy, and finance. Overall, the department has been doing great work over the summer. I commend them for their work, and I look forward to answering questions of the members opposite.

Mr. Kent: Madam Chair, I would like to welcome the officials here today and thank them for the briefing they provided on Friday to my colleague the Member for Lake Laberge and staff from our office. I was out of the territory for personal reasons and unable to attend, but I did receive the notes and the notes that were taken. We will be touching on some of the issues with respect to the supplementary budget, as well as looking for updates on other topics as we move throughout debate on Energy, Mines and Resources.

I just wanted to ask the minister about a couple of constituency-specific questions — one for myself and one for the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin. I will ask the one for my colleague from Pelly-Nisutlin first, and that is with respect to the Lone Tree development area regulation. There was an OIC made effective on September 7, 2023. This is a subdivision near the community of Teslin, on the lake side of the Alaska Highway. I am just curious if the minister is able to, at this time, give us an update on timelines. I know that the roadwork and I believe the survey has been completed on those lots. I am just curious about the timelines for those lots going out to some sort of public process and what price has been set for those lots.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We did work in partnership with the Teslin Tlingit Council to create zoning for the Lone Tree residential development near Teslin. It is to provide, I think, roughly 40 new residential lots. I am just checking in with the department on the timeline. The price is generally set. I think we are bound by either the market price or the price of development, so I will check to see which one of those it is. We still have to do the subdivision next. I am just getting a note that we think it will be early next year for the lot sales, so the subdivision is the next step in that process.

Mr. Kent: If my colleague from Pelly-Nisutlin has any further questions, I will follow up with the minister or have him follow up directly with the minister on the timelines and hopefully we will be able to get a response as to whether the price is to be set at market or development costs or some sort of a mixture, if that's possible.

I just have one other quick constituency question. This one is from my constituency of Copperbelt South as well as the minister's constituency of Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes. This is with respect to the Golden Horn area development regulations. The minister will recall that, in a previous Sitting, we brought forward a petition from a number of residents with respect to the minimum lot size. I know that there was a favourable response from the minister. The department hosted an open house at the Golden Horn fire hall and presented some of the information around it. I was able to attend. I appreciated

that, and the officials did a great job at that open house, but I am just curious if the minister could give us a status update of where this is at. I know that there is some affected First Nation engagement that has to take place — or perhaps has already taken place — so I am just looking for a status update from the minister on that particular file.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We did go out and talk with the folks at Golden Horn. This was about checking in with them about their local area plan because, under it, the subdivisions are only supposed to get as small as, I believe, three hectares. There was a question about whether they should go to a two-hectare model. We went out and had a public meeting. We also did a survey and it came back exactly split, so half of the respondents said to keep it at three and half of the respondents said to make the change. I think we are going to reach out again because we felt it didn't give us a clear direction. I actually just had a meeting this morning, talking it over. I will make sure to include the member opposite, but I think the general plan will be to just have a community meeting, let them know that this is exactly what we heard, and then come with a game plan about how we should proceed. We might look to check back in again with folks and just get our survey down to one simple question and just see whether or not we can get clarity because it was exactly 50/50. That left us in a position that we didn't yet want to proceed without checking in further with the neighbours.

Mr. Kent: On that specific consultation, normally there is a "what we heard" document produced. Has that been produced in this specific case?

Then there's a committee. Obviously, the committee did a lot of the leg work or all of the leg work in getting the petition signed and has been doing the back-and-forth with the officials in the department. I am just curious if there have been any communications with members of the committee that advanced this proposal on behalf of residents there.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I saw a draft of the "what we heard" document. I saw that the results were split completely. I reached back to the department and said that we would need to come up with a strategy to follow up with the folks who brought forward the petition and the residents. I have not reached back out to people yet. We were just in the process of releasing the document — and we will get it out to people — but I asked the department to come up with a strategy about how to follow up given that there was such a split in it. I will check in to see whether there has been conversation with the residents and the committee about whether they had gotten a peek at what those numbers were. But this may be coming as news to the committee members, and we are just developing how to respond and get that information into everybody's hands. I want to say thanks to everybody that provided their feedback, but because it was so divided, I asked that we find another ability to check in with the neighbours.

Mr. Kent: I, too, will share our exchange here this afternoon with members of the committee and I am sure that they will reach out to their department contacts going forward. It's my understanding that there hasn't been very much communication back and forth since that public meeting and the minister explained the circumstances around it here today.

I did want to dig in on some mining-related issues now as well. I am able to find the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board annual report for 2021 online. Can the minister let us know if that is the most recent annual report, or is there a 2022 annual report that perhaps I am looking for in the wrong spot or can't find online?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will just check in with the member opposite to be sure that I'm getting this right. The last one that I think I tabled here in the Assembly — or that was published, anyway — was 2021-22. I do have a draft of the 2022-23 report. We were lining up our tabling for this session, so I had anticipated tabling it at some point during the session here. I will just check to make sure that this is the report that he is asking about.

Mr. Kent: Yes, the most recent one that I can find is the 2021 annual report. It looks like it's largely based on the recommendations of the PricewaterhouseCoopers report. There were about 10 recommendations on there, so I guess I have a question for the minister as well. Previously, the practice was to table the report in the Spring Sitting for the previous year. His predecessor went away from that normal practice, so I'm curious if the minister is contemplating getting it back to that sort of a schedule where the previous year's report is tabled in the Spring Sitting of the Legislative Assembly. So, that would mean that in this past spring, we would have seen the 2022 report tabled then.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will have to look back to see when the Minerals Advisory Board got me the draft of their report. When I get the report, I will do my best to table it. My recollection is that this spring we were focusing as a board on the situation around Minto. That took a lot of the board's time, in terms of providing advice, so I will check on what the timing is of it, but I think that — I am happy to try to table reports as they are ready. If the fault is with me, I will make sure to correct it.

Mr. Kent: Yes, I look forward to — I think that the minister committed to letting us know when he received that 2022 report from the Minerals Advisory Board, and then, if there is an opportunity, as well — perhaps he doesn't know here today, but we would be interested to see why his predecessor abandoned that previous practice, if there was some sort of a reason, or if YMAB was just late getting the reports in. Again, they were normally tabled in the Legislature in the Spring Sitting of the Assembly. I will look forward to getting those responses from the minister.

I just have a couple of quick questions now with respect to Gladiator Metals. The minister would be aware of the company that is currently conducting class 1 exploration work on their Cowley Park property, which I believe is located in the minister's riding and is in close proximity to constituents of mine, as well, particularly in Mary Lake and Cowley Creek. I know that I sent the minister a letter with respect to this, and he did respond to me, so I thank him for that, but I just wanted to get some of those issues on the record here in the Assembly today.

I am just curious if the minister can tell Yukoners on the floor of the Assembly here today, with respect to inspection

reports for class 1 activity — there was a specific inspection report for Gladiator on their Cowley Park that went public through social media. That sort of prompted me to write the minister to see if there was an opportunity for him to publish class 1 inspection reports, so perhaps I will give him an opportunity to answer that question. Is that an option, that class 1 inspection reports and schedules be published online — similar, I guess, to what the Water Board does with their *Waterline*?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: This will be for all Yukoners but in particular for the Member for Copperbelt South's constituents. We wrote back — I'm trying to recall whether I shared with others who wrote to me — but class 1 inspection reports are available from the mining recorder's office upon request. In this case, it would be the Whitehorse mining recorder's office.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: Disagreed.

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Kent: I guess, in the media and obviously in reports with respect to Gladiator Metals, there were some charges filed, and a fine was levied against the company. The company has paid it, but since that time, they have undertaken class 1 activities on their Cowley Park claims.

So, I am just curious if the minister can tell us or share with us if there have been any further inspections done since the class 1 activity has restarted on those Cowley Park claims — and the results of those inspections, if he is able to share them.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am informed that we have inspectors going out more than once a week and taking a look. They write up a report roughly once a month based on that, but they also will flag into the department if there are concerns that have been identified. I have not received any reports of those concerns to this date. Basically, there is nothing in front of me that gives me any indication of ongoing concerns or further concerns, and I am also advised that there is one mining inspector who has been tasked with taking the lead on this file so that there is some consistency across those inspections.

Mr. Kent: Again, last week, while I was away on personal business, I know that the NDP gave notice of a motion with respect to creating an act around notification on class 1 activities. I am just curious if the minister can answer: Is that something that would be covered, in this case, in the *Quartz Mining Act* or in the *Placer Mining Act* review, or would that be something that would require a stand-alone act?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We are currently redoing the entirety of the quartz and placer acts from the ground up, and the public will know about this because we have been out there engaging with them, but, in particular, it was agreed to under the devolution transfer agreement to rewrite successor legislation, which is all of our resource legislation, so we started with forestry. We are currently working on the quartz and placer acts and also have a table going on the lands legislation. All of this is looking to work in partnership with First Nation governments to develop a Yukon-made approach to mining in the territory. It will include, for example, classes of licences. It

will include how we make decisions, how we do compliance, how we plan security — all of that is part of it.

Mr. Kent: My understanding is that those types of issues identified in the NDP motion for a stand-alone act would be captured in the ongoing review of the *Quartz Mining Act* and the *Placer Mining Act*. Obviously, I will have a few questions about the status of those reviews, but just to close the loop on the Gladiator Metals issue, it was last fall, I believe, that the Yukon government undertook a consultation on mining in the municipalities. It closed, I believe, in October of last year. A “what we heard” document was due to be produced. I was unable to find it prior to the Sitting online. I am just curious if the minister could give us an update on the status of that “what we heard” document or the status of the work with respect to mining in municipalities.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I am just asking the department to check on the “what we heard” document and to track that down. I am not sure. I will have to look into that.

The next step that I think we are coming to is a framework on best practices for mining activities in our communities. I was expecting that framework to come in front of me sometime later this fall or early winter. I think we will have that framework ready by the end of 2023 and that will give us direction for mining activities within our Yukon communities.

Mr. Kent: So, I guess, you know, obviously, we are a year past the close of consultation, so I’m hoping that we can see some sort of “what we heard” document and plan for proceeding with respect to this work. The minister will have access to it as well on engageyukon.ca, which is where I found the information and, of course, I followed the consultation piece when it was underway as well.

I do want to ask some questions now about the Minto mine and the government’s role in reclamation and closure. Some of these questions will have been covered at the briefing, but I wanted to get the minister on the record here with respect to what’s happening.

The surety bond, which is held by Zurich — can the minister give us a sense of when we can expect the reimbursements to start on that? Obviously, there has already been an expenditure from the Government of Yukon on — sort of site care and maintenance. But I’m curious when the first reimbursement is expected from the surety bond with respect to the Minto property.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The \$75 million or so in security — roughly \$3 million of that was cash and \$72 million was a surety bond held by Zurich Capstone. We have been working with them to issue invoices. We issued our first invoice several weeks ago. I think the timing on that invoice was roughly a month, so we have a week or so left until that invoice is due. We are anticipating now that this is starting to flow that we will be invoicing more regularly — on a monthly basis is what is anticipated — and all of that is for work that we are doing toward reclamation and closure.

Mr. Kent: Can the minister tell us how much has been spent so far on the care and maintenance aspects? Obviously, water treatment is a big aspect of the work that has been underway so far, so I am just curious how much has been spent

so far. And will that amount for this care and maintenance be coming from the \$75 million in bonding that the company has?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The last numbers that I have for the total costs spent to date are \$8.8 million. Those numbers change daily, so I want to be a little bit careful. We are spending money. Just a reminder that we stepped in right away with the mine to make sure that we were protecting the environment the right way. We did quite a bit of work, considering how things had happened with Wolverine and where we wanted to get to differently with Minto.

Those first steps, as you come in — I think that the team was up and running within 24 hours or had some of the previous contractors back up and running within 24 hours — were really about making sure that we were doing water treatment and that we were going to make it through freshet well, which happened, so that is very good news.

Those initial steps, which some people would refer to as “care and maintenance”, are all also the same initial steps that you would take as part of your reclamation and closure plan. We have been very clear that, all along, we are using the security that is there to deal with reclamation and closure. That is the path that we are on at the moment. I will have to check, but you can say that the lion’s share of all costs to date have been around reclamation and closure and they are part of what went in on our first invoice. Of course, it went in not quite a month ago, and it was for a period of time prior to that, so I think it was for \$5.7 million — or in and around that number — for the first invoice.

The money spent to date, by and large, is on reclamation and closure, and it has really been doing several things: protecting the environment; making sure that we are reducing the liability of the mine site itself to drop the risk, and that’s really about water treatment primarily; supporting the Selkirk First Nation and their position, and I could talk about that if there are questions about that; and finally, trying to make sure that we are supportive of the ability for the mine to be sold. Again, that is working with the Selkirk First Nation on that front. At all times, our actions are consistent with the approved reclamation and closure plan.

Pardon me, Deputy Chair; I will just correct myself. I said “\$5.7 million” earlier. The number is \$5.46 million.

Mr. Kent: When the current owners left the property, as the minister mentioned, there was a quick response from the government. They put in place a contract with JDS Energy and Mining at the time. I know that the contract has now expired and there is a new contract in place with a different contractor. I am just wondering: Was that an invitational contract or was it a direct award?

I can’t find either the JDS or the new contract on the contract registry, so that’s why I’m asking the minister now. What are the terms of the new contract — how long is it for, and what is the value of that contract?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just going back for a moment to the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board, we received the print version of that in July of this year.

With respect to the contracts, we have been using direct award under the emergency provision of the procurement

policy, which is really about trying to make sure that the environment is protected. That is what we have been doing, so contracts to support this work include JDS Energy and Mining for interim water management of \$6.9 million. That contract, as the member opposite noted, is now completed. We have Boreal Engineering, which is contracted from September of this year through to post freshet. I think that the closing date is July. I will have to check on that date, but that's for \$11.6 million. We also have a contract for BQE Water for water treatment that is a little over \$1.9 million and Ensero Solutions for water monitoring at just under \$1.3 million. Those are the four contracts that I have information on right now.

Pardon me, Deputy Chair; the contract for Boreal goes to the end of May 2024.

Mr. Kent: The minister had mentioned \$72 million in a surety bond and \$3 million in cash, so that is \$75 million in total, but I know that was less than what was required. The company was short on reclamation. Can the minister just confirm the amount that they were short on the reclamation bond in place?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: When we first issued the new call for security for Minto, I think that the shortfall was \$18 million. However, as we worked with them during that period of time — so they were under a different level of inspection as we worked with them, because they didn't have the \$18 million at the time, but they worked to bring on more water treatment. So, what was happening was that they took steps — rather than furnishing dollars — to reduce the risk around closure and thus were bringing it down that way.

They also were paying in over time. So, I will have to ask the department to give me some analysis about where they thought the shortfall ended up, but it certainly was not \$18 million. I know that much. I know it was much, much less than that, but I will work to try to get some assessment of where it left off at the point when Minto closed.

Also, I should indicate to the House that, under the \$75 million that we have for the reclamation and closure, we have a reclamation plan in place, and we have been working to execute, based on that plan — sorry — the finances that we have against the plan that we have in place. There is still some uncertainty with it, but we have been taking significant steps toward that, and it is working to do the reclamation and closure with the dollars at hand. You know, there is still uncertainty out there, so I'm not able to say today that we know that is enough funds, but I do know that the team at EMR and the contractors working on it are looking to execute based on the resources that we have to reclaim.

Mr. Kent: That would have been my next question, with respect to what we were told at the briefing last week, which was the project execution plan, which I think the minister was just referring to. At the time, it said it was in process and it would lead to reclamation. I'm just wondering if the minister can give us an idea of when that project execution plan will be completed.

Then, we were also told at the briefing that the plan may be modified if there is a new owner. That is understandable, of course. I'm just curious if the minister can give us any update

on the receivership proceedings that are underway. Is there any sort of imminent deadlines that we should know about with respect to the receivership, or is that something that — or are there none that are pending with respect to the potential sale of the asset to a new owner?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There were a few questions in there. I will try to give as much information as I can, and if I have missed anything, the member could maybe just check in with me again.

First of all, with respect to PricewaterhouseCoopers, which is the receiver signed by the court for the Minto mine, there is a deadline of October 31 for binding bids to the receiver, so that's coming up at the end of the month.

With respect to the reclamation and closure plan, we are due to have our high-level plan to Zurich Capstone, the security bonding company, by November 30, and then we are to follow after that with a more detailed execution plan, which is about how the procurement will unfold, and that should be after that. I think it's early in 2024. I'm not exactly sure on the timing of that as of yet, but it will follow the high-level plan by November 30.

Mr. Kent: Just a final question about Minto — and obviously, we will be following some of the proceedings with respect to the sale and continue to ask questions about the bonding and the execution plan.

I am just curious about licences. Is there a water licence in place currently for the work that is being undertaken at Minto, and was that transferred from the company to the Yukon government when the Yukon government assumed control? What was the process with respect to the water licence for the Minto project?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Chair, there is a water licence, and currently that water licence will have transferred to the receiver — that is my understanding — in this case, PricewaterhouseCoopers. When the government stepped in, we used the emergency provisions under the *Waters Act* and the *Quartz Mining Act* in order to operate the water treatment that way.

That's the authority that we are using to do this work to make sure we protect the environment.

Mr. Kent: Just to clarify then with the minister — use the emergency procedures clause in the *Waters Act* for the water treatment when the Yukon government took over, but was there a water licence in place for that when the company was doing the water treatment? That is where I am just kind of trying to get a sense of where we are at — so I'm sorry if I misheard the minister when he was on his feet.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, when Minto was operating, they were operating under a water licence, which they had. For us, it was the emergency provisions — that is what I'm being told — under the *Waters Act* and the *Quartz Mining Act*.

Mr. Kent: Just to clarify one more thing, Minto had a water licence in place, but when the government took over responsibility for the site, they needed to use emergency provisions. The water licence was not transferable from the company to the government.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: That is correct.

Mr. Kent: Just while we are on the topic of licences, licensing, and permits — and this is with respect to the quartz mining and the hardrock properties — I just wanted to make sure that all necessary licences and permits were in place for all the operating hardrock mines in the territory at this time. If the minister is able to let me know, that would be great. Otherwise, I would accept that in a legislative return or he can come back with it.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: As far as I am aware, the department has indicated to me that all quartz mining operations have valid licences — water licences and quartz mining licences.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that from the minister.

Just a quick question — and I know that the board is a federal board and it may or may not be the minister's responsibility, but the YESA board has a number of vacancies and individuals whose appointments are expiring. I know that the industry is concerned — industry people whom I have talked to are concerned about this. Currently, there is an acting chair in place. One of the executive committee members — their appointment is expiring soon. There is another vacancy, I think, just for the regular board members and another expiration coming. I am just wondering if the minister has any indication from the federal government on when they will be filling those YESA board appointments because, as far as I can tell, sort of by later on in this final quarter of the calendar year, they may not have quorum on the board for their operation. I am just curious if the minister is following this file and if he can give us any update from the federal government on when those appointments will be made.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The lead on the file for YESAA is the Premier and the Executive Council Office. That is where most of our conversations happen with the federal government about appointments. I, of course, have talked with the Chamber of Mines. They have talked to me about the issue and its importance. I, of course, have relayed that on to the Premier and I know that the Premier is in dialogue with Canada to find out. I don't have any updates for the House today regarding the vacancies, but I know that we are aware of them and working to support the federal government in reaching a decision.

Mr. Kent: I do have some other questions for the minister. The mining intensity targets — can the minister give us an update on where the process is at with establishing the mining intensity targets for greenhouse gas emissions for mining companies — if he is able to give us an update on where that work is at and when we can expect to see it completed?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, the target is 45 percent by 2035. I just got some draft letters that are going out to the mining companies to make it formal, but we have been talking with them — and not just them, but to environmental groups — about this target for some time. That is still there and we will get those formal letters out.

The department is working on the next steps around that, which I think are threefold: Number 1 is getting the intensity baselines entrenched; number 2 is the programs and policies, which will assist mines in reducing their emissions; and number 3, working to put it under our *Clean Energy Act* as one of the

targets that we legislate so that we all work together toward this target over time.

Mr. Kent: I just wanted the minister to explain to us and to those who are interested: That 45 percent by 2035 is a reduction below what levels, and how is that going to be calculated as an intensity target for the mining industry?

I guess I just wanted to make sure that was across both hardrock and placer mines, or is that strictly for hardrock miners? As we know, many of the placer mines don't have a —

That said, I will just leave it to the minister to explain. Can he explain what that 45-percent number means and what that is going to mean — especially for the newer mines? Victoria Gold is our latest operating mine, using very new technology. Obviously, there is BMC, and perhaps Newmont's Coffee Project will come online and use the most recent and new technology. I am just curious exactly what — if the minister can just explain to us what that means — that 45-percent number — and how it will be calculated and where the baseline year is for that.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, it is for both placer and hardrock. It's for mining.

An intensity target doesn't use a baseline year. What it uses is a unit of production. We look at mines in recent years to see the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that they use in order to produce a certain amount of ore. Then you use that as the baseline. That's the unit of production.

I think that there are things that the mines have done recently to reduce their emissions in the same way that they are trying to move off fossil fuels. Those are things that we can acknowledge and I think should make a difference in that move to reduce emissions.

So, even though, in *Our Clean Future*, we use 2010 as a baseline year, the way we can think of it is, if you had a mine that was operating going forward or, in the case of placer, you just group all of the mines together and you say that here is their fossil fuel use and this is the production that they have, and that gives you a ratio of production to fossil fuel use, and we are going to get that ratio down so that all mines — the sector — reduces its emissions by 45 percent.

Now, there are a couple of things that I will always say whenever we are talking about this. Because there are people who are concerned about intensity-based targets — and I acknowledge that. The first thing is that our other target is 2050, and that target is zero. It doesn't matter whether you are intensity-based or whether you are an absolute target, we are heading toward zero. What that means is that our goal is to transition off fossil fuels by 2050 or have our emissions go to zero by 2050 across all of the Yukon.

The other thing that we need to understand is that, twice in our past, I have seen when the Yukon has used a slowdown in mines to indicate that we have had a reduction in emissions. In neither case do I think it was actually correct. The first instance was that, originally under the Kyoto Protocol, the baseline year for Canada and the provinces and territories was 1990. In between 1990 and when we started signing on to the Kyoto Protocol — I think in 2006, maybe, when the Yukon signed the Montréal declaration — the Faro mine had closed, and I heard

our government of the day say that we met our emissions reductions targets, and I said, “Oh, no, we haven’t; really what has happened is that a mine has closed.” That is where you want to be careful in a place where mining can be — I remember stories of when the Faro mine would fire up and the territory would go on a brownout. When you have an industry that can, at times, have not much in emissions and at other times have a huge amount in emissions, you need a way to treat it so that you can deal with that swing. That’s why we use intensity based.

The other time that I saw when mining reductions led to a reduction in emissions, it wasn’t because of any action that we had. It wasn’t about shifting from fossil fuels. It was when we had the economic slowdown in 2015-16 and mining activity dropped, and then the government of the day suggested that it was a reduction in emissions, but I knew, as a climate scientist, that this was not the case. That is why we are using intensity-based targets.

If mining activity increases, say, for example, toward critical minerals, then we are able to establish that we have to, over time, reduce the amount of emissions per the amount of ore produced. The reason we have gone for 2035 is just to give some runway to get there with the industry. If mining slows down and we have less activity, it doesn’t count as though the Yukon has reduced emissions because of a mining slowdown. That is the reason you go for intensity-based targets.

I am happy to answer further questions, but the principle is pretty simple: It is the amount of emissions per amount of ore or product created.

Mr. Kent: Just a quick question for the minister: Can he just tell us what exactly the unit of production is? I am just trying to wrap my head around what that unit of production would be. I am assuming it will differ from placer to hardrock, and probably from project to project, but I just wanted a definition of that, if I could.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: As I indicated a couple of responses ago, we are developing the baselines, but in principle, the basis of unit production for placer would be gold. For Victoria Gold, it would be gold, although their baseline may be different because of the type of mining being different. It will be the basic minerals that the mine is trying to create.

In the case of, let’s say, Minto, it could have been a copper concentrate ore, or you could also just work backward and get straight to the copper. Even though there are tonnes of ore produced, you could also know the grade of that ore and so that is the other way that you can do it. Again, the baselines are being worked out now by the department, working in conjunction with data from the mines, to get at that unit of production, but it will be minerals that will be the unit of production.

Mr. Kent: Just to clarify, when you look at Victoria Gold’s Eagle Mine, the unit of production will be an ounce of gold, and that would be the same for the placer industry. I think that the minister mentioned that he was grouping the entire industry together on the placer side — so that unit of production for them is also an ounce of gold. Again, I am just looking for clarification.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It is — just in the basic example that was given for placer, it would be ounces of gold across the placer industry on an annual basis or over some period of time so that there is a measure for how much gold is produced. If placer were twice as much, that would go up with the gold. If it was half as much, it would go down. Similar for Victoria Gold, it would be ounces of gold.

Again, the baselines can be different, because the “business as usual” starting place could be different. I’m not saying that they would be the same baselines — those things have to be worked out, based on the data from the sector or the mines — but that you use a unit of production. For mines, it’s typically the ore that they are mining.

Mr. Kent: I’m curious if the minister has any idea when the baseline work that he has been talking about will be completed. He also referenced earlier — when we just started our exchange on this particular topic — that there are going to be some letters going out soon. When can the companies and the individual placer miners expect those letters to arrive? I guess — he also mentioned that this would be legislated, so I’m curious, with the legislation, how will it — or what sort of enforcement, I guess, is the minister contemplating in the legislation? Will that be done through licensing or permitting, or will it be done through the environmental assessor? I’m just sort of trying to get a sense for what that is going to look like for everyone. I guess, sort of the final question — I do want to turn the floor over to my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King. I have, obviously, a number of other questions, but I will have to get back to them when EMR comes back to the floor.

The final question is: With respect to the 45-percent reduction — I understand, sort of, being able to apply that to one company, as they are in control, but how does that apply to the entire placer mining industry, when you have such a different scale of operators, from very small, you know, mom-and-pop operations to larger companies that have quite a bit of equipment? I’m just kind of curious how that will apply to the industry as a whole at that same level of 45 percent that they are going to apply to a single operator at a hardrock mine.

I will let the minister respond, but I thank the officials for coming, and then turn the floor over to my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Several things — first of all, the target that we are talking about is an industry-wide target. It is not about one specific mine or another. It is about working with the whole of the industry to get there, and just like every other thing under *Our Clean Future*, where we are working to reduce our emissions and transition off fossil fuels, we don’t have that one business is penalized if they don’t make this transition. We have been using other tools to assist us in this transition, and it is us — it is not just the mining industry; it is not just tourism and culture; it is not just an individual hotel — it is all of us. We are working to transition off fossil fuels, and it is not an easy thing to do, and we need all sectors to transition off fossil fuels, and so, that is why targets are so important.

Why do we legislate them? We legislate them so that we mandate future governments to honour these commitments that we are making today, because this is a serious thing. It is about

making sure that there is a law in place — the *Clean Energy Act*. I know that the members of the Yukon Party voted against it — I get that — but it is about having a target that we are obligated to work to achieve, and that is us and future governments. If a future government were here and said, “No, you know what, I don’t want to make that transition off fossil fuels; I am going to change that law,” they would be forced to come to the Legislative Assembly to do that. That is the stick. It is not toward the mining industry; it is toward us as a government, or this Assembly, that you would have to publicly stand up and say, “No, I don’t wish to try to achieve that target, and so, I am just going to try to change the law,” and it would force it into this Assembly.

This is not a new act — the *Clean Energy Act*. There is one in BC, there is one in Denmark, and there are several around the world, but it is a way of ensuring that government works hard to get there.

Now, there will be programs that we put in place that will incent mines to make this transition. The way that works is that those mines that make that effort will help to bring the emissions down for the sector and thus all of us as Yukoners, and, at the same time, they will get the advantage of that program and that support that we put out there. We have asked that mines report information to us and have made that part of their licensing requirements so that we can make sure we are able to share information across the board as we aggregate.

When I talk with the mining industry, I say to them that we need to make this transition off fossil fuels. How are we going to do this together? What I will say is that, in my short time as Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources — I guess, two and a half years in this role — I have seen the industry moving. There are mining companies that I talk to now that just have it as part of their strategic plan about how they are transitioning off fossil fuels. This is where we are trying to head as a country, and in my experience working with the industry, they know that we are making that transition together. In fact, as I will often state, there are certain minerals — not gold but copper, for example — that we will need in order to make this transition away from fossil fuels. That is why there are critical minerals that the Yukon has in many deposits.

The last question that I recall from the member opposite — and I thank him for all of his questions — was around timing. We have been talking to the industry for about 10 months now about this target. We certainly were talking about the target fairly clearly at Roundup. I think it has been well-communicated to our industry partners. The letters are sitting with me and will go out shortly. The baseline work is now underway, and I expect it some time next year — I hope early next year. I will always report back on how that’s happening. I think that was the question, but I always welcome the member opposite — if there are other questions that I’ve missed, I’m happy to try to answer them the next time I’m up.

Ms. White: Just to echo some of the thoughts of my colleague, it is great to have officials here. I do thank him for sharing his time. That hasn’t always been the way, and I really do appreciate it.

I am just going to jump right in. That’s the preamble.

I did actually table a motion last week. My colleague was right in asking about it, because it did talk about introducing a new bill that would (1) allow municipalities to ban mineral staking and exploration within their boundaries, and (2) require consultation with residents living within three kilometres prior to issuing any class of exploration permit. The minister did just talk about how the minerals legislation is currently being worked on. That, of course, really goes back to the successor resource legislation that was committed to more than three decades ago that no one really wanted to get into. Confidence and supply agreement — here we are — working on minerals legislation, which is really fantastic.

The minister might have a different idea of how we got there, but anyway, that’s my take on it.

When we talk about the minerals legislation and we talk about the motion I put in — the reason why the motion was put in, very clearly, is currently what is happening with Gladiator Metals right now. It’s also important to note that we have seen mining in municipalities in Dawson City with the Slinky project. Raven’s Ridge, actually — all the subsurface area has actually been staked. I know that sometimes they don’t know that residents know that they are on top of mining claims. When we talk about mining in municipalities, it really does affect people. We are seeing, right now, with my colleague’s neighbours out in the Mary Lake and Cowley Lake areas that they are being affected by an industrial process that’s happening really near to them. That is why that motion was put forward.

Can the minister just share with us a bit on what conversations may be happening toward the development of that legislation as to whether or not we’re looking at mining in municipalities and how that notification and such things will look?

The challenge is that is a process that is happening. The public has been included in some of those conversations, but we really don’t know where it’s going. I would say that Gladiator Metals is a really good example of how things can change for people when you can start to see it so much closer to home.

I am just looking for an update on where we are in that process.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, on the broader question about our mining legislation, it is being rewritten and I am happy to see us get there and, yes, it’s a long time coming. It’s important work.

But knowing that this work is underway, we also had already been doing work on mining in municipalities. Our next step on that is to develop a framework on best practices. It would be ahead of — or while that legislative work happens, we still want to address the issue within our communities. Zoning tools are the types of tools that we would want to use — which we already have legislation for. As I indicated earlier when I was responding to questions from the Member for Copperbelt South, the timeline for that is this calendar year. Looking for that to move forward somewhere in the next couple months is what EMR is letting me know.

Ms. White: I do thank the minister for that. In some cases when having conversations and listening to people's experiences near the Gladiator project, it was the shock of not knowing that this was going to happen — of going into the woods and walking along and, all of a sudden, you see what looks like a very industrial development.

Again, no consultation, no letting the neighbours know, no notification — unless, of course, you spend a lot of time on the YESAB website, but not everyone does. One of the things that was included in the motion was the very point that there would be required consultation with residents within three kilometres prior to issuing any class of exploration permit — right? So, we know that class 1 has certain requirements, and as we go up, different classes of exploration will require different things.

The reason why I'm asking is that is, as we are working on developing the minerals legislation, we still have this stuff happening. I will point out that if folks haven't had a chance to look at the Gladiator Metals website, the maps are really interesting, because there is one that has a mark of the City of Whitehorse, but it really doesn't acknowledge what those boundaries are. It doesn't really look like there — you know, there is just a little black square, to be honest, and then it has all the mineral claims around it, and it doesn't really show what the reality is: that we live here and there are people nearby these claims. It literally just shows it as an investment tool: Look at all the things we're doing; we have these claims.

You know, it's nearby. I mean, it's probably pretty attractive because it's near a highway. It does actually have the picture of having a rail access when, you know, we haven't used that railway in a while. But it's still here and it's part of the selling. It's part of — invest in our company so we can go forward. But it doesn't really talk about the reality of what it looks like to be here and to live nearby in that situation.

For a long time, prior to this minister being elected, we were having conversations in this Assembly about Slinky mine in a residential neighbourhood in Dawson City and what that was doing to people — houses that shook all the time due to mining that was happening right nearby them. The reason why I'm bringing it up again is that I appreciate we're looking at best practices in municipalities. The minister has said that it's going to be out by the end of the year, and I just hope that we take in the actual reality — how it affects people and how that kind of industrialization affects them — because it's important, because the answer is that it doesn't do good things for people. It doesn't help them sleep; it doesn't remove their stress; it doesn't make them feel good. It does have adverse effects, which is why I wanted to bring it up.

I'm going to bring up another thing that also goes around to minerals legislation. My understanding is that within the development of the new minerals legislation — can the minister let me know as to whether or not the *Miners Lien Act* is being entertained in this part of the conversation?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, we are rewriting the mining legislation in the territory and that work is ongoing. The deputy minister and I met last week with the chiefs committee on mining to talk about the work as it is unfolding with the steering committee on new mineral legislation. All of these

questions that are raised are important questions. Gladiator Metals and other issues that we have had around mining are definitely learning experiences for the type of legislation that we want to create in the Yukon.

I thank the member opposite for the motion, although I want to keep pretty focused on that successor legislation piece. I want to be careful that, if I am doing other legislation, it is with the direction of that engagement with First Nations because we agreed as governments to work together on successor legislation. If I got that clear direction at the table, then certainly we would be happy to entertain working on a specific project, but right now, we are working on the broad project.

There were two other questions that were raised about this type of disruption, and it is amazing to me that when I have seen places where people have been accustomed to a certain level of connection with nature and the world around them and then something happens to disrupt that, it is really disruptive — I agree. I have seen other instances — I have lived in a working harbour before and you get all sorts of noise all the time, but you came there expecting it. It was a different set up. It was right next to Granville Island, which is a classic example of industry and homes and commercial all thrown in together, but it was planned that way.

When I met and spoke with Gladiator Metals as this stuff was starting to unfold, what I said to them — and I think that the deputy minister was at that meeting — was the same thing that I've said to almost every mining company that I've talked to. My first question to them is: Have you reached out to the First Nation? Are you talking to that other level of government? If they are in a municipality, I say: Have you talked with the municipal government? My next comment is: Are you talking with the neighbours around wherever your work is? I agree with this principle that is being discussed where we should have open communication and engagement with people who will be affected by the work. If the mining companies want to see their mine or activity move on to something longer lasting, they need that relationship. That is why I always encourage this as a first thing.

The last question that the Member for Takhini-Kopper King asked about was the *Miners Lien Act*. I will have to check. I will just ask her to tell me whether she was referring to successor legislation or new mineral legislation, in which case, we are looking at all of it. If she was asking about the work on mining in municipalities, we haven't got to the granular level of specific acts. It has been more on the higher policy level of that, but I would have to check specifically on what has been happening with respect to the *Miners Lien Act* if the question was with respect to mining in municipalities.

Ms. White: I appreciate that from the minister. Based on the briefings and the public meetings, my understanding is that the *Miners Lien Act* is not part of the new minerals legislation that is being looked at. It's separate.

The reason I am bringing it forward is that I sat in meetings when Yukon businesses were told they were going to get pennies on the dollar when Wolverine shut — watching people have that realization that they were going to get \$3,000 as the

maximum out of the sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars that they were owed by a mine. The reason why I am bringing it up is that I have talked about the *Miners Lien Act* a lot in the time since then and how it doesn't actually protect Yukon businesses. It actually puts them at the bottom. The reason why that is relevant now is that Minto mine is closed, and I wanted to know: How many liens have been put against that company now and how many of those are Yukon businesses?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will have to work to get the numbers about how many liens there are, how many are from Yukon companies, et cetera, but I know that there are many — I will just use that language. When it comes to the *Miners Lien Act*, I will follow up directly with the member opposite to try to ask about where that information was shared.

From our perspective, we are starting with the *Quartz Mining Act* and the *Placer Mining Act*. We are rewriting them from the ground up. We anticipate that there will be consequential amendments to other pieces of legislation. This will be done, again, in partnership with First Nations as we agreed to — government to government — under the devolution transfer agreement. I have not been informed that the *Miners Lien Act* is off the table. The way it has been framed for me — and the way in which we went out and engaged with Yukoners — is that the core steering committee took apart the legislation and built it up into these various elements. As we build it up, I think we will look for where there are consequential amendments to take place. I can say that I think that we are at a stage in the new minerals legislation where we want to ensure that there is reasonable protection of local businesses as part of that legislation.

I think this is a question that we will be looking at. I can't say that we have specifically detailed yet: Okay, here it is, this is what we are going to do — because we are just at that stage of trying to form the framework of the new legislation. I call it the “backbone” of the new legislation and that is what we are working hard at the table to do, but I certainly will carry the concerns that the Member for Takhini-Kopper King is relaying and make sure that they are expressed to the steering committee.

Ms. White: I appreciate that and I have more questions about it, to be honest, but there is this one — and I am just going to put this on the paper because then we are going to have to move to report progress. The minister was just talking about the difference between, for example, choosing to live in Vancouver in a more industrial area where there are businesses, homes, and industrialization, and then people living out in quieter areas, which means that this is the perfect time to tell you that the next time we're here, I would like to talk about the proposed wood-processing facility in Mount Lorne on the Kookatsoon gravel pit, because people there — included in their residential secluded area was the expectation that they wouldn't be living next to an industrial project and what that means for them and what their lifestyle will be. So, I will leave that there and I look forward to further conversations about it.

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

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following document was filed October 10, 2023:

35-1-154

Proposed closure of Silver City transfer station, letter re (dated September 14, 2023) from residents of Silver City to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier (White)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 139

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, October 11, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 11, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 767, notice of which was given by the Minister of Community Services on October 10, 2023, was not placed on today's Notice Paper as the motion was not in order.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Are there any visitors to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to ask the Assembly today to welcome individuals who have come to visit us today with a Ukrainian delegation. I would like welcome Mayor Volodymyr Shmatko, who is with us today, and also Dr. Serhii Budenkyvych as well as Marta Hlubish. I also would like to recognize, from the Ukrainian Canadian Association of Yukon: Jeff Sloychuk, Taras Yurkiv, and Donna Reimchen, who are with us today as well. At the last moment, I saw Grant Zazula, who is probably with the Zazula family — if we could welcome them all here today to the Assembly.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming some guests here today for International Day of the Girl Child. We have Natalie Taylor from the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Julia Ronalds from the mental health outreach for Yukon government; Maya Auguste from les Essentielles; Charlie-Rose Pelletier from les Essentielles; and Marguerite Tolgyesi from les Essentielles.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Chortkiv, Ukraine

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Today I rise to pay tribute to the newest sister city of Whitehorse, the Ukrainian city of Chortkiv.

Last week, the City of Whitehorse approved the honorary sister city relationship. With a population of about 37,000, Chortkiv is slightly larger than Whitehorse and is the capital of its local regional area in western Ukraine.

Despite Chortkiv being approximately 490 kilometres away from Ukraine's capital, Kiev, their community has felt the effects of the continued conflict with Russia. June 2022 saw the city hit with four missiles from the Black Sea injuring

22 people. Chortkiv has been host now to 3,000 refugees seeking shelter and refuge from the war.

The connection between Whitehorse and Chortkiv first took root when Chortkiv Mayor Volodymyr Shmatko initiated contact with the City of Whitehorse in December of 2022 to explore the possibility of establishing a direct partnership. About a month later, Jeff Sloychuk, from the Ukrainian Canadian Association of Yukon, was on a humanitarian mission to Ukraine and realized that his route would take him through Chortkiv. Jeff and Mayor Shmatko established a relationship that helped to ensure safe aid deliveries and transit supplies to the front lines. Mayor Shmatko personally drives and delivers supplies sent over from the association to ensure that everything reaches the intended destination of persons.

The Ukrainian delegation was met at the airport yesterday with a warm welcome from the Ukrainian Canadian Association of Yukon, representatives from Ta'an Kwäch'an Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and members of the RCMP and local firefighters.

Mayor Shmatko of Chortkiv, the chair of the western Ukrainian international relations department, Marta Hlubish, who is with us today as well, and Dr. Serhii Budenkyvych with the Ukrainian health service have travelled to the Yukon to visit and develop a closer relationship with our city and the territory. Our government is happy to support the humanitarian work of the Yukon Ukrainian association today and has contributed to their travel costs.

Tomorrow evening, the delegation will join a fundraising gala at Mount McIntyre Recreation Centre to support future aid deliveries to the Ukraine. I'm sure that many of us will be there to welcome our new friends and to celebrate the partnership between our two communities. This may just be the beginning of a wonderful partnership and connection for our cities. I want to commend you on your incredible leadership. I know that we have met with — all of us here today — incredible leadership.

Slava Ukraini; glory to Ukraine.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the newly formed sister city relationship between the City of Whitehorse and Chortkiv, Ukraine. As an MLA whose riding is here in the City of Whitehorse, I have always been proud of the relationships developed between our territory's capital city and other communities and cities around the world. We have a long history with sister city agreements — the first being proclaimed in 1977 — and we have ongoing sister city ties with Ushiku, Japan, Lancieux, France, and, of course, Juneau, Alaska.

I had the opportunity earlier today to meet with the delegation that is here with us today from Chortkiv, and I would like to once again extend my very warm welcome to them. I know that the mayor and his delegation have been busy travelling outside of Ukraine, doing important diplomatic work to build international support for Ukraine. We are very pleased that this work has included the Yukon.

I would like to commend both the City of Whitehorse — the mayor and council — as well as the administration that have

done so much work to make this agreement possible, and, of course, I would like to thank the delegation from Chortkiv for this work as well. The Yukon is home to an active and proud Ukrainian-Canadian community, and initiatives like this only serve to strengthen the links between our communities and our countries. The agreement demonstrates the solidarity that our community wishes to proclaim with our friends in the Ukraine.

I would also like to take a moment to commend the great work being done by the Yukon Support Ukraine group — of course, led by Jeff Sloychuk, who is here with us today — with fundraising, supply drives, and relocation assistance. I understand that they have arranged for the Ukrainian delegation to fly home with additional luggage filled with urgently needed supplies.

So, thank you to the mayor and his team for coming this great distance to be with us and for signing this important agreement with our mayor, and thank you to all of those who have worked on this agreement.

Slava Ukraini.

Applause

Ms. White: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the power of peace through people-to-people, city-to-city, and country-to-country relationships, and we are pleased to welcome and pay tribute to Whitehorse's newest sister city, Chortkiv, Ukraine. We want to thank the Ukrainian Canadian Association of Yukon. This group of volunteers has never stopped working to promote peace and to respond to the needs of our friends in Ukraine. This week, we get to see the efforts of this group celebrated with this official delegation visit.

We had the pleasure of meeting Mayor Shmatko and his colleagues who are here to see first-hand where so much support for the Ukrainian people has come. Today, we celebrate the warmth and welcome that they share on behalf of their community and their country. We celebrate the importance of forming bonds across borders and cultures and that centre on our shared humanity. We look forward to the day when peace will allow us to visit Chortkiv and explore your country.

Slava Ukraini.

Applause

In recognition of International Day of the Girl Child

Hon. Ms. McLean: Today, I rise on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to recognize the International Day of the Girl Child. This is a day to recognize that girls around the world do not yet enjoy gender equity and that they continue to face many challenges when it comes to enjoying basic human rights, such as living free from gender-based violence and the opportunity for education and economic advancement, some of which are brought on by political conflict, war, and climate change events.

It is also a day to recognize that, despite this, girls around the world are leading us in creating the world that they want to see and that we must continue to support them in their efforts.

This year's theme is "Invest in Girls' Rights: Our Leadership, Our Well-being". As the United Nations has

shared, governments around the world must continue to invest in girls' leadership programs and programs that support gender equity, because these investments can support girls in creating a better future for themselves and for all of us.

Our government wholeheartedly supports programs and organizations that seek to empower girls so that they can become the leaders they have the full potential to be and, of course, in so many cases, here they already are leaders. Mr. Speaker, as you know, ending the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people is work that I'm very passionate about. One of the objectives under the whole of the Yukon strategy is to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people.

When I learned that two young women from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Jamie Thomas and Piper Fordham, helped to organize the Sisters in Spirit walk and vigil in Dawson City, I was inspired. I know that this is only one example of local initiatives that are happening across the territory where girls and young women, including transgender Yukoners, are working to create positive change in our society.

There are also so many other organizations and groups in the Yukon that are working in different areas to empower girls. There are so many examples, Mr. Speaker, from sports to trades and technology, science to arts and culture. So, let us think today about the challenges that exist, but let us also celebrate the potential of girls to change the world and that, through collective efforts both large and small, we can ensure that every girl has the opportunity to soar and contribute their unique talents to our society. Thank you.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize girls and young women and the unique challenges they face around the world. As we observe this day each October 11, it is important to emphasize the importance of investing in girls to help address these challenges and empower girls to be leaders in a healthy and inclusive society.

The range of issues that girls face around the world is broad, especially in adolescence. No issue should be ignored. Cyber bullying, body image and eating disorders, dating violence, and mental health challenges are all being faced at any time among our girls. However, there are still practices taking place around the world that are harmful to girls and young women — practices such as child, early, and forced marriage and unions or female genital mutilation. According to UNICEF's 2022 global annual results report on gender equality, countries in conflict see adolescent girls severely affected in a number of ways. For example, they are two and a half times more likely to be out of school than girls in non-conflict settings. In turn, being out of school increases their risk of marriage and exposure to violence and limits access to quality health care and other services.

As we reflect today on the issues that girls face here and around the world, we must also recognize that much has been done here at home to recognize and address inequalities. To all parents, please be good role models for our children. Continue

to promote gender equality among our children and youth. Raise your girls to be proud and to stand up for themselves and their dreams. Salamat po.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the International Day of the Girl Child. This is a day dedicated to celebrating the voices and power of girls. We repeat again: Girls' rights are human rights. But all too often, we witness their rights being eroded and removed, often violently, as we see conflict around the world. We know that armed conflict and violence and safety for girls do not mix. We know that as wars have left communities destroyed and schools and education abandoned or destroyed, girls are being left behind. We know that girls are fleeing wars and natural disasters and are left with no access to education in refugee camps. All of these ongoing conflicts, wars, and gender-based violence put girls in great peril.

I want to thank again today the people working so hard to make sure that girls everywhere have access to all of their human rights in these places of great peril. So, thank you to everyone on this International Day of the Girl Child.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have for tabling today a legislative return in response to written questions for the Member for Porter Creek North.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 33: Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I move that Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 33 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House encourages Yukoners to receive the COVID-19 and flu vaccines to protect the health and safety of individuals and our community.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to share that our government has reached a historic funding agreement with the Government of Canada under the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*.

Living a life free from violence is a fundamental human right. Gender-based violence remains a barrier to achieving gender equality in the Yukon and across Canada. Nationally, more than 11 million people aged 15 and over have experienced intimate partner violence at least once since the age of 15.

Gender-based violence is a significant and complex issue in the Yukon, with rates three to four times higher than the national average. Mr. Speaker, these figures represent more than statistics; they represent lives. These levels of gender-based violence and related impacts are simply unacceptable. Through the funding received under the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*, our government will work to address these complex issues with Yukon-specific approaches.

We look forward to implementing the bilateral agreement which will bring approximately \$16 million in new funding over four years to help stabilize the sector, support victims, and increase prevention efforts. The funding received will bolster existing supports in the Yukon and create new and innovative programs to address known gaps in services.

Our government is committed to strengthening our ongoing efforts to address, prevent, and eliminate gender-based violence. This commitment is reflected in our government's decision to match the funding provided by the Government of Canada.

The Yukon's implementation plan prioritizes initiatives that align with the objectives of the Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit+ strategy, an alignment that we know is crucial to supporting our broader efforts. Today's agreement includes financial supports for Yukon-based non-governmental organizations that respond to and work to prevent gender-based violence. Part of the funding will be used to support gender-based violence programming across the Yukon government. This historic national plan builds on approaches and strategies to prevent and address gender-based violence with the goal of supporting victims, survivors, and their families. Our government is incredibly thankful for the contribution of Yukoners to the development of the plan, and we look forward to partnering with local women-led and gender-equity-seeking organizations.

I also want to thank the Yukon Women's Coalition members and Queer Yukon for sharing their knowledge and expertise of front-line work and helping us identify funding priorities. We know that we are stronger together, and we look forward to collaborating with our partners to end gender-based violence in the Yukon. Together, we can create a safer,

supportive territory for all Yukon women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community members. Thank you.

Ms. Clarke: Salamat, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the chance to respond to this ministerial statement, the majority of which was already made in a press release issued this morning.

We are pleased to see \$16.4 million over four years flowing to support the implementation of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* in the Yukon. The territorial government says that it will match those costs over the duration of the agreement. However, in February, the Yukon Women's Coalition, representing eight groups — including the Yukon Status of Women Council, the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, and the Dawson Shelter Society, to name a few — wrote the agreement. That letter requested — and I quote: “A formal working relationship with Yukon Government on the roll out of National Action Plan funding in the Yukon in the form of an MOU that would demonstrate our inclusion as decision-makers on prioritization of how this funding should roll out.”

That letter also asked for clarity on which funding pots would be utilized and for core funding for women's groups. When the minister announced in May that Yukon government was beginning negotiations with Ottawa to fund implementation of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* in the Yukon, those groups were not included in the press release. So, I have to ask if the minister consulted with those women's groups as per their request. Did they include those groups in discussions with the federal government? Did they indicate to those groups which funding pots would be utilized? Did the government give core funding breakdowns to the eight women's groups who make up the Yukon Women's Coalition so that they have certainty going forward?

I will end by saying that we hope the plan's implementation will create a more supportive and safer territory for all Yukon women, girls, and members of the 2SLGBTQ2IA+ community. I look forward to the minister's response.

Salamat po.

MLA Tredger: I am very excited to be discussing the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. Since the federal announcement of this funding almost a year ago, I and many others have been eager to find out what the funding would look like on the ground. I have to admit that despite reading the press release and hearing the statement, I am still a little unclear on that.

So, my first question is: Will the bilateral agreement be made public? I know that the organizations that work to end gender-based violence, such as the members of the Yukon Women's Coalition, will also be very eager to hear the details. As mentioned in February of this year, they sent a letter, which was tabled here in the House, asking for more information. In that letter, they laid out their chronic underfunding. Some of those organizations doing critical work receive less than \$50,000 a year in core funding. That is not even enough to pay

one full-time staff person. I have had many back-and-forths with the minister on this topic, asking what an organization is expected to do with less than \$50,000 a year, and in the spring, she told me that there would be more funding coming in the national action plan.

So, I would like to ask about those increases to core funding that were promised for this action plan, and I am specifically asking about core funding, not project-specific money, but core funding that can be used for an organization's basic needs, like paying an executive director, renting a building, buying phones and computers, and keeping the electricity on.

So, how much of the \$16 million announced today will go to increasing the core funding of gender-equity-seeking organizations in the Yukon?

In that letter from the Yukon Women's Coalition, they laid out how much they needed in order to be adequately funded. For the entire coalition, consisting of eight organizations throughout the Yukon, they asked for an increase to core funding that added up to less than \$1.3 million a year. So, over four years, that would be around \$5 million, which is less than a third of the funding announced from the federal government today. Has the minister met that request? Will at least \$5 million of this funding be going to core funding for non-profit organizations over the next four years?

Finally, I wanted to ask the minister how she will be measuring the success of this plan. What outcomes does she hope to see and how will they be assessed? Will outside organizations such as NGOs working directly on the ground be involved in assessing the plan and recommending changes, and will those outcomes be made public? I look forward to hearing the minister's responses. Thank you.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, this bilateral funding agreement is an important step toward addressing gender-based violence across the territory. The investment from the Government of Canada of over \$16 million is something that our government is proud to match. The *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* in the Yukon reflects our commitment to preventing gender-based violence and creating systemic change through community-led solutions.

Mr. Speaker, creating systemic change alongside partners is a legacy that our government is proud of. To receive funding through the national action plan, our government worked with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive Yukon implementation plan, which was a crucial component of our negotiation package. This plan ensures a targeted and meaningful response to the specific needs of Yukon, and it will support work to better address the intersectional needs of diverse populations, including those experiencing gender-based violence in rural and remote communities.

In terms of timing, the implementation plan outlines how the initial funding will be utilized for the first two years. After the first year, we will gather feedback from the gender-based violence sector. Their insights will shape the allocation of funds for the subsequent two years. Additionally, we will seek input and advice from Yukon First Nations that have unique insights

into the needs of their communities, especially in rural areas. This collaborative approach ensures that funding is directed where it is most urgently needed. Moving forward, our government is working toward negotiating a second implementation plan and securing a second round of funding.

Mr. Speaker, our implementation plan includes many new programs that will reach underserved and most-at-risk populations, including the following: funding to enhance existing programs and development initiatives for women and gender-equity organizations and transition homes in Whitehorse, Dawson, and Watson Lake; improving transportation between Yukon communities for victims of gender-based violence; criminal or family law navigators to support victims of intimate partner violence of all genders who are navigating both systems; multi-disciplinary response for children and youth who are experiencing or witnessing gender-based violence; culturally integrated justice programs for therapeutic courts; integrated restorative justice, community-based and First Nation government-led diversion, and therapeutic court programs; and culturally relevant programming to address gender-based violence for women in territorial custody.

The plan also includes new programs aimed at preventing gender-based violence, such as funding for Yukon not-for-profit women's and gender-equity-seeking organizations that currently receive funding through Women and Gender Equity Directorate to develop prevention initiatives, integrated case assessment teams for high-risk intimate partner violence cases, and media literacy programming to counteract the effects of harmful misinformation.

As I see the time, I am going to try to wrap up quickly here. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all Yukoners who contributed to the plan. Collaboration with not-for-profit women's and gender-equity-seeking organizations is very integral to ensuring that we see real change in our territory.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Rural solid-waste transfer stations

Mr. Dixon: Yesterday, the Minister of Community Services demonstrated how out of touch he is with the needs of rural Yukoners and rural communities. He continues to assert that communities are in support of his decision to close four rural transfer stations, including the one at Silver City. In fact, when one looks at the YESAB page related to the closure of the Silver City transfer station, it is obvious just how out of touch the minister really is.

The Kluane First Nation, the Village of Haines Junction, the Association of Yukon Communities, the Arctic Institute of North America, pretty much every business in the area, and dozens upon dozens of individuals have all written to express their concerns and objections.

When will the minister start listening to the people who are directly affected by his decision?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am happy to rise again to talk about how this government is taking waste management in the

territory seriously. Waste management is a crucial part of responsible environmental stewardship. The Yukon's solid-waste management system was not sustainable under previous governments. Changes to solid-waste disposal systems in communities were instigated in response to a 2016 report by the Association of Yukon Communities. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, this report highlighted the problem of peripheral dumping at Yukon government-operated transfer sites and the need to discourage peripheral dumping.

Mr. Dixon: Well, we have heard this all before. It seems to everyone here in the Legislature and in the region that it's no longer worth anyone's time arguing with this minister. His mind is made up, and all of the letters and pleading from Yukoners won't change it. So, now Yukoners have resorted to taking their plea directly to the Premier. A letter signed by about 130 people in the region has now been sent to the Premier, asking him to step in and take over this file from the minister. They have seen this Premier step in to take files off the desks of underperforming ministers before and are now pleading for the Premier to do so again.

So, will the Premier do as these 130 Yukoners have asked and step in to correct the course of this misguided minister?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It may not be surprising to anyone here that I disagree with the preamble from the member opposite. Our government has held consultations and public meetings in each of the communities that may be impacted by waste transfer station closures. Communities like Keno have partnerships with local companies to haul waste away to a nearby facility.

In 2016, Mr. Speaker, the Association of Yukon Communities requested significant changes to the way solid waste was managed across rural Yukon. They didn't receive any answer to that plea. My good colleague the MLA for beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes stepped in and actually started to implement the recommendations or the requests from the Association of Yukon Communities. Our actions support the request of the Association of Yukon Communities in sustainable rural infrastructure and services.

Mr. Speaker, we have a number of — most, actually — communities in the territory that did not have a controlled and sustainable waste transfer station that have signed on to our agreement to actually provide the infrastructure needed to provide this service to Yukoners, and I'm happy for that support from municipalities.

Mr. Dixon: Well, my question and the letter were addressed to the Premier. This is no longer a question about dumps or transfer stations or solid-waste management; this has become a question about leadership. The Premier has demonstrated his willingness to interject on files that have been mismanaged by his ministers before — we saw that just last week — but now we have a minister who is actively damaging the relationship between the Yukon government and Yukon communities.

Here is what the letter to the Premier says that the minister has done. He has — quote: "... deeply alienated and enraged inhabitants of vast swaths of the Yukon beyond Whitehorse."

So, will the Premier step in and correct the course of this misguided minister?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are implementing recommendations from a report jointly developed by the Government of Yukon, Association of Yukon Communities, and City of Whitehorse, Mr. Speaker. The plan that we have constructed with those groups is currently being implemented. We are actually in phase 2 of that plan, and we have communities across the territory signing on to actually put controlled waste transfer stations in place.

We know that the recommendations were informed by discussions with all partners, as well as previous work such as the Association of Yukon Communities' solid-waste management vision from 2016. The committee's recommendations were then handed over to an implementation advisory group, which again included the executive director of the Association of Yukon Communities plus representatives from different municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I have been throughout the territory this summer and before. I have spoken to mayors and councillors across the territory. This issue is not coming up in my discussions with municipalities that are actually providing the service to handle waste in the territory. They ask that it be done better; we are doing that.

Question re: Confidence and supply agreement commitments

Mr. Hassard: The communities, groups, and individuals who utilize the garbage transfer stations at Silver City, Johnsons Crossing, Braeburn, and Keno aren't the only ones concerned about the closures of these sites; the NDP has weighed in as well. In fact, the Leader of the NDP has even taken the step of submitting comments to YESAB about the closure of the transfer station at Silver City.

In that submission, the NDP leader has made it clear that the minister's decision to close the site without meaningful consultation is a violation of the confidence and supply agreement.

My question for the Minister of Community Services is: Why is he breaching the confidence and supply agreement with the NDP?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the lesson on the confidence and supply agreement that we signed with the New Democratic Party, Mr. Speaker.

We do know that the leader opposite actually endorsed the confidence and supply agreement as well — your leader — so I guess you have done the research.

The territory has to do better and reduce the amount of garbage we are creating. I have committed, through the confidence and supply agreement, to consult with the communities affected by this. I have said in the House that I empathize with these people. The change is difficult. We have had consultations with every single one of the affected communities. We have solutions in place in Keno. We have had meetings with Braeburn, Johnsons Crossing, and Silver City. I know that the members opposite have sometimes participated in those meetings. I know that they have been involved in those

discussions, either in person or by Zoom. We currently have another workshop with residents of Silver City that is scheduled for the end of the month. That was scheduled at the last meeting, which was held several weeks ago. We look forward to hearing what possible mitigations the community can come up with as we continue to work with communities on this file.

Mr. Hassard: So, I am not sure if the minister actually understands the definition of "consultation", but we will carry on.

Yesterday, the Leader of the NDP made it very clear that what has been done by the minister about rural garbage facilities so far has been a violation of the confidence and supply agreement. Just yesterday, the Leader of the NDP told media that what the Liberal government has done so far is not the consultation that was committed to in the confidence and supply agreement.

So, I will ask the minister again: Why has he decided to ignore the confidence and supply agreement with the NDP?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The officials within the Department of Community Services have done an exemplary job, talking to communities and coming up with mitigations, to help make this transition to a much better, much more managed supply of our waste disposal sites in the territory. It is important that we do that, Mr. Speaker, not only for the environment but also because municipalities said that the existing system — the old system — was not sustainable, so we have stepped forward.

We want to make sure that our garbage is managed in a way that is responsible to the environment and responsible to our municipalities, which want to make sure that the garbage going into our dumpsites is managed in a way that is sustainable and environmentally sound. They want gates; they want to have sorting inside those transfer stations so that garbage goes in one pile and compost in another, which will cut methane and other greenhouse gas-emitting waste.

So, we want to make sure that we do this properly and we are doing that in conjunction with the residents and municipalities.

Mr. Hassard: So, I am not sure why the minister refuses to actually answer my question, but I will try again. We have heard from the NDP over and over that they aren't satisfied with the minister's conduct on this file. They have written to YESAB, they have raised their concerns in the media, and they have even asked a question about it here in the Legislature. It is clear that the NDP think that this decision, made by the minister, is a violation of the confidence and supply agreement.

So, does the minister think that the NDP will continue to express their confidence in him by voting to keep him in power, even when he so blatantly breaks the agreement that they signed with his government?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, unlike my good friend the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, the CASA champion, I would never deign to speak on behalf of the Leader of the Third Party. I will say that the Government of Yukon is working toward a sustainable model for solid-waste management in the Yukon. We are investing in waste management facilities that reflect modern, sustainable practices that benefit the environment and the economy. We are also investing with our regional partners.

We have entered into interim regional agreements with Watson Lake, Teslin, Mayo, and Carmacks. Dawson has operated a solid-waste facility for approximately 20 years. These agreements provide financial support to rural municipalities for modernizing their solid-waste facilities and extending their waste management services to unincorporated residents within the regional boundary.

This system is efficient, it is fair to all Yukoners, and it is going to be a huge improvement for the whole territory.

Question re: Mining project oversight

Ms. White: *Our Clean Future*, the Liberal government's flagship climate change plan, was released more than three years ago. One of the action items in that plan is to include new provisions in quartz mine licences to ensure that critical mine infrastructure, like water plants and tailing ponds, are designed and built to withstand our changing climate. This was due in 2022, so the minister is late in delivering on this commitment and Yukoners are beginning to see the effects of this delay. Three current or former Yukon mine sites — Minto, Mount Nansen, and Eagle Gold — have all experienced problems related to water management recently.

The 2021 annual report on *Our Clean Future* says that the government has — and I quote: “Continued to work on guidelines...” Why has the minister dragged his feet on his commitment to ensure that quartz mine licences reflect protections against a changing climate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I will begin by talking about, as we discussed here yesterday in the Assembly — that we're working on many fronts around how to make sure that our mines are more sustainable. These are including how water is treated but also how we are reducing greenhouse gas emissions — targets that we've set. One of the things that I can say is that we have continued to work with mines on several fronts, including making sure that they are responsible to our environment, making sure that they are responsible to our social structures — meaning our communities — and making sure that they are responsible to our governance models.

We have been working on all three of those, and what I will say is that it's my impression that the work the mining companies have been doing is transitioning to a much more responsible future. I am happy to talk about that, and I will get into specifics in my second and third responses.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, the environment unfortunately can't wait for the new minerals legislation to be completed to deal with this issue. In 2021, Victoria Gold was caught storing more water in their heap leach facility than what their licence allows and they failed to report on it. In 2022, Minto mine was found by inspectors to have exceeded their water storage capacity at their tailings facility by more than 200,000 litres, and now, just recently, the tailings pond at the Mount Nansen remediation project was found to be dangerously close to overflowing. The water levels were so high that reports suggest that they could destroy the tailings dam. All three of these mines were spilling heavily contaminated water into tributaries of the Yukon River. This is not just an isolated incident caused by one year of unprecedented weather but a pretty clear pattern

of failure. Will the minister commit to ensuring that his new guidelines are applied to all current, future, and abandoned mine sites?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, are we committed to making sure that our mines are compliant, to making sure that they are honouring their agreements, that we inspect them to do that, that we monitor that the work happens, and that when we find problems, we will report those problems, that we will make sure that the mines have remediated those problems? If there is an infraction, will we charge mines? Yes — yes to all of those answers. It is important that we do that.

As I said in my first response, Mr. Speaker, we continue to work with the industry to move to a new standard. One of the things that I have noted is that mines' safety records weren't so great a decade ago, and now they take safety so seriously. That same transition is happening with their work around the environment. Are there missteps? Yes. Do we find them through compliance monitoring and inspection? Yes, and then we make sure that those issues are fixed. We also report those publicly. So, this is all, from my estimation, how the system is doing the right job to make sure that mines are responsible to the environment.

Ms. White: So, the failure of government to have these mines adequately prepare for a changing climate puts our water, our salmon, and our Yukon way of life at risk.

Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation has noted the downstream effects of the Mount Nansen project. They say that, because of the mine, there are no longer fish in Dome Creek and that fish in Victoria Creek are already unsafe to eat. Recent estimates suggest that if the next spring is similar to this year's, as much as 40 million litres of contaminated water would be spilled into Dome Creek and several major rivers downstream, and that is just for one of these mines.

What assurances does the minister have for Yukoners that these facilities won't fail next spring?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Each time that there is a significant concern raised to me and I ask the department to brief me on what their work is to identify the problem, to work to remediate that problem, and to sanction — if that problem is severe — every report that I have had back has left me with the strong impression that the system is working to make sure that we have protection for our environment over the long term.

Now the member opposite is talking about future challenges, and I want to be careful around answering that, because I have examples here in the Yukon of the Faro mine, Clinton Creek, Mount Nansen. There are examples. Do I think that we are doing the same thing that was done 20 or 30 years ago? No, I don't. Does that mean that we won't have challenges going forward? No, it doesn't. But as I look at the work that's done by Compliance Monitoring and Inspections and the work that is done by First Nation governments to make sure that mines are doing a better job and correcting their mistakes — and the mines themselves in the work that they are doing — they all are working in the right direction.

Question re: Residential lot development

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the Minister of Community Services. How many residential lots has the Yukon government released since the last election in April 2021?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the question. I'm certainly interested in talking about the lot development that we're doing in the City of Whitehorse and indeed across the territory. I hope we can engage in that conversation this afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

Whitehorse is, of course, a vibrant and growing community, and we expect long-term demand for housing to continue. We work on behalf of our partners at the City of Whitehorse to meet this demand and help Whitehorse grow to its potential.

We also collaborate with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council to support their land development objectives in the city. Under the new First Nation land development support program, we are expanding our partnerships with the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Kwanlin Dün First Nation to support their efforts to develop their own lands and advance joint projects like Range Point road and site-suitability work in the city's future growth areas.

When land development is complete in four to six years, Whistle Bend will provide a full-service sustainable neighbourhood of more than 2,000 lots — about 10,000 people — to accommodate our growing population. I can say, Mr. Speaker, right now that we are well on our way to meeting our commitment to deliver 1,000 lots within the Yukon by the end of our mandate.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, with due respect, I did not hear a number. So, I'm going to ask again: How many residential lots has the Yukon government released since the last election in April 2021?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am happy to continue this conversation this afternoon. Our government, to date, has delivered 807 lots since 2016 in Whitehorse and rural communities for residential, commercial, and industrial development. We are on track to deliver, as I said just a moment ago, more than 1,000 lots over five years, by fiscal year 2025-26. This is a historic investment in lot development. Our Liberal government has built strong, collaborative relationships with municipalities, private landowners, developers, and First Nation partners across the territory to speed up the development of lots and homes in the Yukon. We are proud of that work and we are going to keep at it, Mr. Speaker.

Question re: Public transit funding

Ms. Van Bibber: Earlier this year, the Minister of Community Services told the City of Whitehorse that the Government of Yukon would offer \$1.5 million to replace revenue from fares in the city transit system. The city has made it clear that this is not enough to fulfill the promise of free transit in Whitehorse.

Has the minister been able to reach an agreement with the City of Whitehorse to provide free transit as was promised in the confidence and supply agreement?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Obviously, the Leader of the Official Opposition's influence is starting to wash over his party as they continue to take interest in our confidence and supply agreement with the New Democratic Party and look to make sure that we make good on the commitments that he committed to shortly after our election.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that we are continuing our negotiations with the City of Whitehorse and with the Third Party. When we have more news to present, we certainly will do so.

Ms. Van Bibber: How much money has the Yukon government currently budgeted to provide to the City of Whitehorse to achieve the CASA commitment of free transit?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are currently in talks and have been for several months with the City of Whitehorse on this very issue. We're going back to find out what would be required to deliver free transit in the City of Whitehorse. Those discussions have not concluded, and I'm not going to negotiate with the Official Opposition on our confidence and supply agreement on the floor of the Legislature.

Question re: Rural emergency services

Ms. McLeod: Yesterday, the Minister of Community Services was asked by the media about emergency planning in all Yukon communities. His answer was that this is a responsibility of municipalities — quote: "It's up to every municipality in the territory to evaluate and assess their emergency plans and then, from that, you begin to know who will be active during an emergency." He went on to say that all the Yukon government does is provide a backstop for the municipalities.

Why is the minister not taking a leadership role in working with First Nations, municipalities, LACs, and other communities to complete emergency management plans for all Yukon communities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It's my afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and I really do appreciate the questions. I will again take issue with the preamble of the Member for Watson Lake. I have been working very closely with municipalities and First Nations across the territory — indeed all summer in light of the developments in the fires and floods that we have been seeing in the territory not only this year but in the last several years.

We are working very closely with our municipal and First Nation partners to ensure that they understand the need and have the resources that they need to do the emergency plans in the communities they know very well. They know the communities better than the Yukon government does; they are on the ground. It is in fact a municipal responsibility, but we are there to help them in any way we can to provide those resources.

As far as leadership goes, I believe that's what I am doing by talking to them on a regular basis and trying to make myself available. My phone number is always there. I give it out frequently so that people can call me with questions and, of course, my officials — the great folks at Community Services — are doing a tremendous job working with the administrations

of municipalities and First Nations across the territory on emergency planning.

We are going to have a lot of meetings this winter on this very subject. I will certainly report back in a ministerial statement or whatever in the future on this issue.

Ms. McLeod: Back in 2020, the Liberal government released the *Our Clean Future* strategy. That strategy pointed out that the Yukon needed to plan for emergencies that are evermore likely. In fact, there was a specific commitment for the Yukon government to complete emergency management plans for all Yukon communities by 2022. Unfortunately, we know that the *Our Clean Future* annual report from last year — that the deadline has not been met.

Why has the minister not met the deadline that the Liberal government committed to, to develop and implement emergency management plans in all Yukon communities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for the questions, because they are very, very important to the territory; they are certainly on the minds of many Yukoners. Certainly, it is the subject that I have been speaking to my municipal colleagues about more often this summer than at any other time in my political career here, Mr. Speaker.

The Yukon Emergency Measures Organization works with our emergency management partners in municipalities and First Nations to develop emergency management capacity and build emergency-resilient Yukon communities. We appreciate the efforts of municipal and First Nation governments to plan for emergencies and the leadership of these governments in managing the challenges that recent emergency situations have presented. I have spoken at length about Mayor Ellis and Chief Hope up in the Mayo district for the extreme leadership that they provided during this year's fire and emergency situation in that region.

Preparing for emergencies includes personal preparedness. We encourage all Yukoners to prepare themselves, their families, and their homes for emergency events. Resources are available through yukon.ca.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, in closing, that in 2022 and 2023, the Emergency Measures Organization visited Dawson, Mayo, and Old Crow to work on emergency plans and hazard, risk, and vulnerability assessments with municipal and First Nation governments. They will continue to meet with Carcross and Carcross/Tagish First Nation at the end of September. We did that just recently.

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. McLeod: Now, as I said, the *Our Clean Future* annual report from last year makes it very clear that the Yukon government needs to take a leadership role to develop and implement emergency management plans in all Yukon communities, but it also notes that the deadline the Liberals set for themselves has been broken. What is even worse is that the minister's briefing notes from the Spring Sitting indicate that they haven't even started the work. It says that they have been too busy to meet the deadline of 2022 and hope to start engaging with communities this winter.

Yesterday, the minister tried to blame municipalities for a lack of progress, but his own briefing notes show that this just wasn't a priority for him.

Why hasn't the minister even started this work to ensure that all Yukon communities have up-to-date and accurate emergency management plans?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First, I want to commend the Minister of Community Services, because I know that the Emergency Measures Organization team have been reaching out to work with municipalities. Of course, if it was a situation where all the work was done by the Yukon government, I think that the Member for Watson Lake would say that there needed to be more collaboration. That's what I heard from the Minister of Community Services about meeting together, looking at how a community like Mayo did an incredible job with the municipality in the lead role.

Today, what I'm seeing is 30 minutes where the Leader of the Third Party got up and challenged us on policy. Thank you — it was a policy discussion. What I heard in every question from the Yukon Party was criticism — not one new idea. The new leader said that he was going to change the tone and come with fresh perspective — but not one element of a new idea. We are going to spend our time challenging the ideas that we have in place here with the Third Party on the relationship that we have built to move the Yukon forward.

So, again, nothing new — flipped on the promises to Yukoners. Hopefully, somewhere in the next 25 days, we will hear one new idea from the Yukon Party that we can debate.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 756

Clerk: Motion No. 756, standing in the name of Mr. Cathers.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to increase resources and funding to the RCMP to support the hiring of additional front-line police officers in the Whitehorse area and in rural Yukon communities.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to begin speaking to this as the Yukon Party Official Opposition critic on behalf of my colleagues. This is an important topic and an important need here in the territory. Since the Liberal territorial government has been in power, the demands placed on the Yukon RCMP members have grown due to a combination of factors, including population growth and an increase in organized crime, particularly organized crime connected to the illegal drug trade.

The RCMP released a report a number of months ago that indicated that there are at least five organized criminal

organizations operating in the territory, involving over 250 individuals. In addition to drug offences, the RCMP indicated that the severity of the crimes being perpetrated include weapon offences and even human trafficking. Sadly, the Yukon has the worst rate of opioid-related fatalities per capita in the entire country. Despite declaring a substance use health emergency, the Liberal government has been slow to act on the need to increase prevention, addictions treatment, and enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, the RCMP play a very important role in responding to the substance use crisis. While we believe the number one goal of any strategy for a substance use health emergency should be helping as many people as possible to break free of their addictions and live healthy lives, it is also important to recognize that going after the illegal drug dealers responsible for selling these illegal and often toxic drugs and profiting from the harm that it causes to their fellow citizens requires police actions. This includes arresting, charging, and prosecuting these criminals who are causing this harm to society and their fellow citizens and breaking the supply chain of illegal drugs. That, Mr. Speaker, means that part of the solution is that the RCMP need more resources.

Despite all these growing pressures during the years that the Liberal government has been in power, the ratio of RCMP members per capita in the Yukon has actually declined quite a bit. The Liberals have not even increased funding at a rate that addresses increased calls for service due to normal population growth, let alone provided funding to address the surge in organized crime and other types of crime which have increased according to the RCMP's own numbers.

Property crime has increased and public concerns about safety have increased, especially in the downtown core. The government's mismanaged shelter at 405 Alexander Street causes problems every day for residents and businesses in the surrounding area and, of course, as all members are aware, recently led to the closure of a long-time iconic business in the area.

Calls to the RCMP related to the shelter are responsible for about 10 percent of calls for service to the RCMP in Whitehorse, based on information provided previously by the government. Many of the vulnerable clients that the facility is intended to serve also feel unsafe, according to reports done for the government.

In rural Yukon, my colleagues and I regularly hear concerns from people about property crime, the impacts of the illegal drug trade, and delays in police response to calls for service.

Rural RCMP detachments are small, and vacancies due to turnover, leave, or other absences leave the members on duty often struggling to meet the demands and the needs of the communities they serve.

Some governments in rural Yukon have specifically asked this government for more police resources to address rising crime in their communities, yet those calls seem to have fallen on deaf ears with the Minister of Justice and her Liberal colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, the Na-Cho Nyäk Dun' First Nation, the Village of Mayo, and Watson Lake have all made public

requests for more police resources in their area, yet, to date, there has been no evidence of any action by the Liberal government to respond to these requests from those governments.

I mentioned how the ratio of RCMP members per capita has gotten worse under the Liberal government. Here are the numbers. Last Thursday, the Minister of Justice said that the Yukon has 139 regular RCMP members, and she told this House that this equalled a police strength of 320 officers per 100,000 people. In March 2016, when the Yukon Party was in government, the Department of Justice noted that the Yukon's police strength in 2016 was 402 officers per 100,000. So, under the Liberals, the police ratio dropped from 402 police members per 100,000 people to just 320 police members per 100,000 people. Mr. Speaker, we are seeing the results of that throughout the territory.

In speaking to the trends, I want to cite information that will show how things progressed under the first years of this Liberal territorial government as well as under the last couple of years, according to information from the government as well as the RCMP. We have seen that, during that time, particularly in the first part of the government's mandate, the crime rate was increasing while funding remained relatively static. In speaking to that, Mr. Speaker, I am going to refer to the numbers provided by the RCMP themselves in their year in review released in 2020-21, as well as recent statements after that date by RCMP leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I am just trying to find the right page in this document here to begin the first excerpt that I intended to quote here.

So, according to the report by the RCMP entitled *Yukon RCMP Year in Review 2020-21* — on page 12, it notes — and I quote: “The Yukon Bureau of Statistics Population report, First Quarter, 2021 indicates the population of Yukon to be 43,025, an increase of 2.3% compared to the previous year. This represents thirteen percent... population growth in Yukon in the past five years (2016).

“The Yukon RCMP have seen a steady increase in annual calls for service in the past five years. The occurrence count for 2020/2021 indicates a slight decrease over the previous year; this variance can be attributed to COVID-19.” Again, that is on page 12 of that report.

Further, in that same document, which I believe has been tabled in the Legislative Assembly in the past — I am going to make reference to some specific numbers from that report. On page 21, that document notes, under the heading “Specialized Response Unit” — and I quote: “In Yukon Violence in relationship totals have increased 43% (224) over the past four years. Approximately 74% of Victims of Intimate partner violence in Yukon are female.

“In addition, Sexualized Assault totals in Yukon have increased 27% (48) over the past four years.”

So, again, in that five-year period covering from the end of March 2016 to five years after that date, that period — comprising largely the Liberals' first time in office — saw an increase in that category of violence in relationship totals of 43 percent, according to the RCMP.

Additionally, on the previous page — page 20 — they note that from the 2016-17 fiscal year to 2020-21, sexual assault was up 31 percent, robbery offences were up 25 percent, offences related to death were up 55 percent, kidnapping/abduction was up 65 percent, and assault was up seven percent.

Again, on page 20 of that same document, the RCMP themselves noted, under the heading “Crimes against Persons” — quote: “The following graph represents fluctuations in the volume of Crimes against Person offences reported to the Yukon RCMP over the past five years. As the Yukon’s population base is smaller, changes in statistical results, year-over-year, can appear significant. This five-year comparison notes an increase in all categories of persons-based crime in the Yukon.”

I won’t break down the subcategories, though that is found in that report for those who wish to refer to them.

Again, quoting from that same report from the Yukon RCMP, moving on to page 23 of that report, under the heading “Drug Offences” — quote: “The following chart represents fluctuations in the volume of Drug Trafficking & Possession for the purpose of Trafficking offences reported to the Yukon RCMP over the past five years (April 1 to March 31). In the past five years Drug Trafficking offences have increased 90%.” I will read that last sentence again: “In the past five years Drug Trafficking offences have increased 90%.” That was, of course, 2020-21, but we have seen a further increase since that time, Mr. Speaker, according to information provided by the RCMP. And that increase in crime carries with it a need for the police to be able to respond to that, and that requires resources. But as I noted slightly earlier in my remarks, the police ratio has not kept up with population growth, and we have seen under this Liberal government the police ratio dropping from 402 police per 100,000 people when the Yukon Party was in office in 2016 to just 320 police members per 100,000 people, according to the numbers the minister herself provided this Legislative Assembly last week during Question Period.

Mr. Speaker, last year, we also saw the unprecedented situation where the commanding officer of M Division of the RCMP, which is the Yukon’s division, took the very rare step of publicly expressing strong concerns about the lack of resources being provided by the territorial government.

While more details on that can be found in Hansard from last spring during April 2022, I will recap a few of the highlights from that. Of course, as you recall, Mr. Speaker, local media also reported on his comments at the time.

In April 2022, the commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP took this unusual step of expressing public concern about the lack of resources, which provided us with further confirmation of this Liberal government’s failure to properly resource the Yukon RCMP. In a CBC Yukon interview, the commanding officer made it clear that the police force is seriously under-resourced. Despite the Yukon’s rapidly growing population and rising trend in criminal activity, funding from this Liberal government has not been sufficient.

In April last year, Chief Superintendent Sheppard noted that the Yukon RCMP had not seen a single new investigative or front-line position since he took over the position in 2016.

This is despite the fact that the Yukon’s population has grown significantly and the challenges facing the force have too. Despite the fact that there are as many as five organized crime operations in the territory, according to the RCMP, this Liberal government has still not provided adequate resources to the RCMP.

Again, let me connect the dots to remind members that the numbers I just quoted earlier in my speech from the RCMP’s report outlining the increases in drug-trafficking offences of some 90 percent in that same five-year period and an increase in crimes against persons in all categories going up were in the same time period that the commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP said that his division had not received an increase of a single person to help them meet that demand.

It is clear that the RCMP are struggling. We have heard it from RCMP senior members, we have heard it individually from RCMP members on the front line, we’ve heard it from Yukon communities, and we have seen the results translated into increased calls from businesses and citizens who are experiencing the harm caused by this increase in crime.

Stepping back to April of last year, the commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP told CBC Yukon at the time that the Yukon RCMP were struggling to make ends meet. He indicated that they have had to pull resources out of other branches to keep up with the challenges facing the crime reduction unit, and he told media that the RCMP will be operating at a deficit for that year.

Now, again, stepping back to some of the comments made by the RCMP at the time — again, and for the ease of reference for Hansard, I’m referring to page 2007 from April 25, 2022. Here is what the RCMP superintendent said — quote: “We haven’t kept up with the cost of policing. And it’s all sort of coming to a head now. We need an injection of O&M and we need more members.”

A further quote from the same page, also from the same person — quote: “... just to make ends meet. We’ve been running vacancies for years just to pay the bills. So, it’s been really, really tough. But we spoke with the Justice Department and we said, listen, we can’t go on like this.”

So, Mr. Speaker, in response to that, as well as pressure that my colleagues and others have put on the government, we have seen some additional money provided to the RCMP; however, we have also seen the minister and, at times, her colleagues attempt to overstate the significance of those increases by ignoring and glossing over the fact that in last year’s budget, while the number on the surface sounded significant, when one read the fine print, it was clear that the vast majority of the increased resources provided to the RCMP were directly due to the RCMP union, the National Police Federation, signing its very first collective agreement that it had negotiated and a significant increase for members, which directly translated into forced growth without new positions being associated with it. So, while, of course, the government was appropriate that they provided those additional resources, those resources were simply to pay for forced growth directly due to that agreement with the union representing RCMP members.

This year, again, at face value, the number cited by the minister could sound larger than it actually is, but in breaking down those costs — just referring back to March 6 of this year — when you look at the fine print — and again, for the reference of Hansard, this is page 2963 from March 6, 2023. I am quoting the Minister of Justice: “Specifically, this increase includes \$874,000 in one-time costs, including the replacement of Yukon RCMP’s aircraft engine, the payout of excess leave liabilities, and some onetime costs related to RCMP’s force-wide arms, armour and equipment modernization initiative. There is more than \$122,000 in term costs, including a multi-year boat replacement plan, other equipment needed by the officers, and increases to the operation and maintenance portion of the RCMP’s infrastructure program. There is \$2.521 million in ongoing costs, including lab costs, block training requirements, ongoing IT and equipment cost increases, budget erosion related to inflationary measures, negotiated pay raise impacts, and 7.5 new full-time positions for our police service here in the territory.”

So, most of that list and the vast majority of the funding were related to maintenance, ongoing costs, training requirements, IT, equipment costs, et cetera, and did not result in an increase in front-line personnel or boots on the ground, to use the expression.

We did see the minister commit to 7.5 new full-time positions for our police. She later explained in this House that a number of those were administrative, and in the spring, she had indicated that there would be two front-line positions resulting from that, which would include two in Whitehorse and two in an unspecified rural community or communities.

While we appreciate that there was an increase, again, it has still not come close to making up for the decline in RCMP resources per capita, which, as I mentioned, has gone from 402 RCMP members per 100,000 and dropped to 320 per 100,000 under this Minister of Justice.

Another couple of questions that we have are related to the positions that the minister committed to this year. What is the status of those commitments? The minister committed that funding in the budget in the spring. We are now in the fall. When my colleagues, including the Member for Watson Lake and the Member for Porter Creek North, asked questions of the minister, they were unable to get a good answer from the minister about this issue.

My colleague from Watson Lake asked her about whether the Mayo area had received any increase in police resources and whether Watson Lake had received an increase in police resources — again, because those two specific requests had been made by governments in those areas — the minister danced around the question, but the bottom line from her answer seemed to be that, no, they had not received any resources, and it didn’t sound like the minister was planning on providing additional resources in response to the request from those governments.

There is a simple question for the minister. She told us in the spring that the government was providing funding this year for two new positions for the RCMP in rural Yukon. Where are those positions going, and have either of them been filled?

The next question is: With the other two positions that the minister committed to that are actually front-line positions this year, have those positions been filled? Because if the funding was allocated but it’s not actually translating into increased boots on the ground, the bottom line is that Yukoners are continuing to see the impact of a rise in crime and Yukon’s RCMP members are increasingly bearing a heavier and heavier load individually, trying to meet the needs of the communities they serve and the territory as a whole.

I look forward to hearing the minister, when she rises, provide an update on whether any of the positions that they committed to in this budget have actually been filled and if she can tell this House where those positions, particularly the rural positions, are located.

I know that a number of other members wish to speak to this motion. As you noted at the top, Mr. Speaker, when you read the wording of this motion, I would recap that noting that the reason the motion was worded to say that we urge the Yukon government to increase resources and funding to the RCMP and to support the additional hiring of front-line police officers in the Whitehorse area and in rural Yukon communities is that we believe that both are in urgent need of attention. We believe that our communities need more resources. We believe that Whitehorse needs more resources, as well as the ability for the RCMP to fill in gaps across the territory, wherever those may occur.

Unfortunately, as I noted, at a time when the population has grown significantly, the drug trade and illegal drug trafficking has increased. According to the RCMP’s own numbers, in a five-year period, drug-trafficking offences increased 90 percent. We have seen, as well, the situation with increased property crime in a number of communities, as well as especially in the downtown core in Whitehorse.

As my colleague the Member for Porter Creek North pointed out, we know that the local business community made a specific request for an increased focus on dealing with property crime, and unfortunately, the minister chose not to include that or even mention it in her policing priorities issued to the RCMP.

While I know that the minister will likely speak to the fact that the Police Council provides advice on those priorities, as the minister knows full well, the minister ultimately holds the pen on that letter and does have the ability to make adjustments if she feels that the Police Council has missed recommending any areas that they should have, and, of course, as the minister knows full well, the Department of Justice is also involved in helping to guide and provide advice to the Police Council in the first place. So, to try to suggest that ultimately it isn’t her responsibility is simply another attempt by a minister of this Liberal government to dodge ministerial responsibility when they have been called out for a failure in leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I think I will wrap up with that being said. I hope we will see other members of this House, particularly in the Liberal caucus and in the NDP caucus, support us in this role. We have deliberately not been prescriptive in speaking to where those front-line police officers should go in rural Yukon communities or in the Whitehorse area, because attempting to

get into a detailed list would undoubtedly not see support from all members. But we hope that our colleagues from other caucuses will join us in recognizing that the Yukon RCMP and its members are working very hard under an increasingly challenging load, dealing with an increase in organized crime, dealing with responding to a substance use crisis and their role in going after illegal drug dealers, and, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, they need help and they need more resources, and they look to government and to this Legislative Assembly to support them in that area.

So, I commend the motion to the House, and I hope that members will choose to support it.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak about Yukon's RCMP, Yukon's RCMP complement, and the important work that they do across the territory to keep all Yukoners safe. I am also very pleased with the relationship that our government has with the senior leadership of the Yukon RCMP, and I can indicate that prior to coming to this position, I spent many, many, many hours working with individual RCMP officers and leadership of the RCMP, and I know first-hand very well the stresses and the importance of the work that is done by front-line officers and by the teams of individuals who work to keep Yukoners safe throughout their careers.

I am also acutely aware of the fact that the Yukon and M Division provide a very well-respected position for officers and front-line officers and regular members to come for their career. It is a well-sought-after placement for new RCMP regular members and for seasoned veterans who come to provide services to Yukoners. I have experienced this personally, and certainly in my role since 2016 as the Minister of Justice, I have been proud of the relationships that we have built over this period of time and of the work that the RCMP does on behalf of Yukoners.

I am extremely proud to be the person with the responsibility of working directly with the RCMP with the purpose of providing that safety to Yukoners. I am extremely proud, as I have said, of the relationships that we have built as we have moved forward to meet the challenges that have been put before us by the substance use health emergency, by a growing population here in this territory, by COVID-19 and the challenges that it presented not only to all of the government and all of my colleagues as we managed through that — I have no hesitancy to say — probably in the best way of any government in Canada for the purposes of keeping Yukoners safe and protected and for the purpose of managing and striking the balance between what was required by public health and the requirements for us to meet the challenges put forward by not only the federal government in Canada — by the world — with respect to how restrictions would be required on Yukoners' and Canadians' lives but, in addition to that, striking a balance between keeping them safe and providing a process and a place where Yukoners could move around quite a bit more than they could in other places in Canada.

I won't address the individual statistics brought forward by the member opposite. I don't think there is value in that for

Yukoners. What I expect and will say to Yukoners is that we work extremely hard to ensure the provision of a professional and accountable and appropriately funded territorial police service that is responsive to the priorities of Yukoners and worthy of the public's trust. Now, those words — my colleague across the way will say they are just words and will constantly challenge either my sincerity or, with a few other choice — I would say likely inappropriate — words used to describe the work that I do in this role, but that is neither here nor there for me. What is important is my responsibility to lead the Department of Justice and the work that we do there to ensure that there is a police service that is professional, accountable, and appropriately funded. It is required to be so, so that it can respond to the priorities of Yukoners and it must ensure the public trust.

Our government funds, Mr. Speaker, significant and ongoing investments in Yukon's police resources through a territorial police service agreement with the RCMP, as well as through investments in the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program. It is an important way in which work, not only supported by the RCMP, but supported in Yukon, Canadian, Inuit, and Indigenous communities — the importance of the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program cannot be overstated.

This year, the Government of Yukon approved a policing budget increase of a significant amount over last year. I note that the Yukon Party voted against those budget increases for all kinds of services and programming for Yukoners. In particular, I am puzzled by a motion that asks for increases that the party opposite will not vote for anyway. They take the position that, in opposition, they are to challenge. I think I heard the member opposite say — maybe even yesterday — that they challenge such things because they are confidence votes and they have no confidence. We're talking about confidence in Yukoners, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about services for Yukoners. We are talking about front-line workers, and I will speak more about that in a moment.

Voting against the increases for the RCMP in the spring of 2023 budget — well, we saw them vote at second reading against the supplementary budget, and I expect that when we get back to the other supplementary budget, they will do the same thing. I find it, frankly, to be irresponsible to bring a motion before this Legislature to speak about increasing budgets and resources for the RCMP. I am not sure if you could speak against such a thing. Clearly, public safety and the public trust in the RCMP are incredibly important, but to use this Legislature's time to debate such an issue when — if I did bring in such budget increases, they would be ultimately not supported. So, puzzling, yes. Irresponsible? I would say yes.

The increase that we have brought in the past number of years to the budget of the RCMP has been significant. It will be ongoing. It will be done through the work that our government does with the RCMP leadership and in response to observing and dealing with their request for such funding and how they might spend those dollars and in consultation with government as we proceed through our budgeting process.

We are not sure what the members opposite did when they were in government, but we work now on the next year's

budget. Requests have gone out for the need — increases — what is being sought by government departments and government responsibilities, like the RCMP or NGOs. Those kinds of requests are now being brought into the mix with the Department of Finance, and the conversations are beginning with respect to how we will respond to those in drafting a budget that meets the needs of Yukoners.

The increase that was brought in the spring of 2023 budget increased and reaffirmed our staffing commitment to the Historical Case Unit. While it added two officers to the crime reduction unit, two additional resources have been added to bring the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program up to a complement of 19 resources — 19 individuals who are responsible for policing pursuant to that program. Most recently, this government approved additional resources for the Car 867 program under the substance use health emergency strategy. These resources expand the capacity of the mobile crisis response team from five to seven days a week to cover critical call periods and to provide trauma-informed, client-centred support for people experiencing mental health-related issues.

I can note that the strategy for the substance use health emergency includes \$326,000 of additional support for the Car 867 program. As I have noted, it is a mobile crisis response team that offers a range of services, including mental health and suicide assessments. It is operated and the work is done by an individually and properly trained RCMP officer as well as a mental health nurse who attends with the RCMP officer in Car 867 for the purpose of responding to those kinds of calls in the territory. Car 867 is a pilot project that currently operates in Whitehorse. At present capacity, service providers in the program respond to 47 percent of all incoming mental health-related calls.

Additional support will increase Car 867 to cover, as I have said, up to seven days a week to help cover critical call periods, and an evaluation and expansion of the program is being contemplated as the evaluation is being completed.

The Government of Yukon will collaborate with Yukon First Nation governments and provide support for Indigenous-led, community-based therapeutic courts and other restorative justice approaches that focus on healing and treatment alternatives for justice-involved clients struggling with substance use issues.

So, these are just two of the programs noted and priorities in the substance use health emergency for which Justice is responsible.

I can note, having had the strategy brought to the attention of this Legislative Assembly today in this debate, that the strategy is an adaptive one; it is considered to be an opportunity to move forward and to declare the intended plans with respect to the work that can and will be led in some cases by government and led by other community members in other cases. We work closely with First Nation governments and community groups to coordinate the response, focusing on, as it does, prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and community safety.

The substance use health emergency strategy contains 43 recommended actions to be led by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Justice. Of those actions, 14 are being implemented immediately and many others will be developed over time in collaboration with our partners.

The strategy, as I noted, is an adaptive one. It will continually be assessed — regular reports on progress — and adjusting our response to reflect the changing circumstances and emerging needs to meet our long-term goals is the intention of the strategy.

The strategy includes recommended medium- to short- and long-term actions based on the four areas I have noted, but because we have not had too much of an opportunity to discuss it, I want to reiterate that the four areas of focus are: prevention, harm reduction, treatment and recovery support, and community safety and well-being. The desired outcomes of the strategy are the desired outcomes of any response to the substance use health emergency. They include our ability to delay the age of initiation of substance use of any kind. A desired outcome is to minimize substance use across the lifespan of an individual to help people be safe when they are using substances and to learn to be safer, to reduce the harms of substance use, and to improve the health, safety, and well-being of Yukoners and communities. The Department of Justice will oversee the fourth area of growth — community safety and well-being — and 10 of the 43 proposed actions will be led by the Department of Justice.

An important part of the work of the Department of Justice over the last year — actually, two years — has been the initiation of a community safety planning program. It was initiated in early 2022 and launched in February 2023 and provides up to \$200,000 to each First Nation for development and implementation of community safety initiatives that are uniquely designed to suit their citizens. A proposed phase 2 will consider expanding that program to municipalities.

I am pleased to note that, according to the 2022 *Police Personnel and Expenditures in Canada* report, the Yukon has the third highest police-per-capita ratio in Canada, with a police strength of 320 officers per 100,000 population — 139 officers in total.

Now, the member opposite has taken much umbrage with that statistic. Clearly, the reduction since his party was the government of the day is likely the result of an increased population growth that we know to be between 12 and 13 percent here in the territory.

But we should note that despite that population growth and the total of 139 officers in total — which is, by the way, an increase in the last number of years — only the Northwest Territories and Nunavut have higher police-per-capita ratios. Of course, one has to only consider their geography and size in order to perhaps understand that statistic.

As of May 15, 2022, the Yukon experienced a decrease in police strength mirroring the trend across the rest of Canada when compared to 2021. Currently, the total number of RCMP regular members, also known as “officers”, assigned to the territory is funded as follows: 114 through the *Territorial*

Police Service Agreement; 19 regular members through the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program; six individuals are the divisional administration, for the total regular members of 139.

The RCMP forecasts its anticipated human resources operational funding and capital investment needs to the Yukon government on an annual financial planning process. We work on this throughout the year. I meet regularly with the RCMP leadership on a personal basis. As well, the Deputy Minister of Justice and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Justice meet regularly with counterparts in the RCMP so that we are working on a schedule that allows issues of human resources, operational funding, and capital investment needs to be a topic of discussion between Yukon government on an annual basis but certainly more times than once throughout the year.

In response to the recommendations of the 2010 *Sharing Common Ground* — the policing review that was done at the time — evolving community safety concerns, and the requests of the RCMP's M Division, the Government of Yukon has authorized significant increases in front-line and specialized police resources over the period of time that we have been here in government. There have been increases as well as a result of the *Sharing Common Ground* review.

For the 2023-24 fiscal year, the Government of Yukon increased the operational budget of the RCMP's M Division by \$3.301 million. This included funding for a total of eight new RCMP positions. One and a half are for regular members for the crime reduction unit, two regular members were assigned to the specialized response unit, two regular members were assigned to the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program, and two public service employees were assigned for the crime reduction unit. Important aspects of the work done to support the crime reduction unit are done by public service employees.

Provost duties were devolved from the RCMP in 2018, which removed three full-time equivalent positions, and this resulted in a net increase of eight officers over that period, despite 11 positions having been added. Those officers — if they had chosen to do so — were, as I understand it, assigned to different duties. As of April 2023, 19 regular members are now funded under the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program to provide community policing services in First Nation communities.

The RCMP resources within the criminal operations, which are included in the M Division, include the following units: In the Whitehorse detachment, we have the general investigations section; we have the regular members of the Whitehorse detachment; and we have the operational communications centre.

In the district policing unit, we have the responsibilities for 12 district detachments including a relief unit, which is a number of officers who are experienced and well trained and are available to fill vacancies when there are vacancies in communities. The impression that communities are being left without officers to either provide for their own protection or the protection of that community is not accurate. There is a relief unit that is used for the purposes of allowing individual officers to be away for a number of reasons. There is a traffic services unit in the district policing section, there is a forensic and

identification section, there is the police dog services, and there is the air services unit, and the emergency response team, sometimes known in the public as "ERT".

In the plainclothes unit, there is the crime reduction unit, there is a specialized response unit, there is a major crimes unit, there is an Internet child exploitation unit, there is the historical cases unit, the national sex offender registry, disclosure and major case management, and the intelligence analysts. There is also a federal policing unit and operations records management.

Mr. Speaker, the M Division Historical Case Unit was created in March 2018 in response to increasing demand in the Yukon for dedicated resources to investigate historical homicides, missing persons, and investigations related to missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirited people. The unit investigates historical unsolved homicides and suspicious deaths. It investigates missing persons cases where foul play is suspected; it investigates M Division's outstanding missing persons investigations and cases of unidentified human remains. The three-member Historical Case Unit became operational in February 2019 and was officially established as a permanent entity during the fiscal year of 2022-23.

I will make only brief reference to the considerable attention brought by the member opposite to the comment made by Chief Superintendent Sheppard in April 2022 that no new positions had been created since he had come in 2016. It is unfortunate, because despite many explanations and evidence to the contrary, the member opposite continues to bring that up, but the chief superintendent unfortunately, during that news information item, did not have accurate information.

The chief superintendent and I spoke on several occasions with his officials and my officials about the development and the beginning funding of the Historical Case Unit, the reason for doing so, the funding that would be needed to do so, and the new positions that would be assigned to that unit. So, unfortunately, that information in the news at the time was incorrect, but fortunately, there have been positions created since 2016 on several fronts. The federal investigation unit supplements territorial policing resources and is tasked with federal policing priorities, including drug investigations, enforcement of federal laws, protective policing, commercial crime investigations, and integrated border enforcement and intelligence functions. In the work of the federal investigation unit, their priorities and their responsibilities include a number of things that have been mentioned here today, including federal policing priorities and drug investigations. There is no issue that the drug trade here in the Yukon Territory is a scourge on our community and our society, and the RCMP are well aware. It is a part of the policing priorities and has been for several years, and it is something that they are working hard to address.

In 2019, M Division created the crime reduction unit to address specific issues in the Yukon such as drug trafficking, property theft, and organized crime. In 2019, the CRU was created. To staff the crime reduction unit, M Division initially drew resources from other work units that, in turn, were forced to work in different ways with respect to their core policing

activities. But in February 2022, funding was approved by this government — not voted for by the members of the Yukon Party — for two additional regular members to be temporarily assigned to the CRU for four years beginning in the fiscal year 2022-23. In 2023, the RCMP budget included funding to support one and a half permanent regular member positions and two public service employees for the crime reduction unit.

It is not the case that the increases brought for the RCMP in the budget in 2023 were only, as noted by the member opposite, for the purposes of dealing with the retroactive pay of the unionization of RCMP members. It is simply not the case.

I am going to speak just for a second about the crime rates from the 2022 report recently released. In 2022, police reported a total of 10,366 criminal incidents in the Yukon: 2,264 were violent *Criminal Code* violations; 4,475 were considered to be property crimes; 2,688 were considered to be other *Criminal Code* violations; 662 *Criminal Code* traffic violations; and 277 were federal statute violations. The Yukon's 2022 police-reported crime rate was 5.9 percent lower than the revised 2021 rate and six percent lower than the 2020 rate.

To ensure the safety of all communities and RCMP members, particularly those working in communities, detachment complements and the current staffing snapshots will not be shared with respect to what vacancies there may be. It is not the practice of the RCMP to release those numbers. Like other RCMP divisions across the country, Yukon RCMP will at times experience vacancies resulting from movement like promotions and transfers but also from temporary vacancies due to a variety of reasons including training, sick leave, or even parental leave.

The vacancies at the M Division as of September 1 in total are: nine unfilled positions for which there is funding, and four vacancies are due to different types of leave currently — things like training or different opportunities for, as I've said, leave that is available. M Division has the third-highest RCMP-per-population ratio in Canada, as I said earlier, next to the NWT and Nunavut. The vacancy rate, as I've said and noted and wanted to emphasize, is generally low. Retaining and maintaining a sufficient complement of members to ensure public safety is of ongoing importance, as demonstrated through the proactive, internal regular-member staffing and recruitment efforts. As I've said, M Division is well-sought-after with respect to the opportunities that avail themselves to regular members and others in their careers here in the Yukon Territory with the RCMP.

In addition, a team of dedicated officers works to fill vacancies, as required. Our government funds significant and ongoing investments in the Yukon's police resources through the *Territorial Police Service Agreement* with the RCMP, as well as through investments in the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program. This year, as I've noted, the Government of Yukon approved a policing budget increase over last year's budget, and this increase included eight new positions, which includes the addition of two members for Car 867 so there can be expanded services.

The Department of Justice works very closely with the RCMP to understand their resourcing needs each and every

year, and as I've said, that work is ongoing to determine their needs for the next fiscal year.

I would like to make one note with respect to the capital projects, because these have also been an important opportunity for this government — the Yukon Liberal government — to respond to the needs of the RCMP. The *Territorial Police Service Agreement* includes a cost-shared capital asset management program called the "accommodations programs charge". The RCMP and the Government of Yukon jointly decide on projects in each five-year cycle of the program.

The *Territorial Police Services Agreement* was signed in 2012 and that full cycle of time, prior to our government being elected in late 2016 and then taking responsibility of this file in our work after that time, there had been no response to that accommodations program charge, there had been no new capital projects identified by the former government, and the third capital cycle for an accommodations program change commenced in April 2022 and ended in March 2027.

We have responded throughout our time here in government. We have funded the construction, in conjunction with the RCMP, of a new detachment in Old Crow. This third cycle will address Old Crow and the life-cycle maintenance and investments for the Yukon RCMP's existing infrastructure. This includes detachment buildings, accommodations, and other RCMP structures. Our work so far has resulted in, from 2017 to 2022, identification of what was cycle 2 through that program; our government funded three major detachment projects in Faro, Carcross, and Ross River.

Through collaboration, the Government of Yukon and the RCMP continue to work together, ensuring that policing infrastructure in the territory meets operational requirements. This, too, is an important way in which our government has and will continue to support the RCMP and the programs and services that are needed. I note that the buildings and modern facilities and modern work items are required by those detachments in those communities for the purposes of serving those Yukoners and those communities.

Mr. Speaker, if I have not, let's just say, made it abundantly clear with respect to the support that we have for the Yukon's RCMP and if I have not made it abundantly clear about the support for the capital projects to support the work of the RCMP in communities programming to respond to the needs of Yukoners — the Historical Case Unit, the CRU, the First Nations and Inuit Policing Program — then perhaps I have not made myself clear this afternoon.

All of the work that I have outlined, supported by our government in conjunction with the RCMP in M Division here across the territory, as well as the funding initiatives and the budget initiatives — both in main budgets and supplementary budgets throughout our time here and the increase of those funds — of course, lead one to determine that we support ongoing funding and increases, as discussed in our consultation with the RCMP, and the opportunity for us to do that, as I've said, on a regular basis.

I'm just going to check my notes about addressing some of the comments made. I think I've addressed all of them. I think there was a question about the First Nation and Inuit policing

officers and where they would go. My early discussions were that they would be assigned to the community of Mayo and to the community of Haines Junction. There has also been some discussion about one of those officers being assigned to the Teslin detachment with respect to addressing some issues in the area regarding the increase of individuals who now reside in that community for the purposes of working on the bridge project and the increased community safety issues that might arise as a result of having a huge increase in population. That is something also being dealt with in Mayo.

I won't speak on behalf of the RCMP today to say where those ultimate decisions have been made, but I can assure you that those conversations have happened with me and the chief superintendent as well as his senior officials for the purposes of expressing our point of view and the concerns that we have heard from communities. They're expressed to the RCMP. As well, we are at work in conjunction with one another. There is not a request, perhaps, that comes to me or a concern that comes to me that isn't shared with the RCMP and, I would say, in particular with respect to a community response. Responding to the needs of communities across the territory is a key element of the work that we do together.

Perhaps lastly — or almost lastly — I would like to return to where I started. Despite calling for debate in the Legislative Assembly on funding for the RCMP, the Yukon Party has voted against the increases for RCMP officers, for firefighters, for EMS, for community nurses, and for health care providers — all of which I would consider front-line responders. It is cynical for the opposition to express concern about first responders while also voting down wage increases for those individuals and voting against funding for the RCMP.

We will continue to express our support for all first responders during today's debate, and we hope that the members opposite will also see the light, put actions behind their words, and vote in favour of the wage increases that exist in the supplementary budgets that are before this Legislative Assembly during this Sitting.

The 2023-24 territorial budget, Mr. Speaker, significantly increased funding for the RCMP by \$3.3 million. This was the largest increase in recent years and resulted in the RCMP's ability to add seven and a half full-time staff positions, most of whom were police officers, and allowed them to purchase updated equipment to keep officers safe during the work that they do.

As I have noted, unfortunately, all MLAs of the Yukon Party voted against that increase, and the Yukon Party continues to fail first responders in this way by voting against what is before the Legislative Assembly to support these ongoing programs in the fall of 2023.

They voted against \$7.3 million in personnel costs for Yukon government fire crews, management, and crews contracted through agreements with other jurisdictions. They voted against a 10.5-percent wage increase over three years for firefighters, nurses, social workers, and EMS individuals, in line with the recently negotiated agreement for federal public servants. They voted against increasing the shift premium from \$2.25 to \$3 an hour. They voted against increasing the retention

allowance for social workers. They voted against a new retention allowance for corrections officers. They voted against new nurse pay grids. They voted against a new midwives pay grid. They voted against new retention allowances for primary care paramedics and critical care paramedics. They voted against the new retention allowance for primary health care nurses and primary health care nurses in charge. They voted against the cultural leave for Indigenous employees who observe or participate in traditional activities.

No doubt we will hear from the other side that this is somehow just the way things happen in a legislative assembly and they take their position in opposition to be that it's their job to vote against budgets. I see it somewhat differently, Mr. Speaker. I think that their job is to hold us to account, to question at every opportunity, to speak on behalf of Yukoners who speak to them about concerns that they have, and to do this all publicly in the Legislative Assembly. Voting against, ultimately, when they have satisfied themselves that these are expenses that are necessary for the purposes of running a successful government and providing successful services to Yukoners — and they clearly do, since they brought this motion to say that we should financially support the RCMP — but to then vote against it certainly is questionable.

We value our first responders and so do Yukoners, and they want to know that the government has their back. I think that the members opposite do have another opportunity. It is not too late; I hope that they will reconsider their consideration of the supplementary budget. I know that some will call me naïve, but I too believed the Leader of the Official Opposition when he spoke, I think, during the election in 2021 and certainly after that he intended to do things differently. So, a blind dispute or a blind ignoring of the benefits of a Yukon government budget on behalf of providing services to Yukoners may have been a new way to do things, and I don't believe I have been naïve with respect to this understanding.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I will take the opportunity at this stage to move an amendment to Motion No. 756. I move:

THAT Motion No. 756 be amended by adding the phrase "continue to" between the words "to" and "increase".

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice: THAT Motion No. 756 be amended by adding the phrase "continue to" between the words "to" and "increase".

The amendment is in order.

Motion No. 756, if amended, would read:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to continue to increase resources and funding to the RCMP to support the hiring of additional front-line police officers in the Whitehorse area and in rural Yukon communities.

Is there any debate on the amendment?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I can say that my amendment is to give an accurate picture to the statement that is made in the motion. The motion is fine as it stands, indicating that the Yukon government is to increase resources and funding

to the RCMP and so on, but I think it is not completely accurate. It implies that there have been no increases. Perhaps if someone was uninitiated or didn't have all of the information, it implies that an increase to resources and funding to the RCMP would be something that is brand new; that is not in fact the case. I have laid out much evidence with respect to the changes that have been made since our government has come to office in 2016 and, probably most importantly, the relationship that we have built with the Yukon RCMP and our conversations with them about the resources they require, how to best serve Yukoners, and how to invoke public trust in the public safety system that we have here.

I ask the members here in the Legislative Assembly to consider adding the phrase "continue to" between the words "to" and "increase". As you have said, Mr. Speaker, it would read, in part, that the Yukon government continue to increase resources and funding to the RCMP to support — and it goes on to deal with the hiring of additional front-line police officers in Whitehorse and rural Yukon communities. I think that reflects an accurate picture. I hope members opposite will take the amendment into account in us moving forward so that we can all, as it sounds — certainly the members of the Yukon Party and the Official Opposition in the Legislative Assembly — move forward supporting the important work of the RCMP to provide community safety and to serve Yukoners.

I look forward to hearing from the Third Party on this as well.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, it will not come as a great shock to the minister that we will not be supporting this amendment and we do not feel that it paints an accurate picture. I also note that it was also somewhat amusing as the minister spent quite a bit of time in the House trying to spin the narrative that relied on hoping that Yukoners listening had never paid any attention to federal, territorial, or provincial politics and would be surprised by the allegedly shocking revelation that the Official Opposition typically votes against the government on budget bills since they are confidence votes, which, of course, is exactly what we have done.

I remind the minister that the Liberal Party, in opposition, has also voted against budget bills. So, thank you for that revelation for anyone who has never paid attention to politics.

I did want to just briefly make mention of something I meant to refer to in my initial speech, which is on page 34 of the RCMP report that I cited — the year in review from 2020-21 — in outlining the resources provided to them for the item identified on page 34: salaries, operation and maintenance cost. In 2017-18, the total budget that they had was \$38,208,000. By 2020-21, that had grown to just \$39.109 million, which is a very small increase, keeping in light the inflation that was occurring as well as population growth.

This Liberal government, in fact, has probably the worst record in Yukon history of responding to the needs of the RCMP, and we will not be supporting the proposed amendment.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, just to add some spice to the mix, we actually won't be voting in favour of any motion today on this and this issue and we will explain that later on. We aren't interested in the amendment, nor are we interested in the motion as it stands. So, we are going to abstain from this vote. We will let the Liberals and the Yukon Party battle it out, and we'll come back and speak our piece to whatever motion we end up with.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: So, the members opposite — in particular, the Member for Lake Laberge — have been referencing the RCMP report — the most recent one — the year in review from 2020-21. He has been talking a lot about changes that we have seen. Then, just now in speaking to the amendment, he cited it again. I will talk about this notion about whether we have seen increases to support RCMP or not. I think, in the end, I will refer back to that report as well.

The first thing that I want to start by saying in talking to the amendment is that I want to thank the RCMP for what they do to support our communities. They have a tough job. I often go to community meetings in my riding where they attend to give reports about what has been happening in our communities. I have to say that I appreciate what they do all the time in our communities. I think that there are challenges that they face. I think it is fair to say that we need to support the RCMP. It doesn't mean that there aren't challenges that we need to sort through, but it is important that we show our support, both morally and financially. I will move from saying thanks to the RCMP to saying thanks to the Member for Lake Laberge for bringing forward the motion today, because I think it is good to show that support.

What we seem to be debating right now is whether there has been an increase in that support or not. Let me just get straight to it — to talk about that support for a second. I have numbers in front of me that talk about the budget that has gone before the RCMP, and I am going to reference the change over the past five years. Their annual report, which the Member for Lake Laberge was referencing, is a couple of years past. Those annual reports always catch up, but as the minister noted, there is an increase in the budget this year of \$3.5 million to the RCMP. But how does it look over the past five years? What does that increase look like? It turns out that the budget for the RCMP has gone from just under \$27 million five years ago to just under \$36 million this year. That's an increase of 33 percent. That's a real increase. If you look, in this year — in the budget that we are working from right now, the 2023-24 budget — the jump has been the biggest increase that we have seen in that five years.

So, that is an increase. The Member for Lake Laberge has just stood and indicated that it is not an increase, but I can see the numbers in front of me, and so let me also reference some other parts of that report that he is using to talk about. I listened to him because I have spent a lot of my life dealing with numbers and I watch as people present information. So, immediately, as he talked about how crime has increased in the Yukon, I went to the very same report and I started to take a look at it in more detail. One of the ways that I wanted to look

at it was across all of the sectors that are reported in the 2020-21 year in review by the RCMP, and there were some sectors, or types of crime, that had gone up over the past five years. That is correct. I thought: Okay, let me look at all of them, because they publish a whole range of numbers. They publish them in groups: crimes against persons, crimes against property, drug offences, and other *Criminal Code* offences. I took a look at each one of them, and I saw that in crimes against persons, over the five years reported in the report that the Member for Lake Laberge just referenced in speaking to the amendment, on average, crime had gone up 14 percent. However, our population has gone up 13 percent. That is pretty steady. It is an increase, and therefore we agree with the notion that we should increase resources, and for all the reasons that the Minister of Justice outlined about additional programming that we are doing to support the RCMP and the demands that we are putting on them to try to address issues like the opioid crisis, it is important that we increase it. But when I took a look at all of the crimes against persons, it has gone up 14 percent — population up 13 percent.

Then I took a look at the RCMP year in review and added up all the crimes against property. How much have they gone up over the five years reported in that document? Up 14 percent. Then I went down to the one where there is a bigger increase, and in particular, the Member for Lake Laberge kept referencing one statistic specifically. Let me just make sure that I get that one up so that I see it. He referenced a 90-percent increase in one statistic — pardon me, Mr. Speaker.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It wasn't drug offences, actually; it was trafficking offences. But when we add up all of the drug offences which the RCMP reported in their document, it turns out that they only went up 29 percent — still significant, but not 90 percent. But the Member for Lake Laberge decided to focus on the one that had gone up the most rather than looking at the aggregate.

When I looked at the other *Criminal Code* offences, they actually dropped in the five years reported by 18 percent. He also didn't mention that. If I take all of those offences together from offences against persons, offences against property, drug offences, and other *Criminal Code* offences and I take a look, they have not increased significantly.

Now, I just say this because I am always trying to be careful with how we present numbers in this House, because it's about painting a picture. The members of the RCMP are individual people who have chosen their careers to serve, and the communities in which they are serving are dealing with these challenging situations, which, again, are very personal to the communities and very meaningful. So, when the member opposite paints a picture that crime is going up through the roof but fails to show it across the board, I'm not sure that this does Yukoners a service. My view is that we should be trying to give that fulsome picture to Yukoners.

In terms of the amendment, is it worth supporting the RCMP? Absolutely — and I look forward to when the NDP speak to the main motion. Is it worth noting that they face additional challenges and that we should see increases?

Absolutely — again, I agree with the member opposite about that. Is it also true that we have seen increases to their budgets and support from the Department of Justice? Absolutely — \$3.5 million in this budget, a 33-percent increase over the past five years.

You can't ignore those things. Those are real numbers and they exist. So, what I understand from the Yukon Party is that they are going to then vote against the amendment, which says to continue to increase, because they don't want to agree that there have been increases to the RCMP despite the fact that the evidence is in front of them. But truly here, at the base of this motion, it's that we support the RCMP and make sure that they have the resources that they need in order to do the very difficult job and the very important job of serving our communities — incredibly important. We will continue to put forward that the \$3.5 million in this budget is significant, and the Yukon Party will continue to vote against it on principle while asking in a motion in front of us today that we increase it, which is just so strange to me.

I will leave it there for the amendment. I feel that the amendment is simply saying that we are currently increasing resources to the RCMP. I get that the Yukon Party is voting against that, but it doesn't make it not true that it's happening and that we should continue to do that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are seven yea, seven nay.

Speaker's casting vote

Speaker: On the amendment to the motion, Standing Order 4(2) states that, in case of an equality of votes, the Speaker shall give a casting vote. In general, the principle applied to amendments is that decisions should not be taken

except by a majority and that, where there is no majority, the main motion should be left in its existing form. I therefore vote against the amendment and declare the amendment defeated.

Amendment to Motion No. 756 negatived

Speaker: Is there any further debate on the main motion?

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I just want to reference back to a comment made by the Minister of Justice about how unhappy she was to be debating this matter in the House because, really, she didn't feel it warranted the House's time.

I think that there are a lot of Yukoners who put us here to debate issues that are important to them, so it is my pleasure to rise today to speak to the motion brought forward by my colleague the Member for Lake Laberge.

The matter of policing is a very important topic in my community and indeed for all of rural Yukon. As the minister pointed out last week, Watson Lake has a complement of nine police officers serving the community and the surrounding area. That number has been in place for many, many years. However, the demands of policing have changed significantly.

Police are called upon to assist in EMS situations, to assist in coroner's duties and, of course, traffic accidents that can take place far from the community. There is also the matter of resources from Watson Lake to deal with issues in our northern communities, most notably Lower Post. All of these situations take time — a lot of time, in some cases — time that takes away from dealing with the ever-increasing crime that's taking place in and around our community.

The business of policing has changed a great deal as well. It can take months to staff a position in our communities. The administrative duties for an officer have increased beyond measure. Where it may have taken a half hour to perform these duties, it now takes several hours. This takes away from the necessary investigation and enforcement of our laws.

Aside from our vacancies that occur from the usual moving in and out of officers, there are things like extensive administrative leave, vacations, medical, and training. That leaves our communities without the appropriate level of coverage. This has not been addressed.

The minister may use her statistics to try to make the case that we have enough police officers, but the community disagrees. The public does not feel safe in their communities.

Last week, the minister said that Watson Lake was supported through other officials in the community being available, and I said to myself: What is that? The community is unaware of anything that would make sense of that comment.

Also, last week, I asked the Liberal government to commit to providing additional resources to the RCMP specifically for addressing crime in our rural Yukon communities. In response, the Premier said that we did, we have, and we likely will again — but the minister was unable to substantiate that comment.

Property crime, break-ins and thefts, assaults, and drug dealing are all things that the public wants addressed. So, for the minister to state that she believes the RCMP are adequately resourced — well, Mr. Speaker, that tells me that she is out of

touch. The Town of Watson Lake will be holding a public meeting to discuss our concerns with crime and policing and will be considering whether or not a state of emergency should be declared.

I am sure that an invitation will be extended to the minister and we look forward to her attending, as she said she was interested in doing so.

This is nothing new, and the minister has been hearing the same concerns related to crime and safety issues for quite some time. I hope that she will take these concerns seriously and that the government votes in favour of the motion.

Ms. White: We were asked to say our reasons why I indicated that we would not be voting in favour of either the amended motion — if it was to go forward — or for the motion as it stood, so let me explain.

You can't police your way out of trauma. You can't police your way out of poverty, and you can't police your way out of where we are — society as a whole or even here in the Yukon.

The minister made clear — explaining that the budget for the RCMP increased this year by 20 percent, but what we would really like to see is a year where the health care budget, the housing budget, the education budget, or any budget that supports social programs is increased by 20 percent, year over year.

We talk about upstream investments; we talk about solving problems. You know, the hard truth is — and it is not a truth that everyone wants to hear — that we can't police our way out of trauma, we can't police our way out of poverty, we can't police our way out of addiction, and we can't police our way out of housing insecurity, and that is really where the core of the issues is. Putting a police officer on every street corner is not going to help people stop living with the impacts of intergenerational trauma or living with the effects of a lack of safe and affordable housing, of the economic crisis, of an education crisis — and we can't police our way out of the societal failures that government after government after government has created here in the territory and in Canada as a whole.

I can think about the track record from the Yukon Party when we talk about affordable housing, and there was \$13.5 million left in the northern housing trust fund. In the end, it went to landlords with no stipulations. We saw rents increase. They turned down the lot development — at the time it was called "lot 262". They didn't want to give it to a developer that had said they would put hundreds of units on it, run it for 10 years, and then hand it back to government, because they wanted to sell it for a profit.

It was the Yukon Party that built the correctional facility — I think that it could house 160 people — because policing was their answer; justice was their answer; putting people in a system, as opposed to supporting them to stay out of the system, was their answer. What have we seen with the correctional facility? Well, D block is now the John Howard Society's answer to supportive housing, which is still Corrections — I am just going to put it out there. It is still part of the building, it is still part of that envelope, it still echoes in the same way, and it

still feels the same way. There have been some cosmetic changes, but it is still a jail.

I think about the number of times — I was talking about wording off-mic, and I think about my very first opposition Wednesday — just about 12 years ago, probably to a couple of weeks from now, to be honest — and I put in a motion that we should develop a housing strategy, that we should all work together and we should try to tackle it, because in 2011, we were still in a housing crisis — and the Yukon Party changed the wording. They said to implement its housing strategy and we didn't see anything happen. We didn't see the Yukon Party tackle the systemic issues, the upstream issues of poverty. I didn't see them tackle the upstream issues when we talk about access to education. The 2009 report, of course — the 2019 report that came back and said that we were still not doing enough — concerns that we were going to get another report in 2029 that says we still haven't tackled the systemic issues in education — I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful, but it's not moving fast.

So, here we have a motion on the floor. We talked about the way forward — the way forward was to invest in policing. I'm saying that it's not the answer. That's not the upstream investment to solve the problems. I understand why the Yukon Party would want to cling to the idea that the police are the answer to the many social issues that we face in the Yukon, because ultimately, it would be so much easier and so much simpler if that were the case — remove a couple of bad apples from the community and the problem is solved. But we all know that it has never been that simple, and it's not that simple. To be honest, communities across the territory have been having this conversation for years. If the answer was that simple, then we would have already made that decision.

So, again — I'll say it again — we can't police our way out of poverty; we can't police our way out of trauma, out of isolation, out of hopelessness. So, we need to invest in more upstream prevention and long-term solutions. So, that's how we build lasting changes that will improve community well-being. We invest ahead; we prevent the outcome. Even the RCMP agree; they have said it before. Issues like substance use and addiction are not police matters; they're health issues. They don't want to be the ones having to respond to overdoses, but they are called to do it.

I think about substance use and addiction, and I think about the Liberal government declaring a substance use emergency and then having to take 18 months to come up with a plan — and a plan that I'm going to call a document because it's a long-term plan, but little in that document will save lives in the short term — but bring concrete changes on the ground today or tomorrow. That plan doesn't have the solutions for right now. There is the investment for the downstream, but they are not immediate.

We can talk about the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter. Mr. Speaker, I can go back in time to when I was on the floor in a different spot from where I stand now telling the then-Yukon Party government that investing in mats for the Salvation Army was not adequate to deal with the issue of homelessness. There wasn't dignity to adding mats at the Salvation Army so people could sleep on the floor.

The answer to that was a building in a terrible spot, without community consultation, without planning, without thought, without outdoor space. We have seen the problems that building has caused. The Yukon Party handed that building over to the Salvation Army. The leaders of the Salvation Army at the time said "Well, we don't have experience in this, but we'll try." I spoke to the commanding officer of the Salvation Army when they were desperately trying to figure out how they were going to deal with a building that was going to try meet all those needs. We know how that went. The Yukon government did have to take the building over, absolutely; they absolutely did. But the truth of the matter is that the Yukon Party and the Liberals both failed shelter users. They failed the community in the surrounding areas and they failed local businesses. It's a hard reality.

You know, there have been reports after reports published without ever actually taking the actions that had been recommended in those reports. It's important. I went to so many meetings with surrounding businesses when this was all going down — the initial construction and when the shelter initially opened — and no one said "Not in my back yard". Not a single business and not a single neighbour said "Not in my back yard"; they never did. But over years and years and years of dealing with the consequences of a space that was poorly designed, people started to say "No more." We saw that when Alpine Bakery announced that they were closing their doors. That was the line in the sand, and we've seen government act now.

This is why I am talking about upstream solutions, upstream investments. Think about the Beaton and Allen report. Dr. Beaton unfortunately just recently passed away. Dr. Beaton and Chief Allen were given the task of looking at acutely intoxicated people and how to deal with it. They said we needed a sobering centre in downtown Whitehorse. What did the Yukon Party do in response? They built the arrest processing unit at the correctional facility. I guess, to be fair, they had just built a multi-million-dollar massive facility, so maybe they wanted to make sure it was used more, but that wasn't what was recommended. What was recommended was a sobering centre in downtown Whitehorse.

So, when we look at the problems that we're facing, it's not a policing issue. It's so much bigger than a policing issue; it's talking and it's recognizing that we need to make those upstream investments. All of that is hard. It's not immediate; it's not fast. It was on this floor in 2016 that I first started talking about opioids — in 2016. Or we can talk about how long ago we started calling for a managed alcohol program. It wasn't yesterday; it wasn't the day before that either. It has been a really long time working us toward that.

A managed alcohol program is what people on the ground are saying is needed, similar to the supervised consumption site. Neither of those were mainstream — to be honest, still not mainstream — but we knew it was a good idea because we listened to the experts and we listened to the people with lived experiences. We looked toward other jurisdictions that were taking action on these issues and trying to tackle the issues that we were seeing. That was the way; it is the way.

The truth of the matter is that there are solutions that exist outside of the Assembly and outside of this territory that could help us get to those upstream investments. Ryan Meili was the leader of the NDP in Saskatchewan. He was a family doctor. He came up long before he got elected because he had put out a book that was really about tackling the downstream. It was all about having to correct your course and tackle upstream investments. We invited him up between the 2011 and 2016 time because we were trying to talk about the challenges we were facing as a territory. He was really clear: You tackle the problems upstream to prevent the downstream causes. So, it's frustrating to know that solutions exist outside of this territory and outside of this Assembly, but over and over and over again, politicians are choosing not to act on them. It's frustrating because the decisions that are made are leaving people behind.

It's important to note that the Yukon NDP, along with many community organizations, have never stopped advocating for these changes that we think are important: a sobering space, a managed alcohol program, affordable and safe housing, seniors housing. We talked about an increase to minimum wage, and there are some people in this Chamber who said that I was inexperienced in advocating for a \$15-dollar minimum wage. Here we are, just under \$17 an hour.

Taking actions to tackle the upstream are really acts of reconciliation. Trying to support people through trauma and trying to support people through poverty are all acts of reconciliation and walking together.

I have a firm belief that we as a territory and we as a community can do better than we are. If I didn't think that, I wouldn't still be here. Today, when we talk about the motion on the floor about policing, really, for me, it's not about policing; it's about those other investments, so we are going to be voting against the motion.

At some point, I hope we can have a conversation about what those upstream investments can look like and how we can help support our community in a better way. The conversation I am having right now is important, because you can't police your way out of this. More police isn't the answer to poverty reduction; more police isn't the answer to homelessness; more police is not the answer to trauma. So we have to figure out a better way than just looking at policing.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to add my voice. This has been a really interesting debate today, listening to all of the folks who have entered into this discussion. It is certainly an area that I have spent a lot of my life working on prior to coming into the position that I am in right now. I worked very closely with the RCMP throughout my career. I believe fully — and just in listening to the Leader of the New Democratic Party speak right now, I think there is a need for a balanced approach. This is a debate we had for many, many hours when we were working on this plan here, the MMIWG2S+ implementation plan. I can tell you that we had a lot of hours of discussion about this very thing.

We went back in time; we looked back and looked at *Sharing Common Ground* and we looked at the 2010 review of policing and said "Hey, we need to go back to that; we need to

go back and we need to look at that review." Because, at the time, certain aspects of that review were adopted and others were not. Again, that was a Yukon Party government that was in receipt of that review at that time.

I know that there are a lot of different opinions about us going back in history, but I think it's really important when we're talking about this, because we were set on a very specific track when we came into government. You cannot turn the ship on a dime. It doesn't work that way. You have to really work to ensure that you have the right plans in place and that you do start really looking at those upstream investments.

As I said when I first started speaking to this motion, I have spent a lot of my time and many years — in fact, decades — working to find the right solutions prior to coming into government. It's really one of the things that drew me in — to get to those upstream approaches. I believe that is where we are in education. I believe that is where we are in *Putting People First*. I believe that we need to continue to invest in our RCMP and policing in the territory but supplement it with a lot of other different things, and that is what we are doing. We are investing in community safety, for instance. I know that approach works. That's why it's a priority in the strategy for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, because we know that an Indigenous-led approach in planning for community safety is an approach that works.

I actually had the great honour of working with Kwanlin Dün and watching the work that was undertaken in that community to completely transform it to what it is today. Folks in leadership will tell you that it was that community safety assessment and approach that really transformed that community to become the thriving community that it is today. That is why we are investing. The Department of Justice has initiated — and this fits with a number of different strategies — the investment into community safety planning, which is \$200,000 per community, to get the community safety plans done and to then get the plans underway. So, those are all approaches that are being implemented now.

I hear the Member for Watson Lake talk about the levels of crime in Watson Lake. Well, I'm happy to tell the member that community safety planning is on the agenda. All of the leadership officials in Watson Lake are talking about the assessment that is going to happen in Watson Lake, Lower Post, and the surrounding area. That work, I believe, in reference to the community meeting that was spoken about, will be a very big focus of that meeting, Mr. Speaker. So, I just wanted to address that.

We have had a lot of discussion about statistics. We've had a lot of discussion about the ongoing investments that we are making in community safety and in our policing services. I know that the next motion that is on the table will get deep into what is happening in education, and I will get there, but I did just want to say a couple of things, again, based on my experience and the work that I did before coming into the Legislative Assembly as an elected official.

I really want to remind the Member for Lake Laberge of the negotiations that happened around 2010 to 2012 and the policing agreement that the Yukon Party government entered

into — a 20-year agreement, Mr. Speaker. That was a 20-year agreement; it goes to 2032. So, that is currently the policing agreement that we have with Canada that we are working within. The Yukon Party was in government at that time, and I believe that the Member for Lake Laberge would have been at the Cabinet table at the time that decision was made. Another aspect of that is that, at that time, I was actually a technician working with Yukon First Nations and working really hard to implement, particularly, the administration of justice negotiations and trying to get the First Nation that I was working with an agreement. At that time, we were also reviewing the *Corrections Act*. We were helping to try to advise the government on the type of correctional facility that we would need, and we ended up with — I agree with the Leader of the Third Party — a centre that is totally out of scope for a territory like ours, but that is what we inherited as a government.

That is what we came into; we came into the shelter building as well. I want to go back to that agreement — the policing agreement. That is a 20-year agreement. At that time, we begged the government to allow First Nations to be part of those negotiations, because we knew that there was a shift happening — that we have self-government agreements now — and those self-government agreements allow for us to draw down certain areas: corrections, policing, courts, and anything else that we would agree on as three parties.

We knew at that time that our territory was absolutely at a tipping point in terms of what the trends were, the opioids that were coming in — potentially, that was happening in other jurisdictions and it would eventually get here. We felt that Yukon First Nations could bring a very different perspective to those negotiations as we were looking forward with an agreement that would take us 20 years into the future, and that is where we are today. It is always very surprising to me when the Member for Lake Laberge brings forward the type of debate that is brought forward from this particular member, because I know how we got to where we are today.

I think that it is really important to look at the past and see where we are today and where we need to go. I agree in upstream investment and an upstream approach, and that is what we are doing as a government. I, coming into government, thought that things could change very quickly and that you could do things very quickly. I quickly learned that you have to take the time. You have to take the time to plan, you have to bring folks along with you, and you have to put the right strategies in place. When we did the financial review, it resulted in *Putting People First*. It resulted in universal childcare and now a whole early learning investment in the Yukon, and so that is the approach. That started in 2017, I believe — the financial review.

So, when you look at all that planning that happens along the way and the strategies — I worked on this document, the MMIWG2S+ implementation plan, since the day I walked through the door here — seven years — and we now have an implementation plan that ties to all of these strategies that we are talking about.

When I knew that this was going to be debated, those are the things that came up for me, Mr. Speaker, in terms of really looking at the work that is underway right now compared to what we inherited when we came through the door and where we need to go. I agree with a lot of what the Leader of the Third Party said in terms of what we need to be investing in, but we do need to have a balanced approach.

Again, going back to comments about having hours and hours of debate about this, we talked very long and hard about the debate that was happening with policing worldwide — about what was happening in North America, what happened in the United States — because that was all unfolding at the same time that we were talking about how we wanted to approach this within that strategy, so we had very deep discussions. Folks around the table believed that we needed to work with the RCMP and that we needed to bring them in and ensure that they are an active member and partner at the table in terms of our approach to addressing crime. I mean, I just did a number of things today — talking about the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* and talking about the statistics we have in the north. They are staggering; they are absolutely staggering. We need the RCMP as a partner at the table with us to ensure that we work in a collaborative way to address the tragedy that is happening within our territory and in Canada.

I am proud of the work that we have done. Can we do more? We can always do more. We can always do better, so I welcome the ideas from all members of this Legislative Assembly, because at the end of the day, my hope is always that folks are here because they really, truly want to serve Yukoners and that it's not the move toward just gaining power at all costs.

Those are the things that I debate and struggle with a lot, because I sometimes see that approach from certain members. It really bothers me, Mr. Speaker, because I think that what we need is more compassionate leadership and leadership that comes from a place of true, true service to Yukoners. That is what they elected us to do.

I know for certain that I, absolutely — every single day — come to work and I really hold up this team of people I get to work with. I really have a lot of respect for other members within the House, but I'm happy that we're in a confidence and supply agreement with the New Democratic Party, because I believe that we have a lot of similar approaches and concerns and that we're here in that same way. I want to believe that to be true of all members of the House, but sometimes that's not what I see.

I see the Member for Lake Laberge probably not really enjoying what I'm saying and what has been said by others today, but that is truly how I feel. This is an area that is of the most concern, I think. It weighs heavily on Yukoners throughout this entire territory. We're going to keep investing and balancing our approaches.

I'm happy to be able to add my voice to this today. I know that we'll be able to have a lot of other discussions around what we're doing and what the work is that I'm doing in leading in education in other motions that we may get to today, but I thank

you, Mr. Speaker, and all the members of the House for allowing me to speak today.

MLA Tredger: I just want to add a few more words to this discussion. When we started the debate this afternoon, the Member for Lake Laberge started by talking about the substance use health emergency. It made me wonder if he has read *Getting to Tomorrow Yukon*, which is the Yukon's report from a community public health dialogue on solutions to the overdose crisis. It doesn't talk about asking for more policing, but it does talk about people being afraid to call ambulances when they overdose because they are afraid that the police will respond and they will be charged with crimes. It talks about that as a barrier to people getting the medical services that they need.

The war on drugs has been going on since the 1970s and all we have to show for it is a skyrocketing number of people dying from drug overdoses. The war on drugs has failed. We have to admit that it has failed. Trying to police our way out of a substance use crisis has completely failed. What's more, money going to increasing policing means that this money isn't going to all these things that we do know help reduce crime. It's not going to housing, it's not going to food security, it's not going to income support, it's not going to education, it's not going to early development programs and supporting families, it's not going to health care or mental health care or addictions support, and it's not helping people leave the criminal justice system behind and build stable lives. It's not even going to community safety officers.

I do know that there are communities in the Yukon that have asked for increased policing, and I would not presume to know what they need more than they do. They are the experts on their communities. I know that many communities struggle with capacity. I think the way forward is for YG to do an individual assessment with each community to identify their needs. I will only speak about my riding, which has struggled a great deal with crime. We have had a lot of discussions about the area around the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter — last week, this week, and for a long time before that.

I have heard from the RCMP that they have actually increased policing in the area. I have also heard from the people in the area who have concerns that it hasn't helped. I just want to repeat that: Policing has increased in the area and it hasn't helped. What we do have is a report full of recommendations that could help the area around the shelter and the shelter operations. That is where extra funding to deal with downtown crime should go.

Before I conclude my comments on this topic, there are a few more things that I need to bring up. As a queer and a trans person, I can't talk about increasing policing without bringing up the history and relationship of my community with the RCMP. My community has been targeted for a long time, unfairly, by the police. It has been failed by the police, and this is not in the distant past. Just a couple of years ago, the police here in the Yukon were asked not to attend pride events in uniform as a result of that history and they ignored that request.

We also can't talk about policing without talking about the systemic racism present within the RCMP and other institutions. I think of the way that women of colour and Indigenous women are discriminated against when it comes to addressing issues like sexual assault and other forms of violence. I think of the number of racialized people, particularly Black and Indigenous people, who have died at the hands of police. There are many people out there who are not safer when policing increases.

These are all the things that I am considering as we discuss this motion, and I will be voting against it.

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Mr. Cathers: Madam Deputy Speaker, to begin with, it will be interesting to see how the NDP lands since they indicated that they were abstaining from votes, but now we heard an indication that they plan to vote against this motion.

I do have to remind this House what the motion itself actually says — the motion that apparently the New Democratic Party and the Deputy Premier from the Liberal Party so strongly object to. The motion itself says quite simply this:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to increase resources and funding to the RCMP to support the hiring of additional front-line police officers in the Whitehorse area and in rural Yukon communities.

That is what the motion is before this Assembly. As my colleague the Member for Watson Lake noted, this is important to many Yukoners. Her community, which she represents, is actually considering declaring a state of emergency because of the severity of crime. I cited the statistics from the RCMP themselves. Members themselves should be well aware of the pleas that we have heard from Yukoners, particularly in downtown Whitehorse but also from the surrounding area, regarding the impact of the mismanaged Whitehorse shelter at 405 Alexander Street. We have seen the closure of Alpine Bakery as a result, and we have all received the e-mails and calls from Yukoners who are concerned about that and calling for government action to address the crime in the area, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is interesting that the NDP and apparently the Deputy Premier don't support increasing resources to the RCMP to help them cope with the rising demands on them, and as I mentioned, the population increase as well has led to the police ratio per capita declining strongly.

This summer, we have all seen, I'm sure, the posts from Yukoners in Whitehorse and the surrounding area, as well as from rural Yukon, about increased property crime and people feeling fearful for their safety as well as having lost property. Yet the response to that from the Liberals is that everything is just fine, no additional action is necessary, and the NDP have been clear that they do not support increases to policing.

I want to just remind all members, since both the NDP and the Deputy Premier tried to suggest otherwise, that we have never said that policing is the only solution to deal with the

substance abuse epidemic. While the NDP was fixated on harm reduction, it was the Yukon Party calling for increased prevention and addictions treatment as well as enforcement to respond to the substance use health emergency. Mr. Speaker, the RCMP play a very important role in responding to the substance use crisis.

I would just note before wrapping up my comments in the interest of getting on to the next motion for today — I'm just going to quote from a *Whitehorse Star* article from last summer — July 27, 2022 to be specific — regarding a report issued by the RCMP. That article includes comments by the chief superintendent of the RCMP as well as from the Minister of Justice herself. Mr. Speaker, that report noted — quote: “Illicit drugs, overwhelmingly provided by five organized crime networks, are estimated to have cost the Yukon \$113 million in 2021, says a report released Tuesday afternoon.”

The article further goes on to note: “As well, in 2021, illicit drug overdose-related deaths in the territory occurred at a pace of 48.4 per 100,000 people, the report notes — the highest rate in Canada.

“This is significantly higher than a Canadian-wide average of 19.4 and even the British Columbia average at 42.8, the previous high across the country,” says an executive summary of the research.”

Further in the article: “The report released Tuesday is entitled *Organized Crime in Yukon: An Examination of Criminal Networks and the Associated Impact*.

“It analyzes criminal activity in the territory which, the Yukon’s RCMP said, ‘provides important information with respect to guiding future enforcement activities.’”

The article, again referencing the report, further goes on to note — and I quote: “The effects of illicit drugs in the Yukon, the report says, is significant as a result of: illicit drug overdose related deaths; organized crime, whose members supply and operate most of the illicit drug activity; and rising costs and harms to the community from illicit drugs. ‘Organized crime in Yukon is responsible for more harm than which occurs from alcohol and tobacco,’ the report has found.”

Again, that is a report released by the RCMP, and the minister herself was quoted in this article. Further from the article — and I quote: “Organized crime, both in the Yukon and surrounding provinces, has persisted and is becoming entrenched, the report says. ‘There are at least five organized crime networks operating in Yukon, consisting of more than 250 individuals located within, and outside of, Yukon. In 2021, it is estimated that organized crime generated \$12.5 million from trafficking crack cocaine, powder cocaine, and opioids. An estimated \$1.5 million of that profit was used for other criminal activity, such as violence, weapons trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking,’ the document reports.”

I would just note that the article also goes on to quote, as I mentioned, the Minister of Justice as well as the commanding officer of the Yukon RCMP. The commanding officer notes that — and I quote: “As indicated in the report, illicit drugs, and opioids in particular, have both a human and financial impact...” It goes on to further note: “... RCMP in Yukon will continue to work with local partners to minimize this impact

and reduce the opportunities for criminal organizations to introduce toxic drugs to Yukon communities through targeted enforcement activities.”

Mr. Speaker, again, what I wanted to emphasize in quoting from the report issued by the RCMP as well as quotes from the commanding officer is the fact that enforcement is part of tackling organized crime and the illegal drug trade. Members will show by their votes this afternoon whether they agree with that or not.

Again, the Liberal government had suggested that they have done a wonderful job, but whether it is with funding for the RCMP or the substance abuse action plan, Mr. Speaker, when all is said and done, there is a lot more said by the Liberal government than is actually done.

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.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Disagree.

Ms. Blake: Disagree.

MLA Tredger: Disagree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 14 yeas, three nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 756 agreed to

Motion No. 762

Clerk: Motion No. 762, standing in the name of Ms. Blake.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide children and youth with comprehensive and consistent mental wellness supports and programs in every Yukon community.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to speak to this motion, which states:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide children and youth with comprehensive and consistent mental wellness supports and programs in every Yukon community.

This motion is necessary because there are many children and youth across the territory who struggle to access mental health supports in their communities, in their homes, in their schools, and in spaces where mental health supports can be beneficial.

Throughout my career, I have witnessed the ongoing challenges that families face when they are in dire need of getting their child or youth connected to a counsellor for immediate or urgent support. Parents don't know where to go, who to talk to, or even where to start. They are left to navigate a multitude of resources, and it becomes overwhelming and leads to frustration and feelings of isolation and hopelessness, while they continue to work toward supporting their child or youth who may be dysregulated and emotionally unstable or even physically unsafe. I have seen circumstances like these occur far too often for families and their child or children across the Yukon.

Today, I continue to hear from caregivers, service providers, and young people that when there is a young person struggling — whether it is at home, in school, or in a public setting — no one knows what to do. At present, there seems to be no one really taking the lead on supports for the Yukon's child and youth mental health system, including navigation, referrals, advocacy, case management, and follow-up. Parents and caregivers end up in a continuous cycle until they get connected with a resource person who is willing to take the lead on advocacy and referrals to help a young person who is often in a crisis situation.

The gaps in mental health services and programs for children and youth have been a long-standing issue in the Yukon. This is not a new issue for caregivers today, nor is it a new issue for parents who have already raised their children. This is why it is so important for action to be taken. There is a great need for efforts to be invested in for children and youth to have more consistent and reliable access to assessments, diagnosis, and treatment options that meet their specific and unique needs. At present, we have parents who can access a child psychiatrist if and when an appointment is available. We have parents who are accessing private therapists with support from Jordan's Principle, which is then not connected to a Yukon government public service.

Parents continue to truly do the best they can to meet the ongoing needs of their children's and youth's mental health with very little options for support. What parents urgently need is access to a coordinated case manager who can deliver support and advocacy in getting their child or youth connected to services in a timely manner.

Let's think back to before we had the mental wellness hubs in place. During that time, Alcohol and Drug Services provided mental health nursing support, while Child Abuse Treatment Services, which I previously worked for, had a designated

outreach worker for every community outside of Whitehorse. Many Rivers also had a youth counsellor travelling to communities, and ADS would do outreach to communities where gaps existed. This structure of support ensured that children and youth had access to mental health supports that were responsive, reliable, and long-term.

This allowed for better case management, assessments, treatment planning, and relationship building to support children and youth accessing any of these services, as well as their caregivers and extended family members. It is important for the Yukon government to provide children and youth with comprehensive and consistent mental health and wellness support in every Yukon community and across all systems in Whitehorse, because I have heard and continue to hear and witness the ongoing struggles that children and youth are facing across the Yukon — challenges that we all know as far different from our time when we were youth or children ourselves.

I understand from the communities that I have visited since coming into this role the high numbers of our children and youth who have lost their parents to suicide, addictions, and drug poisoning. These children and youth are living with trauma, grief, loss, homelessness, disconnection, heartbreak, and early onset of addictions at ages far too young.

There are children and youth who have been placed in extended family homes. I have heard and continue to hear from caregivers in many communities the challenges and frustrations they face as they try to find mental health supports for their children and youth in their homes who are dealing with very complex challenges, including mental health disorders. For many of these caregivers, the issues that they are trying to address are foreign to them — like opioid addiction. Many elders always ask me when they are caring for young people: How do you tell when they're on opioids?

There are few supports for those families and young people who want support but don't know who to reach out to, where to go, or where to start. When we talk about the impacts of colonization, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the historical numbers of child welfare apprehensions across our communities, these events continue to have a direct impact on children and youth no matter what family they grow up in or what institution they may be connected to. It is also evident that there has been and continues to be detrimental impacts stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic with all children and youth across the territory.

Today, many front-line workers are continuously responding to crises, and with the hard history that has brought us to where we are today, I feel that the mental wellness of children and youth in the Yukon has not always been held as a priority. Children and youth need better mental health supports. They needed it yesterday, they need it today, and they'll even need it more as we move into the future. Children and youth in the Yukon need a mental health system and access to programs that allow for a collaborative response from all who are involved in their lives, including family members and service providers. We have heard from many folks across the Yukon about the ongoing issues of service providers or agencies

continuing to work in silos. We continue to hear from service providers, caregivers, and various government workers about the challenges of accessing an appropriate treatment program for children and youth in the Yukon struggling with mental health and addictions.

At present, there are very limited options for children or youth treatment in the Yukon. Service providers and families at times may have access to a select few treatment centres out of territory, and there are currently no agreements with the wide range of youth treatment programs that exist outside of the territory. It is so critical that children and youth treatment programming be established in the territory, as history has shown that there have been far too many children and youth who have been sent out of the territory, away from their families and home environment, to get help.

There are leaders in this House who have attended past youth town hall events where they have heard directly from young people personal stories of the current struggles these youth face with various types of drugs and alcohol addiction. There have been many brave and courageous children and youth who have shared in town halls and youth engagement forums that they continue to live in difficult environments through no fault of their own — environments where they, as children and youth, experience neglect while being exposed to environments plagued with addictions. They are experiencing losing family members at a faster rate than we can understand. They are growing up with no mom or dad or have lost both parents and numerous siblings due to the drug crisis in our territory.

During any community visit, including to my home community, I visit the schools, youth centres, or spend time on the land with youth. I connect with parents and I also hear from service providers. One of the common concerns expressed across the board is that anyone trying to find help or trying to help a child or youth who has faced a lack of support when they feel the child or youth is in need of comprehensive mental supports really has nowhere to go. I continue to hear that there is a huge gap in access to service when it comes to counselling for young children or any type of mental wellness support, including being wait-listed and having to be in Whitehorse to access the counsellor.

Ensuring a secure, long-term, therapeutic approach to supporting children and youth in the Yukon is critical. This message continues to be clear in the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office annual reports, school attendance reports, the *Empty Spaces* report, and also in their 10-year review and their most recent review of sexual abuse in Yukon schools. I also continue to hear from educators about the urgent need for mental health supports in the community, as many teachers end up providing more emotional support for children in schools, as these supports are not available in the school, nor are they available in the community.

The priority of investing in mental health resources and programming supports for children and youth in the Yukon can also be found in recent government reports, including the *Putting People First* report and the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy*, which states — and I quote: “It has been

found that ACEs...” — adverse childhood experiences — “... can predict an earlier age of drinking onset, a higher rise of mental and substance use disorders as an older adult, tobacco use during adulthood, prescription drug use, lifetime illicit drug use, drug dependency and self-reported addiction, suicide attempts, and even pregnancy outcomes.”

As the daughter of a residential school survivor who is now deceased and the daughter of someone who has been through Indian day school, I also think about the hard things that I and many others have witnessed and experienced growing up in our homes, including violence, various forms of abuse, growing up on our own, becoming caregivers for our siblings, becoming caregivers for our parents, and basically surviving through each day. I know that the experiences of my parents have impacted and continue to impact me in my daily life while also affecting my own children who I have been privileged to raise. There are many people who share this same story today and yet continue to try to find the resources to help their own children and youth to ensure they have better outcomes in life.

What I hear from young people during my community visits are the common questions: Why are things the way they are? Why does life have to be so difficult? Why did my parents have to die? Why?

I also think about sexualized violence in the communities — something that not many of us talk about in our communities with the history of sexual abuse. Sexualized violence impacts children and youth across the territory. Domestic violence also continues to have direct impacts on many children and youth whose caregiver is living in or fleeing from violence.

I can't help but also think of the yearly reminder of the high rates of alcohol consumption in the territory. Those figures alone directly impact children and youth in the territory. The substance use crisis that has been declared by numerous First Nations in the territory and by the Yukon government also has a direct impact on every child and youth across the Yukon. All children and youth are not immune to these issues — issues that will continue to create challenges and barriers in any environment where children are growing.

Now is the time for all levels of government — the federal, territorial, and all levels of First Nation governments — to truly make the mental well-being of children and youth across the territory a priority by ensuring that there are financial resources to build programming and capacity that can be sustained long-term.

Our young people need more than a pilot project or a band-aid solution. This is everyone's responsibility — not only to our children and youth of today but also to those not yet born. The young people are in dire need for resources to be put in place to ensure that every child and youth has access to whatever it is they need in terms of support, whether that is therapeutic support, a counsellor, a traditional healer, or going out on the land.

When we talk about mental wellness, it encompasses everything. From access to safe housing, access to health care services, access to social supports, access to education, and all the supports that could be available in those environments that are children- and youth-specific. Anything that we do to

positively impact a child's life or contribute to supporting children and youth also contributes to enhancing better outcomes for their life, no matter what each may face individually. We know that adequate age-appropriate and culturally appropriate supports build resilience, connection, sense of purpose, and self-esteem.

We are losing far too many young people to suicide, addictions, and violence to continue to sit idle. The young people across the Yukon are struggling. They are crying out for help and yet feel that very few are listening. What the young people want is action. Action means investing financially, physically, and structurally. Our youth don't need another framework to be developed, as we can't risk losing another young life, which happens far too often.

As I begin to further understand the history and the impacts that affected my parents and grandparents, I am better able to compassionately understand that parents are truly doing the best they can with what they have. The more we focus on enhancing supports that contribute to mental wellness for children and youth in the territory, the more we are showing through tangible action that, yes, children and youth are important. Yes, we do care about their well-being. We are taking the well-being of children and youth seriously, especially when it comes to their mental health. We hear their concerns; we hear the challenges they face and we hear that there are challenges to accessing supports, and now is the time to do something about it.

To end, I would like to thank my colleagues for listening to me today as I share these words. I also want to thank the many children and youth who have reached out for a visit or to teach me something on the land while they also share their stories and concerns that matter to them. The time spent has been admirable and appreciated. I hope that I have been able to bring forward the young people's experiences in a respectful manner while shedding light on the urgency for comprehensive and consistent mental wellness supports and programs to be available in every Yukon community. We can't predict the environments or experiences that any child will face after birth, but we can influence the services and supports that are there for them.

I hope that my colleagues will vote in favour of this motion, and I hope this motion will be a call to action to this government to take concrete steps so that children and youth in the Yukon can gain access to secure, stable, long-term mental health services and programs that they urgently need and deserve.

Mahsi' cho.

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is my pleasure to stand today to speak to Motion No. 762, brought forward by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

I will start by saying, of course, that the health, safety, and well-being of students and staff is our first priority. We certainly recognize that the challenges of the last few years, including the pandemic and the toxic drug crisis, have brought with them an increased need for mental health supports, especially for youth. Mental health supports for children and

youth are critically important, and we are taking steps to ensure that students have access to mental health support.

We understand that students' well-being is not just about academic success; it's about creating an environment where students can thrive emotionally, socially, mentally, and spiritually. We are committed to fostering equity and inclusion for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances. Reimagining inclusive and special education, also known as "RISE", will serve as a cornerstone to this commitment.

The Department of Education is developing a comprehensive mental health and wellness approach. This is an important part of the overall work that we're doing to reimagine inclusive and special education. Our comprehensive mental health and wellness approach will include prevention and promotion of positive mental health as well as intervention supports and responses in and out of school. The approach will be developmentally and culturally responsive. It will align with Yukon's mental health strategy and be guided by the recommendations from the Yukon youth territorial strategy from the 2023 Yukon Youth Summit, which shares important perspectives from youth to support that work for them.

The main estimates include \$500,000 for mental health supports in schools in the 2023-24 budget in recognition of the increased mental health and wellness needs of students. These supports and services may range from assessments, counselling, consultation and programming, case management, and education, depending on what the specific needs are of the individual schools and communities. Meeting the mental health needs of students requires flexibility in how we approach meeting them where they are at. This can include raising awareness of mental health for all students through inclusive, culturally appropriate programs to target services for acute mental health challenges. No one student is the same and may certainly have different needs.

We will continue to work with the school boards and councils, First Nation governments, and other education partners, including youth, to determine how best to coordinate student services and access to services, how we will provide additional training for school counsellors, enhance student outreach and awareness, and offer training and supports to school staff in developmentally responsive approaches to mental wellness and awareness of mental wellness needs. We continue to offer ongoing training and access to confidential counselling services to staff as well. We are actively working to enhance the links between mental health and well-being resources available within the community as provided by partners and stakeholders as well as resources that will be accessible within the school environment.

Conversations about mental health are very important. Through increased awareness, our curriculum, and developmental supports, we are providing students and staff an understanding of mental health. This includes teaching them the language to talk about it and where to seek support. School counsellors support students to achieve their personal, social, emotional, and academic development and their career potential. Through the Yukon school curriculum, students learn

about social and emotional skills, decision-making, their health and safety, and strategies to strengthen their resilience and well-being. For acute mental health challenges, school-based staff help students and families connect with the most appropriate supports that are available within the community, including clinical counselling services.

I will just move to RISE and will speak a bit more about that initiative, because it is, as I've stated, a cornerstone to the work that we're doing. We continue to work with our partners and stakeholders to reimagine and create schools that are safe, inclusive, and that build on students' strengths to ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive. It's really about reshaping education overall.

In November 2021, the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education provided the reimagining inclusive and special education work plan, which addressed the review of inclusive and special education as well as the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate review on attendance.

The department hosted an educational summit in November 2021. This was when we were still doing most things virtually. We had approximately 600 online participants representing our educational partners, stakeholders, as well as broad representation from the department.

In May 2022, the department hosted a conference for members of the community of inquiry, the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education. The communities of inquiry have a variety of representatives from First Nation governments, non-governmental organizations such as the Child Development Centre, Autism Yukon, Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, school councils, and school-based and central administration staff. Membership varies from the various communities of inquiry within RISE.

Just considering the time, I'm going to move through a little bit quicker.

Several Yukon schools are also — and I think it's really important to note this — offering experiential learning programs. From Golden Horn, which is very successful — that includes academic, athletic, cultural, and social endeavours through an experiential lens. Elijah Smith Elementary School is working very closely with the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate and Kwanlin Dün First Nation to host experiential, culturally based weeks of activities throughout the year. Wood Street, of course, offers a wide variety of experiential learning programs where academics are integrated with heritage, adventure, outdoors skills, theatre, and art.

Hidden Valley students can access on-site camping, hiking, snowshoeing, kicksledding, and cross-country skiing. These are some examples, but really, this is embedded and is the move throughout all of the schools within the Yukon — to move toward more experiential learning. Of course, when we moved to the BC curriculum — it was right around the time when the pandemic happened, so some of that had to be put on hold, but it's now really gaining ground and schools are becoming very creative in their approaches to meet their school and community needs.

A key initiative that was launched in the fall of 2022 was Ready-to-Learn Schools, based on the groundbreaking work of Dr. Bruce Perry's neurosequential model. The program is grounded in understanding that children can only be ready to learn when they feel safe and calm. This model trains teachers and staff to be developmentally responsive to recognize that a child's chronological age may not match their emotional, cognitive, or social age. Most importantly, it helps the educators understand how developmental adversity impacts brain development, functioning, and learning. This initiative empowers our teachers and school staff to understand, honour, support, and guide our children so they can learn as they travel along their own unique path. Again, the move with the Department of Education is to have this implemented in every single school in the Yukon, and many of them are now. Takhini has been implementing it for a number of years already. Others are in their second year and some are just moving into the introduction of the approach. Others will continue to be onboarded throughout the next couple of years.

The Yukon government has committed 81 new positions over the next three years, including school wellness specialists, education assistants, learning assistance teachers, and other support positions. We are creating a school wellness specialist or similar position for every Yukon school. The role of the school wellness specialist will be to provide a variety of direct supports to students, families, educators, and the community, which may range from assessments, counselling, consultation, programming, case management, and education, depending on the specific needs of the individual schools and communities. In addition, we are working with First Nation governments to develop the First Nation wellness role. This role will provide culturally appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual academic needs of students.

We have also allocated an additional \$1 million in funding, which can be used for other types of services to support students. Part of these funds will be used to work with First Nation governments to hire these new roles. We are currently working with superintendents and school board executive directors to prioritize the implementation of both positions over the next two years. The success of these new roles is dependent on thoughtful, purposeful, and comprehensive planning. We really want to ensure that we get this right and that it meets the needs of the school community and the communities where the schools are situated.

We are looking to a broad range of approaches, from inclusive and culturally appropriate programming to targeted services for acute mental health challenges, including clinical counsellors.

In addition to providing the supports, we believe that working to make schools safer and more inclusive for students will support their mental health. One way we are making schools safer is through our work on the sexual orientation and gender identity policy. All students, staff, and parents have a right to be and feel safe in Yukon public schools. They also have the right to be treated with respect and dignity regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, ancestry, place of origin, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, age, or ability.

To further support 2SLGBTQIA+ students, the Department of Education updated its sexual orientation and gender identity policy, or SOGI policy, as outlined in our inclusion action plan.

In our work to implement and evaluate the updated SOGI policy, we will continue to engage with students, educators, and other members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. Schools are required to develop school-based procedures and guidelines under the umbrella of the Department of Education's SOGI policy.

One other area that I wanted to note was the recent partnership between the Department of Education and the ARC Foundation — a charitable foundation supporting SOGI inclusion in education.

We are working to implement tools and resources of the SOGI 1 2 3 program to create more inclusive schools and just to ensure that the educators and school communities have the right tools to be able to implement this policy. All counsellors and administrators have been provided with local and national SOGI and gender and sexuality alliance information. Several schools have gender and sexuality alliances and other 2SLGBTQIA+ initiatives. It is really great work that is happening throughout our schools in the Yukon.

One of the other areas that we have really worked on is language, culture, and heritage revitalization in public schools. Safer, healthier, and thriving communities are inherently linked to rebuilding First Nation identity and connection to heritage. A specific priority of the Government of Yukon is to work toward a shared commitment with Yukon First Nations and the Government of Canada to address and take meaningful steps to revitalize Yukon First Nation language, culture, and heritage. Yukon government is interested in continuing to work with the joint education action plan, in which all Yukon First Nations and Canada are partners, as well as advancing specific funding conversations with Yukon First Nations and Canada on how to advance language, culture, and heritage priorities in public schools, so that is a very important part of our work.

Also, the Department of Education's role in truth and reconciliation is, of course, very important and vital and a responsibility that we take very seriously. We want to highlight the work that has been done on action 63 to maintain an annual commitment to aboriginal issues, including developing and implementing kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum and learning resources on aboriginal peoples in Canada's history and the history and legacy of residential schools. This is really important work. I am happy to provide more information at various times, I think, during the Sitting around the curriculum that is already in place, the curriculum that is currently being developed, and what is next in the queue.

The safer schools action plan is another important area that definitely relates to the well-being of students, teachers, and families. The outcome of the safer schools action plan — we completed the 23 commitments in the safer schools action plan and released that this last summer. While recognizing that the work to ensure that students are safe at school will never end, the action items in the safer schools action plan really emphasize creating safe and caring environments,

transparency, accountability, victim-centred approaches, collaboration, and reconciliation in educational settings.

Again, as I've stated, this work will be ongoing, but I think our government has certainly taken meaningful steps to improve government-wide coordination in response to any critical incidents that may occur so that we can ensure timely and appropriate supports for children, their families, and the school community.

Another area, I think, as we speak today about upstream approaches and the earliest intervention — we continue to work with Yukon First Nation governments and stakeholders to enhance early learning and childcare programming in the Yukon as we move toward a future where all families have access to high-quality early learning and childcare that is affordable, accessible, and inclusive.

We heard loud and clear in various engagements on universal childcare that, in addition to affordability and the accessibility for families — and, of course, to address quality. So, we have taken great strides in all three of these areas. We are investing heavily in professional learning and development opportunities. This includes innovative and flexible training options for childhood educators. This year alone, Mr. Speaker, we are investing \$43 million in our early learning and childcare. We are, I believe, one of the leaders in the country now in terms of our ability to fully implement our agreement with Canada and to really invest in our youngest Yukoners.

I know that folks in the Assembly were able to come and be part of the opening of the new Child Development Centre — very proud of this investment and what it is going to mean to have all of our services for the Child Development Centre in that new space. If you haven't had a chance to see the new centre, please reach out to ask for a tour and to see the space that is now there for this important program. What it means is earlier intervention, and I know that we are making the right investments, Mr. Speaker, in terms of investing in these types of services.

I wanted to just touch on a couple of other areas as I wrap up my comments today. Obviously, we're in support of this motion and I hope to try to get to a vote today, but I really wanted to highlight the work that is happening in the Department of Education. The other areas where we continue to support children and youth who require access to mental health wellness supports through services, through the child and youth and the family treatment team, which offers counselling services to children, youth, and families — this team is currently supported by 11 clinical counsellor positions and two clinical supervisors. We also continue to support the Roots of Hope initiative, which is an evidence-informed community suicide prevention and life-promotion model that aims to build capacity to prevent suicide. In August 2023, our government released the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* that was informed in collaboration with Yukon First Nations. We are moving forward with 14 initial actions outlined in the strategy to respond to the substance use health emergency. We are also working very closely with the Council of Yukon First Nations to increase funding and support to

Yukon First Nations to develop and implement land-based mental health and substance use treatment initiatives.

There is so much more that I can say. I hope that folks, through the comments that I have made today, see that this is a very important part of our work in the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Social Services, and throughout government. There are supports that are available to children, youth, and families throughout the territory. I hope that folks are accessing them. I listened very carefully to the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin and the comments made, and I will directly follow up on some of those, because I think that it is very important to ensure that if there are gaps, we are filling them, and that is truly the intent of our government.

I will end there, and hopefully we do get to a vote today.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Ms. Blake: I thank my colleague across the way for her words. I have heard many times that this government is taking things seriously. Unfortunately, this is not what I hear from children, youth, and families in the communities. That's the reality I uphold as I talk to this motion.

During visits to several Yukon communities, I have been taken by community members to graveyards so I can see the number of youth and sometimes children who are dying from suicide and drug poisoning, and that's the harsh reality that I'm made to see — that people live with every day when there are no specialized supports.

Our young people deserve better and they need better services, so I hope people vote 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. 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.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 15 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 762 agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:32 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled October 11, 2023:

35-1-102

Response to Written Question No. 38 re: electricity supply and demand and Written Question No. 39 re: power outages (Streicker)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 140

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, October 12, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, October 12, 2023 — 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. Mostyn: This afternoon, we have a few folks here for our tribute on the North American Indigenous Games. Please join me in welcoming: Marie Cairns, the director of Sport and Recreation branch; Megan Cromarty, assistant chef de mission for the North American Indigenous Games and First Nations recreation sport consultant, Sport and Recreation branch; Gael Marchand, chef de mission for the North American Indigenous Games and executive director of the Yukon Aboriginal Sport Circle; and, finally, Pat Joe, who is an elder with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

Please join me in welcoming them to the House this afternoon.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, we have some very special guests here who have joined us here today for the ministerial statement on the Child Development Centre. From the Child Development Centre, we have Dale Stokes, from the board of directors and accompanied by her wonderful support network. We also have Michelle King, program coordinator; Marguerite Kuiack, developmental therapist; and Erin Brost, administrative assistant. From the Department of Education with Early Learning and Child Care joining us today, we have: Clara Northcott, director; Miranda Colbert, supervisor of child care services; and Ruth Lane, early learning program specialist. Thank you all for being with us today.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have the pleasure of tabling the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board's annual report today, and we have in the gallery the chair, Heather Burrell — if we could welcome her, please.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of the Dawson City Fire Department 125th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Silver: I rise today on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Dawson City Fire Department and their 125 years of service. Since 1898, the

department has protected the people and properties of the Klondike, making it Yukon's oldest fire department. Recently, on September 29, the department proudly marked its 125th anniversary with their annual firemen's ball, held at the Palace Grand Theatre. It was a roaring success with nearly 150 people in attendance, all dressed in their finest.

The Dawson City Fire Department sets the standard for civic service and commitment to community, to which all Dawsonites aspire. Their service is defined by their decency, honesty, and care.

Their dedication is expressed by the incredible number of volunteers who have decades and decades of service. Members like Eric Blattler, with nearly 40 years of service; or Buffalo Taylor with 45 years of services, and dozens more with over 35 years of service as well.

Thank you all for your tremendous service, and thank you to all the new recruits, who keep on turning up, attracted by the opportunities for service that the department provides. Mr. Speaker, the department responds to more than just fires. They are front and centre responding to other emergencies like flooding in the Klondike Valley this summer. A major demonstration of this department's incredible spirit was when every single firefighter responded without hesitation to the fire that claimed the Klondike Metallic Industrial building. Despite knowing the risks of being so near to a building that contains highly combustible materials, the courageous volunteers of the department battled the flames for over four hours, and ultimately kept the people of Dawson safe and prevented further damage from surrounding properties.

Locally, they have championed civic addressing projects and ensure that help quickly arrives when needed. They are a fixture at community barbecues and events whenever there is an opportunity to share fire prevention messaging as well. They also created a life-jacket library along the Dawson waterfront for anybody who needs a PFD. They manage the Dawson City Firefighter's Museum in Dawson, which is a must attraction for anybody visiting, providing valuable stewardship of the community's firefighting legacy, and they also assist in delivering Christmas hampers for elders every Christmas. Sometimes they even drive Santa around.

There are amazing people who work for this department and they are more than just a fire department. They are Dawson's reliable nucleus. They are the core that we all revolve around.

I want to thank them all. Former, present, and also future firefighters, thank you very, very much for your service.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Dawson City Fire Department.

On June 13, in Dawson City, we held a Special Sitting of the Legislative Assembly and observed the 125th anniversary of the Yukon becoming a territory. We now have the pleasure of acknowledging the 125th year of the formation of a fire department at the height of the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898. This fire hall is not only the oldest in Yukon; it houses an

amazing museum with memorabilia and a collection of vintage fire engines, apparatus, photos and other fire-related artifacts.

The oldest, vintage fire truck is an 1897 Clapp and Jones steam pumper that came to Dawson in 1900 and has since been refurbished with fundraising done mainly by the local fire department; however, it does amaze me that a 1973 GMC K35 walkaround rescue truck is listed as an antique.

Between the full-time fire chief and approximately 27 volunteers, the Dawson City Fire Department takes care of all manner of crises within the city and throughout the Klondike Valley — house, vehicle, and business establishment fires, all the way to school visits and being a major part of Dawson City parades. They are visible and a strong part of the community.

When Dawson was so much smaller, and basically everyone lived in the downtown core, the fire hall was beside what is now KIAC. The fire station was downstairs, and the fire chief whom I knew, Mr. Elmer Gondreau, and his wife, Margretta, lived upstairs. Mrs. Gondreau and her sister Martha Cameron — née Ballentine — were born Dawsonites, and as we know from history, they were all active members of our community and the Yukon.

As with many buildings in Dawson, the fire hall was moved and today houses the Ray of Sunshine store. Dawson put much value in repurposing and recycling as material was not that easy to acquire.

On September 29, 2023, a formal gala was held at the Palace Grand Theatre to honour the firefighters of the century and a quarter, to the many who gave their service and dedication helping the people of the Klondike. They were active in prevention as well, and they fundraise for others. In fact, the recent gala funds were donated to the Humane Society Dawson. They have a barbecue truck that caters events throughout the summer, and much of the funds are used for the museum or to help their fellow members should they need financial support.

We commend all firefighters for ensuring that our villages, towns, and cities are there for us when we are in danger and angst. Words are never enough. To all the Dawson City Fire Department members, past and present, thank you.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our congratulations to the Dawson City Fire Department.

The world has changed a lot in the last 125 years. Building codes have been established; firefighting tactics have evolved. Those first Dawson firefighters would probably barely recognize the firefighting equipment of today. But what hasn't changed is that when we're in trouble, when our lives and homes and buildings are threatened, firefighters drop what they are doing and run toward the danger, and we are so grateful.

I very much enjoyed the stories told by Dawson fire chief, Mike Masserey, about the history of the department. His obvious pride in the institution is well-deserved. I was particularly struck by the story from just a few years ago when firefighters in Dawson put out a fire and avoided a chemical explosion by seconds. It's a sobering reminder of the risks that firefighters take to keep us all safe.

Congratulations to all of the staff and volunteers of the Dawson City Fire Department, past and present, on this remarkable anniversary. We appreciate everything you do to keep us safe, and here's to another 125 years.

Applause

In recognition of Team Yukon at the North American Indigenous Games

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today to pay tribute to Team Yukon's North American Indigenous Games contingent. From July 15 to 23, Team Yukon travelled to Halifax for the North American Indigenous Games.

The games assembled more than 5,000 athletes, coaches, cultural performers, and team staff from more than 756 Indigenous nations across North America to celebrate, share, and reconnect through sport and culture. It was the 10th edition of the games and the first time they were held since 2017 in Toronto.

Team Yukon was made up of more than 130 individuals, including a cultural contingent and Yukon First Nation elders who shared their stories. I was lucky enough to watch the team launch from the waterfront this summer, and it was so great seeing the excitement and the anticipation of all of these athletes and cultural performers on the cusp of their great adventure. There was representation from across the territory, including Watson Lake, Dawson, Mayo, Teslin, Carmacks, Haines Junction, Ross River, Pelly Crossing, and Whitehorse.

Team Yukon has competed at the North American Indigenous Games since their inception in 1990, and it's exciting to say that Team Yukon had their most successful games in the medal standings ever in 2023. Yukon earned 20 gold, 10 silver, and 9 bronze medals in swimming, rifle shooting, beach volleyball, canoe/kayak, and 3D archery. It is not just medalling that our athletes should be proud of, however; many received personal bests or achieved goals that they set for themselves before heading to the games.

This is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and perseverance of the Yukon's athletes and coaches. Sport grows leaders both on the field and in life. We are proud of what Team Yukon achieved in Halifax and how they represented us all so very well on this important sporting stage. For some athletes, this is the end of their athletic journey. For others, there are even greater sporting goals ahead to tackle. Regardless of where team members find themselves, we are excited for what Team Yukon gets up to next. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to congratulate Team Yukon on their incredible accomplishments as they represented us at the 2023 North American Indigenous Games this past July. This year, the games took place in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaq people. They saw over 3,000 participants from 756 Indigenous nations across North America. Team Yukon made up 130 of that group, a small but very mighty team made up of youth from across the territory

participating in 11 sports and their coaches and mission staff. Thirty-nine metals came home with those athletes, earned in canoe/kayak, archery, beach volleyball, swimming, and rifle shooting. Congratulations to all who participated in the games this year. It is amazing that our youth have so many opportunities to compete in the sports they love in such a large-scale event.

Not only are competitions like the North American Indigenous Games a way for youth to compete, but they are also a way to learn about different cultures and travel to places that they may not have otherwise had a chance to see in their lives.

Each day, the Halifax Common opened to provide cultural village events to participants. A marketplace, various cultural demonstrations, and a main stage set up for a number of performances kept everyone busy and entertained each day. Other performances, festivals, demonstrations, and activities took place throughout the city, and I understand that the residents of Halifax were absolutely thrilled to host such an incredible event.

I would like to say thank you to all those who helped our Team Yukon athletes prepare and train, as it's no easy feat to be selected and to compete. Congratulations, once again, to Team Yukon.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the North American Indigenous Games and the Yukon team.

The North American Indigenous Games bring together Indigenous athletes, coaches, and cultural performers from nations across Canada and the United States to connect, build relationships, and share their love and passion for sports and culture.

The North American Indigenous Games highlight the resilience, strength, and dedication that bring together Indigenous youth from all of North America, youth who have overcome much adversity in their individual journeys through the power of sport and connection to culture.

All the athletes push themselves to try out for their desired sport, competing against some of the top Indigenous athletes across the country. It is in this arena of competition that you see youth give more than 100 percent to not only make the team and compete, but to also represent their home community and nation.

The Indigenous games also create a respectful, supportive, and encouraging space for these athletes and artists to come together in a healthy way to honour their hard work, dedication, and perseverance while their families and support systems cheer them on. All Indigenous athletes are a primary example of the good that will come when there is true investment in sports for Indigenous youth. This importance is also reflected in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action 87, 88, 89, 90, and 91.

This year, the games brought Indigenous athletes to Halifax on the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. First-time Indigenous athletes gathered and built connections

while veterans of the games reconnected with friends or even returned as coaches to mentor the next generation.

There are many ways that the games contribute to improving the quality of life for youth. We witness youth returning from Indigenous games with enhanced independence, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-connection, a sense of belonging, and mastery, all of which are important factors that amplify even more inner growth for youth people.

Congratulations to all the Yukon Indigenous athletes and coaches and elders. You make us all so proud.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board 2022 annual report.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 34: *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 34, entitled *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 34, entitled *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for introduction and first reading of Bill No. 34 agreed to

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to take action to improve safety on Takhini River Road by:

(1) promptly repairing the damage caused by recent precipitation and traffic; and

(2) including the project to improve the roadbed, surface, and drainage in the government's 2024-25 capital budget.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to address the increasing numbers of cases of syphilis and sexually transmitted infections in the Yukon by:

(1) implementing a public awareness campaign encouraging people to be tested; and

(2) ensuring access to immediate testing, results, and treatment.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Development Centre

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, our government cares deeply about ensuring that every child in the Yukon has the right supports and opportunities to build a strong foundation for when they begin school. Over the years, we have continued to make investments to ensure that children are set up to thrive from their earliest years. This includes the Yukon's universal, affordable, childcare program, investing in early childhood educators, and investing in bright, modern, and safe learning spaces.

Today, I'm honoured to share more about one such space in this ministerial statement that will provide insights and serve as a valuable resource for future generations.

Earlier this year, the vibrant Child Development Centre welcomed staff to its new, permanent location at 206 Hanson Street in Whitehorse. I had the opportunity to tour the space at their recent open house and I was very impressed. Our government is extremely proud to provide the Child Development Centre with dedicated funding and to see young children in every Yukon community set up to thrive with the centre's child-centred programming.

This year, we are providing approximately \$4.6 million in funding; last year, we provided operational funding of \$3.4 million along with another \$2.68 million for renovations and furnishings for the centre's stunning new space. This year's increased annual funding allows the Child Development Centre to move forward with their renewal plans, which will address the waiting list and provide additional support for Yukon families.

This funding also supports the lease for their beautiful new space. We know how important the Child Development Centre's location is for supporting not only Whitehorse, but Yukon families and children in all communities who can benefit from speech, language, and developmental therapies as well as additional supports.

Following many months of collaborative work and careful planning, I am grateful to know that, for years to come, the new space can accommodate all CDC programs and staff, including the much-loved therapeutic preschool.

I want to take a moment to hold up the entire Child Development Centre team. I know that each of them has remained flexible, found innovative ways to carry out their work, and have continued to go above and beyond to consistently provide exceptional services, and they did this throughout the centre's five moves in two years, operating at times out of three locations simultaneously.

I would also like to recognize the hard work of the Early Learning and Child Care branch at the Department of Education. They have worked so closely with the Child Development Centre for the past two years to support the organization during their transitions between spaces, all while making preparations for arriving in their new home.

I know the Early Learning and Child Care branch will continue to collaborate to identify future needs for our communities and the needs for future generations, as they grow and evolve. I look forward to many, many more years of the Child Development Centre team serving Yukon families, communities, and children.

Mr. Dixon: I'm pleased to rise in response to this ministerial statement on the Child Development Centre. I want to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to the CDC on the completion of their new space. Like many of my colleagues, I had the opportunity to join the CDC staff, client families, partner agencies and organizations, and other supporters of the CDC at its grand opening just a few weeks ago. For me, Mr. Speaker, it was a touching reminder of the importance of the work that the CDC does for our communities and Yukon families.

During the remarks at the opening, we heard from the minister of the longstanding support that the Yukon government has provided to the CDC. We also heard from a representative of the staff, who spoke about the challenges that the dislocation has created for them over the past few years, and we heard some very touching words from a parent, who spoke about the impact that the CDC has had on their family and their children. What was absolutely unanimous at the time was the sense of relief and happiness at finally being home in a permanent location.

I know that the past several years have not been easy for the CDC. Since the discovery of mould in their old building, they have been bounced around, spread apart, and dislocated. Staff have been working from a variety of offices and spaces since then. There were some at Copper Ridge Place at one point; some in Waterfront Station; I understand some were working from home. I think it was last year that I attended at least one meeting with CDC staff at a rather spartan building in the industrial area. As the minister said, five moves in two years — wow.

I know from the remarks of the staff at the reception, as well as hearing directly from various staff, that all of the moves and the dislocation and the fact that their teams were so spread apart made it very difficult for them. I'm very happy to see that their patience and resilience has paid off, and they are now comfortably in a new, beautiful, functional space that will allow them to deliver the best possible services and programs that they can. For that, my colleagues and I, and many other families across the territory, are thankful. Congratulations to the CDC.

Turning to the minister's statement, I wonder if, in her response, the minister can provide us with an update on the organizational review that is being conducted by the CDC. Her department has certainly been involved in those discussions, so it would be helpful if the minister could provide an update. As well, could she also provide an update on the funding for the CDC? Has the minister been able to provide the multi-year funding agreement to the organization so that they can pair the certainty of their new location with the certainty of multi-year funding? Also, can she let us know what steps have been taken by her department to reduce the wait times for CDC services

that have previously been identified in the organization's annual reports?

With that, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

MLA Tredger: I am delighted, on behalf of the Yukon NDP, to congratulate the Child Development Centre on their new building. It's a particular treat for me to say this, because I have been hanging around their old building since I was about eight, which is when my mom started working there. Folks might not know, but my previous career was as a speech language pathologist, and as soon as I graduated from university, I started keeping an eye on the Child Development Centre's hiring page, because I knew it was where I wanted to work. After a few years, a job opened up, and I was lucky enough to move back home and take it.

I can say from personal experience that the Child Development Centre is a leader in the way it delivers family- and child-centred services. They have put a huge amount of work into making sure that families and children get the support they need in a personalized way that works for them. They have an amazing team, from health professionals to bus drivers to board members to administrators — that's not an exhaustive list; they are all fantastic. They walk with families in some of their hardest moments but also in their successes and joys.

Since their old building was unexpectedly closed a few years ago, they have had a pretty challenging run of it. Being spread out across multiple buildings and having to pack and unpack their offices as they moved and pivoted, the staff have faced the challenges with patience and good humour, and they have gone the extra mile to make sure families and children still had exceptional service.

I also want to commend the families and children for being so flexible as they adjusted to the many changes and the less-than-ideal circumstances. Now, they have a beautiful new building — the modern, accessible, purpose-built space they all deserve. We are so happy for you. We are so happy for all the children and families who come to your space. Thank you so much for all your work, and congratulations.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you to my colleagues today for providing comments and their congratulations to the Child Development Centre. I think it is very much deserved. Our government certainly has made historic investments in early learning for all Yukon children. We are very committed to doing all that we can to ensure children are supported in high-quality learning environments and are ready for school. We know that these are the leaders of tomorrow, and it is absolutely crucial that they are provided with the right tools to grow and flourish.

For almost 45 years, the Child Development Centre has helped families and young children access inclusive, early learning, and specialized therapeutic services. It is profound to think that the centre started operating from a small trailer behind Selkirk Street school with only two employees.

Today, we can just look across the way and see their new, beautiful home, busy with families coming in and out. It is definitely heartwarming. It is certainly one of the initiatives that

I am very, very proud of. I know that this is an important investment for the generations of children to come in the Yukon.

We know there are families across the Yukon still waiting to access the Child Development Centre, and the increased funding we are providing this year will help the centre address the waiting list.

Again, we are proud to support the Child Development Centre, along with the Department of Highways and Public Works, which worked very closely on this project as well. They were able to help the centre with a private sector partner to provide the new long-term space. Not only is it a freshly renovated building, but the space is also very energy efficient, comfortable, and well-suited for the centre's needs, now and into the future. We know that we must always be looking forward as we invest.

I will turn a little bit to some of the questions that were posed today by the Leader of the Official Opposition. In 2021-22, the department funded the CDC to undertake a review of services. They have since shared two reports — The Yukon Child Development Centre New Strategic Plan and Structural Renewal Plan, which is what I am talking about in terms of the funding that we are providing to ensure that they are able to move forward with their plan. The Early Learning and Child Care unit continues to work with and support the CDC, as I said earlier, in identifying their future needs. The structural renewal recognizes the need for a new approach to service delivery that addresses the increasing numbers and complexities of children waiting for services. Again, this new approach is dependent on strengthening organizational support and shifting administrative duties away from specialized therapist services.

I personally have met with the board, and I understand their vision. I am working closely with them as a priority area for our Department of Education to ensure that they are supported in their future plans.

We are investing in continuing education for educators as well. We are investing in the right places with an upstream approach in mind. We care deeply about creating successful learning outcomes for all learners and ensuring that our littlest Yukoners have a strong foundation to begin their school journey.

Thank you so much for allowing me this time.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Mental health services in schools

Mr. Kent: Last spring, during budget debate, I asked the Minister of Education about the confidence and supply agreement commitment to the Third Party regarding wellness counsellors across the territory for Yukon youth. Section 2.f. of the CASA permits the government to "create dedicated wellness counsellors or similar positions in all schools specifically dedicated to addressing the need for comprehensive mental health and wellness." The minister indicated that the government was doing so, saying — I'll quote again, "My hope is to have this work that we are working on

now implemented into the fall school year.” So, can the minister indicate if any wellness counsellors were in place in any Yukon schools for this fall, and whether or not any schools were specifically requesting that support from the department?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I spoke a little bit about the confidence and supply agreement yesterday, and I am happy to speak about it again today. The 2023 agreement sets out a new relationship between the Yukon Liberal caucus and the Yukon NDP caucus, founded in principles, really, of good faith, and we share a number of priority areas when it comes to education.

What was really important to me, as this agreement was being negotiated and as we came up with the areas around education, is that our Department of Education has been working toward renewal and reshaping of education, and so, it was very easy for me to see the positions that were proposed in the confidence and supply agreement for school wellness specialist-type positions. What’s really important for Yukoners to know is that Yukon government has committed to 81 new positions over the next three years, including wellness counsellors, educational assistants, and learning assistant teachers.

I will continue to build on the answers around the wellness specialist positions, as we move forward.

Mr. Kent: Despite the minister’s statement last spring, it appears that there were no wellness counsellor positions in schools this fall.

On August 4, mere weeks before the first day of school, the deputy minister wrote to the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education, and in reference to wellness counsellor positions, indicating that — and I quote: “The department is still working on the job description for this new position...” So, of course, it would be very difficult for those positions to be in Yukon schools when they were still in development in early August. We have seen the Liberals fail to staff critical positions across the government, and now the minister has failed to meet her own target of this fall for wellness counsellors in schools.

Can the minister provide a timeline for when recruitment will start for these positions and when we can expect to see them in all Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Yukon government has made some significant commitments, all aligning, of course, with the reshaping and revisioning of education, and ensuring that we’re getting this right. We have created a school wellness specialist position. These positions will have two specific roles with each school having access to both. The school wellness specialist, with a minimum requirement of a bachelor of social work, and our First Nation wellness support, which will be an elder, traditional knowledge-keeper, or traditional healer — the role of the school wellness specialist will be to provide a variety of direct supports to students, families, educators, and the community, which is really important, and may range from assessments, counselling, consultation and programming, case management, and education, depending on the specific needs of the individual schools or community.

We will post the job ads for the school wellness specialist the week of October 16, 2023. Further, the role of the First Nation wellness support will be to provide culturally

appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students.

Mr. Kent: I don’t believe I received an answer to my question. My questions were specific to whether or not the wellness counsellor positions were in place in schools this fall. As I mentioned, on August 4, the department indicated to the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education that they were still working on the job descriptions for these new positions, and I also mentioned that it would be very difficult, obviously, for those positions to be in Yukon schools when they are still in development.

So, I’m going to ask the minister again: Can she provide this House with a timeline for when recruitment will start for these positions and when we can expect to see wellness counsellors, wellness specialists, or wellness coordinators, which she referred to in the spring, in all Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I believe that I said that those positions will be posted on October 16, 2023.

I will further continue with the answers around these specialized supports. The First Nation wellness support role is another really important role, and we have allocated an additional \$1 million in funding, which can be used for other types of services and supports for students. Part of these funds will be used to work with First Nation governments to hire these roles. We are currently working with the superintendents and the school board executive directors to prioritize the implementation of both of these positions over the next two years. We are also working with school board executive directors and the superintendents on additional EAs and LATs supports in schools. This is, in part, dependent on the success of the recruitment efforts of these positions.

I think that what is really important to note, Mr. Speaker, is that we are really working closely with all of our authorities — the Department of Education and our two school boards. Things have changed in education and we have to work with all of our —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Women’s organizations funding

Ms. Clarke: Earlier this year, the Yukon Women’s Coalition made up of eight individual equity-seeking groups wrote to the minister asking for additional core funding for women’s organizations. The minister responded to the group on April 13. In that letter, the minister said — and I quote: “It is also our intention, once we have finalized a negotiation with...” — the Women and Gender Equity Directorate — “... on the broad implementation plan, to add money through the supplementary budget process to flow to organizations towards stabilizing the sector in the Yukon.”

So, how much new money is being provided as core funding to women’s groups in the supplementary budget?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. I am happy to rise to talk about the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. I gave a ministerial statement yesterday. The bilateral negotiations on the national action plan are complete now. We have a signed agreement with Canada. We certainly are looking forward to

continuing to work with our partners in the NGO sector and other departments within government and First Nations as we move forward.

I think what's really important to note is that the new dollars being introduced through this important agreement — \$16.397 million over the next four years. And, as I stated yesterday, the Government of Yukon is very committed to ending gender-based violence. We are looking forward to implementing Yukon's agreement. We are thankful for Yukoners' contributions, including all of the equity-seeking groups.

The first round of funding for 2023-24 and 2024-25 — and I will continue to build on the answer here in terms of the program that we will be —

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the minister was clear in both her letter and her words in the Legislature. Women's groups should expect to see an increase in the supplementary budget this fall once the negotiations are done with Canada. The supplementary budget includes additional funding to the department of over \$2 million. How much of that is going to the groups that make up the Yukon Women's Coalition in the form of core funding?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, we have a number of very important NGOs that are providing good services to Yukoners. The Yukon implementation plan determines where the funding is allocated over the next two years. The budget for the first two years is \$8,161,000 and what we determined is that 49 percent of that will go directly to NGOs.

The main organizations that will be in receipt of these funds — and, of course, I talked a little bit about this yesterday in terms of the three shelters in the territory that will receive direct funding. It will be done through Health and Social Services. In terms of the organizations that will be eligible, they will be the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, Yukon Status of Women Council, Yukon Women's Transition Home Society, les Essentielles, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Yukon Women in Trades, Queer Yukon, Skookum Jim, and Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition for the first round.

Ms. Clarke: In their letter to the minister in February, the Yukon Women's Coalition requested a formal relationship with the Yukon government in the form of an MOU that gives them a role in prioritizing how the funding should roll out. In her ministerial statement yesterday, the minister said — and I quote: "... our government worked with stakeholders to develop a comprehensive Yukon implementation plan..."

So, can the minister tell us whether or not the Yukon Women's Coalition was involved in the creation of the implementation plan?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are very thankful for the contributions of Yukoners to the plan's development and believe that future collaboration with Yukon not-for-profit women and gender-equity-seeking organizations is very integral to achieving real change. We are also thankful for the opportunity to have met with the Yukon Women's Coalition

before the start of the negotiations. We are mindful, of course, of their request. I just spoke to the amount of funding that will go to the organizations within these next two years. We will continue to work closely with them to determine where dollars will be allocated in out-years.

I also indicated that we have to consider our relationship and partnership with Yukon First Nations and, of course, departments within government as well. One of the key priority areas is also our missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit+ strategy. I'm really looking forward to continuing the work with the not-for-profit groups and seeing —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Nurse recruitment and retention

Ms. Blake: In this year's budget, the Liberal government is on track to spend \$10 million on agency nurses in Yukon hospitals. In comparison, this amount is more than what the Toronto University Health Network spends on their agency nurses to staff a network of large-scale hospitals that serve more than three times the number of patients compared to Yukon hospitals.

Hiring an agency nurse currently costs this government three times as much as a public nurse yet we rely heavily on them every day for essential care. This is not sustainable, practical, or good government spending.

What is this government doing to move our health care system away from being dependent on private health companies?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. It's always great to have the opportunity to speak to Yukoners about health care. Front-line health care staff here in the territory continue to work tirelessly to provide Yukoners with health care services and play an integral role in our ongoing response to public health needs of Yukoners, the substance use health emergency, as well as acute care and preventive care.

We recognize that health care provider burnout is a real and pressing issue in Yukon communities, and we support all health care providers who have sacrificed much of their personal lives and time to their jobs over the past few years. Agency nurses, of course, help us allow others to have some personal time or some much-needed rest.

We continue to mitigate the increased pressures resulting from local, national, and global shortages of health care providers. Nurses, in particular, play a critical role in the delivery of health care services in the territory. The Department of Health and Social Services has undertaken several actions to attract and to retain nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses.

Ms. Blake: We continue to hear from nurses who express feeling undervalued, ignored, and unsupported by this government. Nurses continue to respond to crisis situations daily, often working overtime and under pressure. In contrast, agency nurses get flexible working hours and three times the pay of a public nurse.

Many public nurses have asked for more flexibility in their hours, and they are often denied because of shortages and rigid

work structures. Yukon nurses deserve to work in a health care system where they are valued for their sacrifices, their time, and their expertise.

When will this government start listening to public nurses and give them the flexibility and scheduling they deserve?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think I addressed many of the concerns that were noted in the second question in my first response, in which I expressed clearly that we support health care providers. We understand burnout to be a very real and pressing issue in the communities as well as here in Whitehorse. We support all health care providers who have sacrificed much of their personal lives and time to their jobs.

You don't have to look very far back — the spring of this year — when bonuses were introduced for our Yukon nurses — retention and recruitment bonuses. They have resulted in Community Nursing experiencing a vacancy rate now of approximately 19 percent in primary health care nurses. Of course, that's still not the goal. We are working hard to make sure those positions are full and recruited for throughout the territory, but that's an improvement of approximately 29 percent since the fall of 2022. We work every day to make sure that Yukon nurses are recruited, properly paid for and remunerated in a way that is to their benefit.

Ms. Blake: Some provinces in Canada are working to limit or even ban the use of private nursing agencies. They have realized that using private companies for short-term contracts pulls nurses out of the public health system, takes money away from public funds, and puts it in the private pockets. We can't keep operating our health care system in a state of emergency.

Overworked nurses are feeling demoralized every day, having worse working conditions and lower pay compared to their agency colleagues. The longer we wait, the more we drive public nurses away.

What is this government's timeline to move us away from their dependency on private agencies and into a sustainable health care system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The use of agency nurses across the country, and perhaps across the world, is a delicate balance, of course. Our goal is to use agency nurses only when necessary, in situations where coverage is needed to either support where there is a vacancy or to support our own nurses and health professionals for much-needed rest and respite.

The Department of Health and Social Services has undertaken several actions to recruit nurses to the Community Nursing branch, including widespread job advertisements across websites and social media platforms, and targeted outreach to organizations and individuals. As I've noted, there are significant recruitment and retention bonuses in place. We have worked to shift scheduling structures to allow many nursing positions to operate on a part-time or rotational basis, which is supported by Yukon nurses. In addition, materials have been developed for all branches to support recruitment initiatives at job fairs and others. The International Council of Nurses Congress met with over 6,000 nurses in Montréal in July; Yukon was present.

Question re: School staff shortage

Ms. Van Bibber: We have heard from a number of school councils about staffing challenges that their schools are facing this year. One council told us that their school has a 15- to 20-percent staffing deficit each day and that the list of teachers on call is not translating into answered phone calls each morning. This means that the learning assistant teachers and education assistants are often taken away from their normal duties with vulnerable students to teach classes. If this sounds familiar to the minister, it is because many schools faced the same issues last year.

What is the minister doing to recruit and retain substitute teachers?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the question.

We know that effective teachers are one of the most important factors in a student's success in school, and we work to attract and retain the best educators. In terms of teachers on call, I think that I gave these numbers last week, but I will give them again, because these are the most current numbers that I have from September 26. We have registered teachers on call — they continue to rise; I want to note that first. Right now, we have 159 registered teachers on call — 129 of those are in Whitehorse; 30 in rural; with an additional 19 applications. I believe that many of those applications may have been completed.

We continue to recruit TOCs and recognize that demand for coverage continues to be a challenge. We continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for the teachers-on-call roles and to support the staff in accepting assignments as they are available. We recognize also that the renegotiation of our collective agreement at the end of the current term — June 2024 — is a joint opportunity to collaborate with the union through a negotiation process as well.

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Van Bibber: One of the councils said that working in a deficit model on a daily basis is creating a toxic work environment at the school, according to the administration and staff. They are worried about losing staff, as stress and fatigue affects the morale of the educators. As the TOCs are not available, or it seems they are not answering calls, what steps can be taken to address the shortage of the TOCs and the substitute teachers in the Yukon schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, in terms of operational management of schools, this routinely requires regular adjustment by administrators. While I'm on my feet, I really want to commend the administration teams for their ability to effectively make adjustments where there are temporary vacancies and to mitigate the increased demands on staffing resources. Schools have several options available to help them manage should they have a need. These include, but are not limited to, temporary adjustments, adjusting staff teaching assignments, adjustments to student learning groups, and the use of teachers on call, which is the main part of this question. If a school indicates it may be unable to operate due to a shortage of staff, temporary deployment of central administration staff to schools or regrouping students will be

considered before a shift at all to any kind of remote learning, which is not something we've seen this year.

I think that things are improving. We have been able to attract more TOCs earlier this year and we will continue to work on recruitment.

Ms. Van Bibber: In August, the minister committed to 81 new positions over the next three years in Yukon schools. This includes school wellness counsellors, educational assistants, and learning assistant teachers. Forty of those positions are for this school year.

Can the minister update us on how many of those 40 positions have been hired so far and which schools have they been deployed to?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I believe that I had spoken to this a few moments ago during another question. These are very important positions that we are deploying into our schools. The student wellness specialist positions, as I described earlier today, will be posted on October 16. They are a very important part of the 81 new positions. We will be hiring them, and, as I indicated earlier, we will be working closely with all of our Yukon education partners and authorities. We now have two school boards that we work closely with. There are a lot of other aspects of the supports we are putting in schools. I also indicated that the First Nation wellness support roles will provide a really unique opportunity to work with First Nations around ensuring that we have culturally appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students. We have allocated \$1 million toward that initiative.

Question re: School replacement

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, this summer the government released a tender for the consultant services on the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. The specifications of that tender caught the eye of many people in the school community. In particular, the tender contemplates the demolition of the Takhini Elementary School. To date, the minister has never indicated that there were plans to demolish Takhini Elementary.

Can the minister confirm that Takhini Elementary may need to be demolished to accommodate the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I think I want to start by saying that our government is really proud of investing in school infrastructure. École Whitehorse Elementary has been identified for replacement with a new modern facility that will meet the needs of the community for years to come. Of course, folks know that this is one of our oldest schools and we have made the decision to go ahead and start planning for a new school.

The Takhini education land reserve is a central location that can accommodate this size of a school. It's one of our largest education reserves. In August 2023, Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd. was awarded the prime consultant contract for the École Whitehorse Elementary replacement project through a public tender. A preliminary site assessment is currently underway.

Moving Whitehorse Elementary School to the Takhini education land reserve does not preclude having a school downtown. We have lots of debate around that and we are looking forward to releasing a "what we heard" on Whitehorse school infrastructure later this fall.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, my question was with respect to the potential demolition of Takhini Elementary School that is contained in that RFP, and hopefully the minister gets a chance to address that in this next response. The RFP that was released this summer, and ultimately resulted in the contract awarded that the minister mentioned back in August, also includes a request for the consultant to conduct an analysis of other potential sites if it is deemed that the Takhini lot is inadequate. However, to date, the minister has insisted that this is the only acceptable lot and the only location that the government would consider. So, why would the minister instruct their consultant to conduct an analysis of other sites if they don't think that any other sites are appropriate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to saying that this is a really important project in terms of new infrastructure for Whitehorse. As everyone knows, our population is growing. We have experienced growth that we haven't seen in probably decades. Since 2016, I believe, we have had a 12.1-percent increase from 2016 to 2021, and we are working to catch up — that's what we are doing, Mr. Speaker. We did not have any elementary schools built during the last whole mandate of the Yukon Party.

We are investing in schools and this school is one of our oldest schools. As I have indicated, we have hired a very capable prime consultant to do the assessment work and we want to be as broad as we possible can and do our due diligence, Mr. Speaker. I believe that, in ensuring that we are making the best decisions that we can based on evidence, this contractor will do a very good job for Yukoners.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I will give the minister another chance to answer the specific questions that I asked and they are related to the contract that was awarded back in August to the consultant to look at the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. The first one is that — and the minister has never mentioned this before — they have asked the consultant to consider whether or not Takhini Elementary School needs to be demolished as part of this school redevelopment. The second one is that they actually asked the contractor to look at other potential sites if the Takhini site is not deemed to be appropriate. I know that the minister has never said anything publicly about either of those issues, so I will give her the chance on the floor of the Legislature here today to tell us whether or not they are considering demolishing Takhini Elementary School and whether or not the government is considering other sites for this project.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, this is an important infrastructure. Replacing École Whitehorse Elementary School is an important project for the Government of Yukon. We have awarded the contract as the prime consultant to Kobayashi and Zedda. There is certainly a scope of work. They are hired to provide a plan for the entire design of the replacement school. The first phase of the project is site

analysis and test fit for this particular build. We, of course, want to do our full due diligence, but I will go back to say that the site selection, as it stands right now, on the Takhini education reserve — the Takhini education land reserve is one of the largest in Whitehorse and has enough room for potentially two schools. There are not a lot of other sites that are centrally located and would meet the needs of a new school such as this.

I'm really looking forward to the results of the prime consultant, and I'll be able to give more information then.

Speaker: Order, please.

The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 744

Clerk: Motion No. 744, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It is moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to COVID-19 symptoms, illness or protocols may participate in the sittings of the House by video conference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by video conference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) be permitted to participate in counts in Committee of the Whole, notwithstanding Standing Order 44 and Standing Order 44.1;

(4) contribute to constituting quorum in the Legislative Assembly, under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(5) be considered to have attended the sitting of the Legislative Assembly, with no deduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Following COVID, and since we have come back as an Assembly, we have had this motion and two other motions that we brought forward each time for each sitting of the House. Recently at House Leaders, I was asked to please take this up with the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to try to seek a more permanent solution around this, rather than bringing this set of motions back each time.

I can say that I have raised this with the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, but the committee has not yet reached agreement to bring back a report to us as an Assembly. I indicated that I would bring these motions back. I have heard from some colleagues in the House that they remain concerned about this motion, and I agree that we should find a permanent solution. That is why I raised it at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges.

Maybe we will get into a debate about it today, but this is the first of three motions, which we have had since the House returned after COVID. It is about making sure that people can participate in this House, do their work, and contribute, while not putting others at risk. I look forward to debate on the motion, and I will continue to try to seek a solution at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges.

Mr. Cathers: I just have to remind the Government House Leader that he is also a member of that committee and has the opportunity to propose solutions there.

Our caucus has been clear for quite some time about our position that we recognized that something was necessary during the pandemic, but we don't think this is the right model — especially as an ongoing model.

Most legislative assemblies in Canada adopted temporary measures for virtual participation in sittings during the pandemic. As of August 2023, most have moved away from those measures and do not allow for virtual participation in sittings. Only four other provinces and territories allow for either virtual attendance under a hybrid model, or attendance that way under exceptional circumstances.

We have proposed an alternative model for discussion at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, and we believe that or something similar would be a better approach. We also asked that the chair convene a meeting as soon as possible to discuss this issue and other items. However, we don't see it as productive to spend much time debating these motions today in the interest of the House's time, and we will reluctantly vote in favour, while noting that the model should change before the next sitting.

MLA Tredger: This motion has been really important for this Assembly over the last three years. It has allowed us to keep each other safe while still doing our jobs. We have heard over and over from medical professionals how critical it is to stay home when you are sick. We have amplified that message here in the Legislature. When we, as MLAs, choose to stay home when we're sick, we keep all the people who work in this building safe — from the security staff to the department officials who come to help brief us, to the clerks and the pages. We keep their families safe. We protect all the people who come in contact with them when they finish their work day and head out into the territory and run into people at the grocery store, or while picking up their kids from school, or while joining their friends at a sports game. There are an exponential number of people who avoid exposure when we stay home when we are sick.

This motion has allowed us to do that while still doing our jobs. We can keep people safe and still vote. We can pass a budget and keep the wheels of government turning. We can make sure that the voices of our constituents are heard without compromising the safety of the people around us. It just makes sense.

But COVID-19 is not the only illness of concern that we face. Right now, we are coming into flu season. Influenza is an unpleasant and disruptive disease for anyone, but for people

who are young, or elderly, or who have compromised immune systems, it can be deadly. Besides that, there are a whole host of gastrointestinal and respiratory and other illnesses that I wouldn't wish on anyone.

So, I am going to move an amendment to this motion.

Amendment proposed

MLA Tredger: I move:

THAT Motion No. 744 be amended by deleting the phrases "COVID-19 symptoms," and "or protocols".

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse Centre:

THAT Motion No. 744 be amended by deleting the phrase "COVID-19 symptoms," and "or protocols".

The motion, if amended, would then read:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting, any Member of the Legislative Assembly who is unable to attend sittings of the House in person due to illness may participate in the sittings of the House by video conference, notwithstanding Standing Order 8 or any other Standing Order, and by video conference shall:

(1) be recognized to speak in debate, notwithstanding Standing Order 17;

(2) be permitted to vote, notwithstanding Standing Order 25;

(3) be permitted to participate in counts in Committee of the Whole, notwithstanding Standing Order 44 and Standing Order 44.1;

(4) contribute to constituting quorum in the Legislative Assembly, under Standing Order 3 and the *Yukon Act*; and

(5) be considered to have attended the sitting of the Legislative Assembly, with no deduction of indemnity required under subsection 39(5) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*.

The member has 18 minutes and 12 seconds remaining to speak to the amendment.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I want to apologize for my off-mic comment of surprise when I realized that I had not signed the motion properly, and I appreciate the Clerks helping me get that corrected.

This amendment expands the motion to cover all illness. As I have said, there are many illnesses besides COVID-19 that we do not want to be spreading to each other or to any of the people who work in this building, or any of the other community members who they will be on contact with. I know that this issue is going forward to SCREP, but I believe that this is a critical issue of safety that warrants input from the entire Legislative Assembly, so I have brought it forward here today.

One of the concerns that comes up when we discuss remote participation is: Is the technology adequate? Well, we have invested in these beautiful, new screens here in the Legislative Assembly, and cameras, to make sure that we can. People are working remotely all over the world, and after three years of Zoom meetings, I hope that we are all proficient enough to manage a video call. One of the advantages of a small Assembly, like we have here, is that we can avoid some of the

complexities faced by places like the House of Commons, who have needed face recognition software to vote. For us, it's pretty straightforward. Of course, there may be hiccups and learning curves along the way, but I am confident that we can make it work.

As I've mentioned, staying home when we're sick helps everyone, but it especially protects the people who are immunocompromised, including people with a variety of chronic illnesses and disabilities. If we want this Assembly to be accessible to everyone so that everyone in the Yukon can be represented here, it means making sure that it's safe for everyone, and that includes people who are particularly vulnerable to infection.

Everyone in this Assembly takes their job very seriously and understands the weight of the responsibility we have. I know that many of us have shown up for work despite being ill because it was critical that we could participate in debate and votes. If the choice before us is letting the government fall or coming in sick, well, it doesn't feel like much of a choice. But, at the same time, we have said to the public over and over to stay home when you're sick, so it would be hypocritical of us not to set up a system that allows us to do the same.

With that in mind, I hope that all of my colleagues will join me in supporting this amendment.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to speak to the amendment.

First of all, I thank the Member for Whitehorse Centre for bringing the amendment. This is exactly the point that I had raised at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections, and Privileges. What we do here in Canada — but let's talk about in the Yukon — is that we say to workers to please stay home if you are feeling sick. What we are talking about is if you have cold- or flu-like symptoms. That is what we have been advising Yukoners to do. That's coming from our health care professionals — our chief medical officer of health — and it's about making our workplaces safe.

We talk about making sure to cough into your elbow, making sure to have great hand hygiene, and to just being better at trying to make sure that we don't spread illness. This is exactly what we're talking about. It's about making sure that our workplaces are safe and it's about making sure that we are reflecting what we are asking our citizens to do — that we, as an Assembly, hold up the same advice that we're giving to all Yukoners.

When I think back to how this motion, as a COVID motion, has been used, it has been used several times in this Assembly. It has never been abused. It's for when people have had COVID — or even COVID-like symptoms, and when they had those symptoms, we weren't sure whether or not they had COVID in that moment — they could participate.

I remembered doing it once before we had the new technology, the screens, and the cameras. I was thankful that I had the opportunity to continue to do my job representing members of Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and to take on the role as a minister. That's trying to do work.

One of the questions that I can imagine is: Where is the line? I always think that the people who are here serving Yukoners do so honourably and do so in a way where they don't, in any way, for example, feign sickness.

There have been times I have noted here — that's just a gravelly voice, by the way, not an illness — when I have seen people come in and, to me, it feels like they are under the weather and I would prefer if we had a motion like this. I note that the amendment, as it stands, will be for this Sitting, and I still commit to taking this back to the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to try to work across all parties to come up with a more permanent solution.

One last thing that I will just point out — when I heard the Member for Lake Laberge speaking earlier, he talked about four Canadian jurisdictions. It is true that it is four provinces and territories but there is also the federal government, so it's five, I think, that allow for this type of approach. I recognize that it is not the majority; however, I have also not heard of problems from those jurisdictions. This is about health and about leading in the way that we are asking of our citizens in their workplaces.

Mr. Kent: The Official Opposition will be voting against this amendment for a couple of reasons. Obviously, we have spoken on the floor here today about House Leaders in the spring and the fact that there we had discussed adopting the COVID motions in the spring but referring that to SCREP over the summer. It is my understanding that SCREP — I am not a member of that standing committee — met twice over the summer and, as was mentioned, they weren't able to come to any sort of an agreement on what this would look like.

I guess the more disappointing thing for me is that I am seeing this for the first time here rather than it coming to House Leaders for any discussion, and then we could have potentially gone back to our caucuses and had further discussion about what this means.

Again, we were prepared to vote in favour of extending the motions that we have had for the past number of Sittings during the pandemic and as we emerged from the pandemic but, that said, we believe that the proper place for this discussion is at the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, or SCREP, so that they can have those discussions. They can come back with something that has been presented and potentially voted on, or concurred with by all three parties, rather than just asking us here on the floor of the House to support this today with no prior warning and no prior discussion at House Leaders.

So, for that reason, we will be voting against this amendment brought forward by the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

Ms. White: I am actually — this is probably no surprise to anyone — going to be speaking in favour of the amendment. In the time that I have been here, I have come in before with a flu because, at the time, I had to come to work. I came in with a flu. Liz Hanson and I had gone to a house where the small infant projectile vomited, like in the movie *Poltergeist*, and I

was sick for days after, but I had to come to work because I needed to be here. I didn't have an option; I couldn't not come to work.

People may remember the horse cough that I think I had in the fall of 2021. That sounded awful, and I am sure that Hansard remembers because it was probably awful for them every time I did not move away from my microphone in time before I coughed. It wasn't COVID; it was some kind of horrible infection that the doctor told me I was just going to have to muscle through it. But I didn't have the option of staying home. We tell people that they should stay home when they are sick. We have just implemented paid sick days because we think it is so important.

As a business owner, when people were sick, I didn't want them in my business. I didn't want them to get their co-workers sick because then I would have no staff. It is a matter of making sure that we are mirroring what we are asking people. I can tell you that when I had the flu, I would rather have been home, and I did participate remotely when I had COVID prior to the investments that we made in this Chamber. It was a pretty awful experience, I am sure, for whichever minister — I can't remember — I tried to ask questions for. It didn't go well.

We put the money in. I think it's important that we have, but it's making sure that not only do we respect the people in the territory to whom we are saying to stay home when sick, but it's also respecting each other. It's recognizing that no matter how much we like to pretend that we're not quite human and that we can muscle through it, the truth of the matter is that sometimes it would be better off if we didn't. I can tell you distinctly that there were two times when I wish I hadn't been here or had to come in, but I did because there wasn't an option. Really, the amendment to this motion says that you can participate remotely while you are ill. I think that is important.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question on the amendment?

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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the amendment carried.

Amendment agreed to

Speaker: Is there any debate on the main motion as amended?

If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I just will respond to a few things here. The first one is that there have been conversations that have been going on. Even today, the Member for Lake Laberge wrote to me, talking about this issue. I replied back. I used the similar reply that I had given about a week ago or so, talking about that this was about creating a healthy workplace. So, this motion, or the amendment to the motion, while it wasn't discussed at House Leaders, it has been discussed by our various political parties.

Another thing that I just want to talk about is that this is about providing an opportunity for people to continue to do their jobs. Say that someone did have an illness like COVID-19, or whatever the illness is, and that they were not able to be in this House, this is a way that allows us to continue to represent citizens, to continue to do our work, whether it is as an opposition critic, or whether it is as a minister — I think that all of us strive to do our best to represent Yukoners in this House, and this provides an additional option for that representation.

I don't know, at this point, whether the Official Opposition, now having voted against the amendment, is also in support of the motion as amended or not. It is my hope that they are. I just will reiterate that, regardless of what the vote is today on this, I will continue to bring this to the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges for us to try to work through what will be a long-term solution for us as an Assembly.

Of course, whatever the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges agrees to bring forward, it will still come to the floor of the Assembly for us to debate and decide on the rules that govern us here in this House. This is about creating safe workplaces, it's about allowing people to continue to do the jobs that they were elected to do, and it's reflecting what we are asking Yukoners to do across all of our workplaces.

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: Disagree.

Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. Clarke: Disagree.

Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 10 yeas, seven nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion as amended carried.

Motion No. 744, as amended, agreed to

Motion No. 745

Clerk: Motion No. 745, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It is moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting, if the Legislative Assembly stands adjourned for an indefinite period of time, the Government House Leader and at least one of the other House Leaders together may request that the Legislative Assembly meet virtually by video conference, with all the Members of the Legislative Assembly being able to participate remotely, notwithstanding any current Standing Orders regarding members' physical presence in the Chamber.

Motion No. 745 agreed to

Motion No. 746

Clerk: Motion No. 746, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It is moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT, for the duration of the 2023 Fall Sitting:

(1) the Clerk shall keep a daily list of paired members, in which any member of the Government and any member of an opposition party may have their names entered together by noon on that date to indicate that they will not take part in any recorded division in the Legislative Assembly held on that date; and

(2) following each such division held, the names of any members entered on the list of paired members for that date shall be printed in Hansard and the Votes and Proceedings.

Motion No. 746 agreed to

GOVERNMENT BILLS**Bill No. 28: Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)
— Second Reading**

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 28, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Clarke.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Environment that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce Bill No. 28, *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, for the Legislative Assembly's consideration.

This bill includes several small but important amendments to the *Environment Act* that are necessary to enable the implementation of a fully modern, extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon. The extended producer responsibility is a waste management approach in which producers of products and packaging are legally obligated to ensure those products and packaging are responsibly managed at the end of their lives.

This represents a departure from the current waste management approach, which is heavily subsidized by Yukon taxpayers through government administration and transfers to recycling and waste management processors. Extended producer responsibility will provide a long-lasting solution to the underlying structural issues facing the Yukon's recycling and waste management system and will reduce the cost of these services to the Yukon taxpayer. It will also set the stage for innovation and improvement in the Yukon's waste management systems and will support the shift to a circular economy that generates less overall waste. The changes we are discussing today will have an impact on the Yukon's future extended producer responsibility regulation. We intend to advance these changes later this winter, after the Legislative Assembly considers this bill and the Assembly rises.

Firstly, these amendments are necessary to ensure that the Yukon government has the authority to establish a comprehensive producer hierarchy and assign producer responsibility to classes of stewards. Additionally, the amendments allow for exemptions of small producers who met revenue- and weight-based thresholds identified in the regulation. Lastly, they capture producers conducting transactions outside of the Yukon under the regulation, such as online sales.

Mr. Speaker, for an extended producer responsibility system to be effective, the responsibility for the collection and recovery of materials is assigned to the producer most responsible for the creation and introduction of that material. In extended producer responsibility systems, producer hierarchies are created with the responsibility for collecting and recovering materials cascading from national chains and brand owners down to importers and, ultimately, local businesses. Placing responsibility as high as possible in the hierarchy is most

desirable as those groups have the most control over how things are packaged and distributed.

The *Environment Act* currently does not enable the Yukon to place producer responsibility on producers at the highest levels of the hierarchy, like brand owners, product designers, or franchisers. Updating the definition in the act will allow the Yukon government to assign responsibility for waste management in the Yukon to those large national chains. Not updating the legislation could create a scenario where Yukon businesses are made responsible for the collection and recovery of materials when there are national businesses above them in the hierarchy that should instead be responsible.

The amendments contained in Bill No. 28 also clarify that the definition of "producer" captures producers from outside of the Yukon who supply designated materials into the Yukon, even if the financial transaction takes place outside of the Yukon. This will avoid a scenario where producers outside of the Yukon, like Amazon, can argue that they are not bound by the regulation because their transactions are not occurring in the Yukon.

Bill No. 28 will also pluralize the word "steward" in the act to ensure that producer responsibility can be assigned to a class of stewards rather than to an individual steward, avoiding a scenario where the Yukon government must list each steward individually in the regulation. This amendment is administrative and will not impact stewards or members of the Yukon public.

Lastly, Bill No. 28 will provide broader language to allow the Yukon government to exempt certain classes of stewards from their responsibility under an extended producer responsibility system. The current list of exemptions may appear exhaustive, but there is the potential for future small producers to not be captured by the groups currently listed in the act. Adding the word "stewards" to the list of groups that can be exempted from the regulation will eliminate this risk. Mr. Speaker, the Yukon government has made it a priority to ensure that the concerns and interests of the Yukon public and Yukon businesses are understood and considered during the development of an extended producer responsibility system.

The Department of Environment carried out public engagement that occurred from November 2022 to February 2023 on an extended producer responsibility system and included questions that inform the proposed amendments contained in Bill No. 28. The feedback from the engagement indicated a desire for a strong and clear definition of "steward" that aligns the Yukon's producer hierarchy with other Canadian jurisdictions. Officials with the Department of Environment have also had ongoing dialog with recycling stakeholders, municipalities, and members of the business community since January 2022. The Yukon government values the certainty and reassurance that this open dialog can bring so we have committed to ongoing discussions that will carry into the extended producer responsibility implementation phase that will culminate in 2025.

We are excited for the potential that an extended producer responsibility system will bring to the Yukon and the immediate certainty that it will provide to our recycling and

waste management system to setting the stage for a circular economy in the long term. I look forward to hearing the thoughts of my colleagues in the House this afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to Bill No. 28 at second reading.

Mr. Dixon: I am pleased to rise today and speak to this bill that is before the House to amend the *Environment Act*. From what we can tell, the changes proposed to the *Environment Act* are relatively small but take the Yukon in the direction of going toward the establishment of an EPR model. Of course, this is not new to the Legislature; we have discussed this issue previously.

We will be voting in favour of the legislation, but I do want to say a few things about the concerns that I have about the potential establishment of an EPR system as envisioned by this current government.

Over the past year, we have been hearing significant concerns being raised by the business community about the implications of this system on their businesses. The consultation that occurred over the last year or so heightened the discussion and the level of awareness that a lot of Yukon businesses had about this. Our office was certainly contacted by numerous businesses in a variety of sectors that were expressing concern about what it would mean.

Earlier this year, in January, my colleague, the Member for Copperbelt South and I were in Vancouver for other meetings and had the opportunity to sit down for a meeting with the Retail Council of Canada. The Retail Council of Canada is the main business organization in Canada that deals with extended producer responsibility programs across the country. We had a very enlightening conversation with their policy staff there. The Retail Council of Canada, I know, submitted a significant document to the Yukon government in regard to their consultation that happened earlier this year or last year.

I won't rehash the entirety of what they said but I will say that I did leave that meeting with the Retail Council of Canada concerned. They expressed significant surprise to us that a jurisdiction of our size, with our population size, and the size of our economy would consider establishing an EPR model all on our own as a stand-alone model. They thought that was surprising, for sure. They expressed concerns about what that would mean for cost and efficiency, and they recommended that we proceed very much with caution.

Following that meeting, I have been approached by a number of business leaders in this community. I won't get into individual businesses, but I would say that they span across a variety of sectors and had real concerns about what they saw in the document that was presented by Environment Yukon for consultation. It led them to raise serious concerns about what the impact on the cost of doing business would be as a result of the proposed implementation of this program.

I had heard from some businesses that attended some of the consultation meetings that were hosted by Environment Yukon, and it was remarked upon by officials that local businesses wouldn't have to worry about this because the cost of this entire program would simply be borne by large, multi-national

corporations or big chain businesses. That was something that I think raised the concern of a lot of businesses as well because that certainly sounds like it's too good to be true. The idea that local, small businesses just won't be impacted by the cost and that the big companies will simply just fork over all this money and pay for the whole system, I think, is naïve and I think it is something that the government needs to be very careful about — working under that assumption.

I have heard from a number of businesses that do operate chains here in Yukon. Again, I won't get into the specifics, but they are in the food service business. Large retailers — in some cases, the largest retailers in our community — expressed directly to us a high level of concern about the possibility of what the Yukon government was proposing — what they interpreted as the imposition of significant new costs on their businesses.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, we will vote in favour of the legislation proceeding today. We will have some questions in Committee, but I think we all know that the devil will be in the details of the regulations. The regulations will be what brings the system into effect. The regulations will be where businesses can get a sense of whether or not this is going to work for them. My request at this stage — I realize that we are only at second reading of this bill — will be that the government make the regulations public before they come into effect so that businesses can know exactly what they are dealing with, exactly what's coming, and then they can have their say about how it is going to affect them.

Previously, we have seen governments consult on regulations, wait a few years, and then release regulations that then immediately come into effect, and businesses, stakeholders, and everyone else are caught off guard as to how the implementation of those regulations will work.

My request is for the government to take seriously the concerns of the business community, to draft the regulations with care and thought, and then to share those regulations in draft form with the business community before they come into effect.

I will conclude my comments there, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, we will vote in favour of the legislation today. There's nothing in the bill before us that is of immediate concern, but the longer term implications of the imposition of a new system are concerning to us. What ends up in the regulations is concerning to us, and we will have significant questions about those regulations, once those regulations come out.

MLA Tredger: The Yukon NDP is very happy to see this movement forward on extended producer responsibility in the Yukon. Most jurisdictions in Canada have started doing this, and we are happy to be catching up and leading the territories in doing this.

Like most good ideas, it can be done in a way that checks a box and doesn't achieve much, or it can be done in a way that makes real change and has a real environmental impact. So, as my colleague said, the devil is in the details, and I have a bunch of questions for Committee of the Whole.

In particular, some of the things that I am interested in are what the minimum recovery percentage will be for the different material categories. I am interested in how we are going to make sure that the recycled materials make it all the way back to re-manufacturing and don't just leave the Yukon, where they are out of mind and out of sight but nothing consequential happens. I will save my questions for Committee of the Whole where we can get into the details, and we are really pleased to see this moving forward.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I am going to take a few moments this afternoon to talk about extended producer responsibility here in the territory, and I want to begin by thanking my colleague for bringing this very important piece of legislation to the House this afternoon. Make no mistake; it really is important.

For a while now, we have been talking in this House about how much garbage we have been producing, how much it costs, and how much it costs each one of us, and how we have to deal with it. In 2016, the Association of Yukon Communities passed a resolution asking for improvements in how our society handles our garbage, organic waste, and recycling. In 2018, as a result of that resolution, and the report that we received, the Association of Yukon Communities participated with the Yukon government in Whitehorse in a Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste. We have been working on the recommendations from that committee ever since, tying it into the nation-leading *Our Clean Future* document, which again, our government took pains to draft to make sure that we are held accountable and actually take action on climate change.

One focus of the report of the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste was improving our landfills — creating supervised and controlled regional landfills and closing transfer stations in Braeburn, Johnsons Crossing, Keno, and Silver City. I don't have to go over this at all; we have been talking about this for at least years now.

As a matter of fact, at the time of our action on the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste, we had a press release from the Yukon government, Whitehorse, and the Association of Yukon Communities that said — and I quote: “Changing the way in which we deal with solid waste takes time, but we must persevere to achieve a system that works in Yukon, as the cost of solid waste and recycling to our governments continues to rise.” The Association of Yukon Communities “... is encouraged to see the recommendations moving forward, through the efforts of Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste.”

That was a quote from the president at the time of the Association of Yukon Communities, Tara Wheeler.

Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about today is really central in managing our garbage better. It is about taking better care of our environment, and very important to me — something I've been working on for most of my professional career — it is about taking action on climate change. Better managing our landfills, separating organics from garbage, and recycling will go some distance in reducing methane in the territory, which is a very pernicious cause of global warming. It is one of the reasons that this is important to me.

We have declared a climate emergency in this territory, and in the face of such a declaration, we must take action — as many actions as possible — to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Improving our management of our landfills is one action that we can take to do this. We also have to reduce the amount of garbage we produce as a society. I have been quite vocal on this of late. Recycling is very important for that: to achieve less garbage. This is where extended producer responsibility comes in.

The amendments tabled today to the *Environment Act* give us the ability to place the responsibility of waste management collection and processing on large national corporations, rather than on Yukon small businesses. Extended producer responsibility is a waste management framework that provides a long-lasting solution to the underlying structural issues facing the Yukon's recycling system and reduces the cost of recycling to the Yukon taxpayer. We have all noticed the impact to recycling services over the last year.

Most recently, processors announced that they would no longer be accepting soft plastics. This sent a ripple throughout the entire community, and I can't believe — now that is going into the garbage — how much plastic we are actually producing as a society. I know that others — I'm sure that many of our constituents have noticed the very same thing. Under an extended producer responsibility system, the government can obligate producers to collect products like soft plastics that are currently going into our garbage cans and currently going into our landfills. Glass — which is also going into our garbage and also going into our landfill — and other hard-to-recycle materials — we can obligate producers to ensure that they are designed out of the system, reused, or recycled. That's what we are talking about this afternoon.

Now, while we have heard widespread support for an extended producer responsibility system during our public engagement period, respondents did raise concerns about potential cost impacts to residents and Yukon businesses. Because extended producer responsibility systems are already in place across Canada, we are not reinventing the wheel here. These are systems that are well-developed in the rest of the country.

National chains have already incorporated the cost of funding these systems into their prices. We are paying for this already, and we are getting nothing in the territory back. A recent economic analysis estimated that, collectively, Yukoners are already paying an estimated \$1.3 million to \$2.9 million — as much as \$2.9 million a year — for extended producer responsibility services that we are not receiving, that we are not taking advantage of. That is a \$3-million swing in the territory, and I am going to talk about how much this is costing us already that we are getting nothing back for.

This is incredibly important legislation that we are talking about this afternoon. I want to highlight that. So, to ensure concerned Yukon businesses and recycling stakeholders have the certainty they need, the Yukon government has maintained an ongoing dialog. We are talking to address concerns and inform the development and implementation of our system. My good colleague has been doing that great work. We are

committed to continuing this dialog up to and beyond the implementation of an extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon, and the Yukon's extended producer responsibility system will assign responsibility for recycling starting at the national brand-owner level.

We are going to try to recover the up to \$3 million that we are losing every year, in addition to paying almost \$2 million. We are talking a \$5-million swing to the territory's finances just by implementing this policy properly. As a result, we anticipate direct impacts on local Yukon businesses to be limited.

All right, I have a few more things to say, and then I'll cede the floor.

Amendments to the *Environment Act* that enable an extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon is a continuation of the work this government is doing, as I said, to modernize waste management services in the Yukon. The implementation of extended producer responsibility was recommended by the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste back in 2018. The committee was a joint working group, comprising Yukon government and Association of Yukon Communities representatives tasked with providing recommendations and priorities to improve waste management systems in the territory — want to make things better — but this committee was also building on a history of work that demonstrates the need to modernize and improve waste management in the Yukon.

As I have said, introducing extended producer responsibility is an important feature in our approach to develop a standardized waste management system for the Yukon that is based on a shared responsibility for waste management and waste reduction. Financially sustainable, collaborative environmental health and economic benefits will be seen in the territory through this change.

The work to establish a modern approach to waste management is a standing agenda item for most meetings between staff and elected officials of both the territorial government and municipalities. We talk about it all the time in community meetings. It's one of the things we talk about a lot.

A sustainable solution to funding solid-waste operations requires a combination of approaches, and extended producer responsibility is a part of that strategy. It's a very important part of that strategy, Mr. Speaker. This extended producer responsibility legally obliges producers of products and packaging to deal with those products and packaging at the end of their life. Until now, non-refundable recycling in the Yukon has been managed primarily through a mixture of municipal and Yukon government funding with organizations like Raven ReCentre, Whitehorse Blue Bin, and P&M playing a role in collection and processing. It has been sort of a hodgepodge — government, not-for-profits, and businesses.

Every community, every Yukoner wants a better waste management system. We understand that recycling, diversion, and reuse are important parts of meeting our climate change objectives. It supports *Our Clean Future*, our nation-leading plan. It is important that we implement these recommendations for that plan. If we are going to hit the targets that we have said we're going to meet, we have to take every action, and some of

those involve making very, very hard choices when it comes to dealing with our waste.

I am committed to making those hard decisions and making those moves that will make things better for all Yukoners into the future. As a matter of fact, the whole country — the whole planet — is what is at stake.

Some of Yukon's recycling is refundable through legislative fees, like the beverage container regulation, which sets the surcharges on beverage containers and the amount that is refunded when an item is taken to a licensed recycling depot in the Yukon; or the designated materials regulation, which establishes a surcharge collected on tires and electronic waste at the time of purchase to pay for recovery of those items at the end of their lives. Both fees are deposited into the recycling fund to help ship and recycle these products to recycling centres out of the territory; and both programs will continue to operate when the extended producer responsibility comes into force.

For items not captured by the beverage container and designated material programs, the Yukon government is already spending up to \$2 million in diversion credits to processors in 2023 for what we call "non-refundables". That's money that Yukon is paying, and we are not getting any money from the south on this. We are paying out of our pocket and not getting any recoverables, and we have to change that. Diversion credits are a per-tonne contribution that offsets the cost of handling and processing material that otherwise would end up in our municipal and unincorporated landfills — filling up our landfills, which are expensive to build, expensive to use, and expensive to decommission, adding to the environmental liability and contributing to greenhouse gases.

The cost of diversion credits has increased dramatically in recent years, from approximately \$500,000 in 2018, when that committee first made its report, to approximately \$1 million in 2022. This year, it has nearly doubled to \$2 million. We have to get a handle on the cost of dealing with our garbage, Mr. Speaker. This \$2 million is in addition to the City of Whitehorse providing \$150,000 in diversion credits to Raven ReCentre and P&M each year.

I want to note, that Dawson City and Watson Lake annually contribute \$200,000 and \$180,000 respectively to their local recycling initiatives. Those two communities are spending \$380,000 on their recycling initiatives; Whitehorse is paying \$150,000; the Yukon government is paying \$2 million toward those recycling efforts. We have to start making that money back.

The extended producer responsibility, which is a system in place for recycling paper and packaging across Canada, ensures that producers and large retailers pay for the cost of recycling those non-refundables. We want the larger corporations in Canada to start paying their share of the garbage that they are putting in our landfills.

Extended producer responsibility regulations have now been adopted by all provinces in Canada. Alberta expects to have their program operational by April 2025. Our homegrown northern extended producer responsibility program goes some distance in addressing the Association of Yukon Communities resolution from their 2016 annual general meeting that asked

for a territory-wide solution for waste management, recycling, and other diversion programs that reduce waste and illegal dumping, and the subsequent actions that the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste made in 2018. It will also be welcomed by professionals and recycling operations involved across this sector throughout the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, since Raven ReCentre announced earlier this year that they would close the free public drop-off service, officials from the City of Whitehorse, the Yukon government, and the recycling industry have been exploring how we can support sustainable solutions for recycling programs in the City of Whitehorse and across the territory. That action was taken at the behest of myself at a meeting with Raven ReCentre and officials. This is the first time that we have ever seen such a committee working on this project together, and I really commend them all for stepping up and making this a reality.

The working group has developed options for a recycling system that will ensure the continuation of recycling system services within Whitehorse beyond the end of 2023. That is the goal. Our officials have been working in partnership with the City of Whitehorse and local recycling stakeholders to find solutions. This important work, as I say, is ongoing.

The one stumbling block the group encounters is the cost of dealing with this material. Extended producer responsibility addresses the shortcoming for most material by shifting the cost of managing post-consumer packaging to producers — these national producers. We are going to start pulling money from them and not having to pay out of our own pocket. It is very important; I can't say that enough.

One might argue that this change will ultimately be paid for by the consumer, but there are three things to keep in mind: number one, Yukoners already pay for much of the extended producer responsibility fees that are embedded by manufacturers in the price of the products they are buying today; we are just not getting that money back into the territory. Extended producer responsibility will also reduce the need for diversion credits paid for by government — taxpayers in the territory, the businesses here, will not have to pay and lose the revenue that they are getting from these national producers. Third, extended producer responsibility will drive innovation with producers seeking to reduce costs, and we can all rightly expect less packaging in the future.

We all see how much plastic, glass, and other material is going into our garbage cans. We want to make that less so that we have longer lifespans in our landfills and we're actually putting less of a strain on our planet, and by separating out our garbage properly, we can have less methane and other nasties in our environment.

This is a huge step. I really do appreciate all the work that my good colleague has done — the work that Community Services has done — in supporting all of this work as well. We are excited to be taking this step after years of discussion with our community partners and colleagues at Environment. Thank you for the time this afternoon. I will now cede the floor.

Mr. Hassard: I hadn't intended to speak to this today, but a couple of things have come to my attention as I have been

listening. I guess the first one is probably the Minister of Community Services — I don't know what to call it — his willingness or constant desire to bring up his shortcomings in dealing with solid-waste transfer stations in the Yukon — four, in particular, of course, that we talk a lot about. Today, in talking about his shortcomings, he brought up AYC again. Of course, we all know that he continually places the blame on AYC with what is going on with this fiasco and these four particular solid-waste transfer stations, but the one thing he mentioned today was the past president, Tara Wheeler. He used a quote of hers, and in that quote, it talked about finding solutions that work for Yukoners. That's great. It's very true, and I don't think you will find anybody who would disagree with that. The part that the minister is missing is the working with Yukoners to find solutions, instead of this "father knows best" routine that the minister keeps forcing on Yukoners.

The other comment I have is that I'm hoping, when the Minister of Environment is on his feet again — we know that EPR was a commitment coming from *Our Clean Future*. We know that, last year, the report was brought forward and delivered to Yukoners in September; so, I'm wondering if the minister can provide an update on when a 2023 report will be coming forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will cede the floor, and hopefully we can get some answers from the minister.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the members opposite for their comments and questions relating to extended producer responsibility and Bill No. 28. I also thank my colleague, the Minister of Community Services, for his comments in support of these amendments. I will work with my staff to provide responses to some of the concerns raised.

As we all know, the Yukon's recycling system is in a precarious position. Non-governmental organizations and businesses, like Raven ReCentre and P&M Recycling, have done a tremendous job building and operating Yukon's recycling and waste management infrastructure. However, it is time that we provide them and Yukoners with a system that guarantees the long-term sustainability of these services.

Yukon government is working to establish an extended producer responsibility framework in the Yukon by 2025. We are on track to become the first territory to adopt such a framework, which will ensure that Yukoners continue to recycle and responsibly manage a variety of materials. This act in the second reading here gives us the ability to place the responsibility of waste management collection and processing on large, national corporations rather than on Yukon small businesses.

Extended producer responsibility is a waste management framework that produces a long-lasting solution to the underlying structural issues facing Yukon's recycling system and to reduce the cost of recycling to the Yukon taxpayer. We

have all noticed, Mr. Speaker, the impact of recycling services over the last year. Most recently, processors announced that they could no longer accept soft plastics as there is no viable market for soft plastics right now. Under an extended producer responsibility system, the government can obligate producers to collect products like soft plastics and other hard-to-recycle materials to ensure that they are designed out of the system, reused, or recycled.

As my friend the Minister of Community Services indicated, one of the intended consequences of extended producer responsibility across the provinces is that there is innovation so that the big retailers and big companies that produce the preponderant percentage of the — at least theoretically — recyclable materials will continue to innovate, because there will, of course, be a profit incentive to innovate packaging but also to eliminate as much packaging as possible.

While we heard widespread support for an extended producer responsibility system during our public engagement period, respondents did raise concerns about potential cost impacts to residents and Yukon businesses. I heard that loud and clear from the Leader of the Official Opposition and I have heard it loud and clear with some of the meetings that I have had with some of the Yukon retailers and Whitehorse retailers. But, as indicated, extended producer responsibility systems are already in place across Canada. National chains have already incorporated the cost of funding these systems into their prices.

As we have heard a few times, a recent economic analysis estimated that, collectively, Yukoners are already paying between \$1.3 million and \$2.9 million annually for extended producer responsibility services that the territory is not receiving. In order to ensure that concerned Yukon businesses and recycling stakeholders have the certainty that they need, the Yukon government has maintained an ongoing dialogue to address concerns and inform the development and implementation of our system. We are committing to continuing this dialogue up to and beyond the implementation of an extended producer responsibility system in the territory. The Yukon's extended producer responsibility system will assign responsibility for recycling starting at the national brand-owner level. As a result, we anticipate direct impacts on local Yukon businesses to be limited.

However, Mr. Speaker, I have heard the Leader of the Official Opposition and I have heard from business, and that is why, after we go into the stewardship phase, there is in excess of one year to continue the process of consultation to get this right.

We are also actively liaising with British Columbia and with Alberta, which have active and functioning extended producer responsibility systems in place. So, wherever possible, we certainly do not wish to reinvent the wheel in the Yukon.

As the House has heard — I don't have the statistics here exactly but I recall that the numbers are still something like — we are generating around 450 kilograms for every man, woman, and child — for every Yukoner — and that is too much. We can do better. Obviously extended producer responsibility isn't the only measure that is going to positively

impact behaviours, but it is certainly a step in the right direction.

I know that my colleague the Minister of Community Services is having active discussions with the City of Whitehorse, with Raven ReCentre, P&M Recycling, and a large group of other interested persons in order to ensure that the recycling system that will exist between now and the anticipated implementation of the extended producer responsibility is still occurring, still viable, and still meeting the needs of all Yukoners — but certainly all Whitehorse residents because that is what Whitehorse residents would expect of us and of all the organizations that have helped in this process over the years.

As indicated, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon government, the City of Whitehorse, the City of Dawson, the Town of Watson Lake, and other communities are all contributing to the recycling stream — sometimes at great expense — but we are gaining no benefit from existing extended producer responsibility models that exist in southern Canada.

The Yukon is on track to meet the *Our Clean Future* commitment to have an extended producer responsibility system in place by 2025. We are on track to become the first territory in Canada to adopt an extended producer responsibility system.

I am proud of the work that the Department of Environment, Department of Community Services, and other important team players in this endeavour are engaged in and what we have accomplished to date. Recognizing what I heard from the Member for Whitehorse Centre, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin, and the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to the devil being in the details, I don't disagree with the Leader of the Official Opposition or with the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

Finally, the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin asked a question about when the *Our Clean Future* annual report — which will be up to the end of the calendar year 2022. We do anticipate that it will be released before the end of this calendar year, but I can hopefully be in a position to provide greater detail to the member opposite.

This is exciting work that we're doing. I concur with my colleague to my right, the Minister of Community Services, and I know that he is actively engaged, either directly or peripherally, on this file as well.

On a very personal note, I have memories of — since I have been in the Yukon — dropping off recycling either at Raven ReCentre or at P&M Recycling with my children, who, at the time, were probably two or two and a half years old. My eldest is now 25 years old. Ultimately, yes, there is absolutely an expectation among Yukoners that we're going to get this right. Parenthetically, sometimes with the very cold weather with the wind blowing, as we know that it does at Raven ReCentre, hopefully my sons had frozen smiles on their faces while they were dropping off the recycling.

In any event, there is a new generation of Yukoners who absolutely expect us to get this right and want us to move bravely forward with this. So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments with respect to the second reading on

Bill No. 28 and look forward to further discussion in Committee of the Whole in future days of this Sitting.

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.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 16 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Second reading of Bill No. 28 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Economic Development

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As the Minister of Economic Development, I rise to speak to the *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for the 2023-24 fiscal year. I would like to welcome the officials to the Assembly today, our Deputy Minister Michael Prochazka — welcome — and also Jamie McAllister, who is now with us as our Director of Finance. This is his first visit to the Assembly in this new role. Good to see you as well.

At the Department of Economic Development, our work is focused on building a prosperous Yukon by working with partners to create and foster economic opportunities; pursuing economic initiatives focused on prosperity, partnerships, and innovation; and forging, maintaining, and expanding partnerships with First Nation governments to meet our mutual economic goals.

This supplementary budget request includes additional funding in response to increased staffing costs, as well as funding for the Skagway Marine Service Platform, and a new program to assist landlords. First, we are asking for \$496,000 to cover increased staff wages following the ratification of the most recent collective bargaining agreement. This breaks down as \$181,000 for Corporate Services staff and \$315,000 for Operations staff. The staff at the Department of Economic Development are critical to the continued success of our territory and this budget item is a priority.

Next, the temporary landlord assistance program at a cost of \$1,014,000: the next item in our supplementary budget ask is for this program. The new program is in response to the recent change in regulation capping the 2023 rent increase at five percent. Since 2021, the rent cap has been set at the rate of inflation of the previous calendar year. Landlords were expected to be able to raise rent to a maximum of 6.8 percent in 2023. This change has resulted in an unexpected difference in their rental income. The rebate will help address this difference and ease costs, as landlords plan for the future, so they may be more likely, again, to remain in the residential market. Our supplementary budget ask to administer this program is \$1,014,000.

We also have a transfer with Health and Social Services. We are asking for an additional \$300,000 related to the transfer of employment and training service programming from the Department of Health and Social Services to Economic Development. So, that is, of course, a net increase.

The Skagway Marine Service Platform is the last item in our supplementary budget. We are asking for \$21,361,000. This is to ensure that the port of Skagway remains accessible as an export option for the Yukon mining industry. These funds will support potential financial expenditures in the current fiscal year. The platform is planned to be a 227-foot fixed, concrete, T-shaped dock. It would be capable of supporting multiple

ore-loading methods, as well as the loading and unloading of other heavy goods.

The agreement with the municipality of Skagway will include approval rights for the Yukon and continuing consultation during the construction process to help ensure that money is properly spent and the project meets the Yukon's needs. Maintaining an ore export option in the Yukon's nearest deep-water port supports mine development, mineral exploration, and investment. So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, we are asking for a supplementary budget increase of \$22,271,000 for the Department of Economic Development.

Before we begin question and answer, I want to thank folks at Economic Development. Again, some of the new concepts and ideas that have been delivered over 2023 have been nation-leading, and I want to thank them for their work over the last number of years, keeping our economy strong and vibrant, and for preparing for this supplementary budget. It is always a lot of work getting this ready for today. Thank you, and I will hand it over to questions.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you to the staff who are appearing today to help the Premier; also, thank you for the briefing given earlier this week. I am going to get right into questions. I had a bit of a preamble, but seeing as we are later in the day, I am going to start hammering on a few notes.

Under operations, there is the new program listed, temporary landlord assistance program. That brings many questions. We were told during the briefing that this is coming soon with details — and that it's still in development — possibly by October 31. Can the minister give us a firm date on the opening of this program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Right now, we are looking at having more public information available next week. That will give us a chance to probably give a bit more detail to the opposition members. I will just check with our officials what the potential time lag is from our public conversation to being able to accept applications.

We are still on point to have a bigger conversation publicly next week, and then we are looking at about 10 business days in order to be able to start accepting applications for this program.

Ms. Van Bibber: Indirectly, to having this program brought forward — who wanted this program? Was it a request from the landlord association, and that caused the government to respond to this action?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There were conversations with a number of individuals. The landlord association did meet with the Minister of Community Services, and there was a conversation about some of the challenges that they saw with a rent cap. We had individuals within our community who had rental properties and also reached out.

I know that I was at a chamber lunch last year, and I signalled that we were looking at having a program in place to be able to help folks who were in the rental market. I think, overall, what we heard was that there were some challenges with the cost that folks had to carry because of the rent cap. I had asked officials to start to work on — with both the Department of Economic Development, and then later, in

concert, of course, with Finance — to take a look at some different options.

We did, you know, have conversations through the process with some folks who, you know, work with the landlords, as well as with chambers, and had a sense of different things that were happening across the country — or different models that we could potentially look at. You know, one of the conversations was around a tax rebate. We had heard from folks that was something that they believed wouldn't be as helpful as actually having sort of a direct grant option — something along those lines.

So, again, not just the landlords, but I think there were a number of folks. It was a very live conversation in our community at the time that we rolled out our CASA agreement, and then subsequent to that, the focus on rent caps.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you for that answer. So, that is a direct result of the rent control and no-cause evictions that was agreed to with CASA and the NDP. So, is this not defeating the purpose of this agreement? It's sort of like taking money from one spot and putting it into another. Can the minister say why this is now the rational way to go?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, I think that, of course, this was part of the dialogue, but what we're doing in this particular scenario is we're — first, we're supporting renters, and my belief in the rent cap has become even stronger, as we have watched across this country. I think, for the member opposite, even if you have seen in the last week the amount of protests, and people in some jurisdictions where there is no rent cap, specifically Ontario right now, where they are trying to do a renters' union. Actually, in some cases now, they are actually stopping paying rent altogether. They're taking on that legal challenge because of the displacement that is happening.

I do think that the rent cap is an important tool right now, but I also think that some folks have — many folks have — not just corporations, but individual folks — have invested in rental assets, and there is a bit of a delta here between the five-point percent and the seven percent, or 6.8 percent, that we have seen in the consumer price index.

I would say that I think that there will be individuals who will speak and say that this isn't enough. It is public policy; it will not make all residents of the Yukon happy — who will use the program — but I think that it is an appropriate way for us, at this point in time, while the new legislation is being created. We are counting on the fact that our 2025 spring session will give us the opportunity to bring forward a modernized version of that legislation. People at Community Services, the teams there, are working very hard to get that work done, and so, in the interim, we are looking at this year, making sure that we can monitor how this works. I can't pre-determine next year's budget because that hasn't been built yet, but, at this time, we think that this is a proper solution.

Again, the government is intervening — yes, we understand that. The government has — on being able to provide the difference within that rent piece. It is a bit different than, I think, the preamble stated, but yes, this is a bit innovative. Others would challenge it, where we are playing a role that may affect the free market, but I think that it is fair to

say that folks are under a tremendous amount of pressure where rental incomes have come. We see some folks who have actually put rental incomes up to a place that has displaced individuals. We understand what our vacancy rates are here in the Yukon right now. There are not a whole bunch of other options.

I sat with a group of elders not too long ago in Watson Lake, and they said to me, look, you have to understand that there are not a whole bunch of different options here for us. We are in the places we are in. Some of them own their own places, but others rent, so it is a unique situation, as we continue to support the build-out of more rental accommodation. I think that greater supply will be able to build a more appropriate ecosystem for the renter, but, at this time, we think that this is something that is worth trying, and we think that this also respects the fact that renters have invested in these assets, and it is important to many of them — lifeblood to their quality of life.

Ms. Van Bibber: When the program is actually launched, is this a one-time application? Who qualifies? And is there a cap per unit?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, I am going to commit to the House that we can bring back a legislative return next week going through a series of details for this. As folks know, we want to have a public conversation next week. I think it's important to ensure that the details of that public conversation are controlled by our department. Not to take anything away from the good work of the opposition, but I would rather us be able to provide those key details and then respect the questions here in the House and bring back that legislative return that has full details.

If there are more questions, I will sit and we can get all of those questions on the record today, and then we can work to respond in detail to all of those items.

Ms. Van Bibber: There is also \$300,000 for employment and training service programs that were previously delivered by Health and Social Services. Can the minister elaborate on what programs were transferred and the reasoning behind the move?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The programs that were being delivered under that \$300,000 included the Head Start program, which was a wage subsidy that was targeted at persons with disabilities. The Department of Health and Social Services, in conversation with the Department of Economic Development, felt that it was more about employment outcomes than it was about health outcomes and it seemed to be better suited within our labour market programs under the work that we're doing. That was the reason for moving it; it was really just about having it in the most optimal spot within the Yukon government where we could do the best work for those clients.

Ms. Van Bibber: I believe it was last year when the department took on the training from the Department of Tourism and Culture as well. Will this continue to happen with other departments — moving their training programs to Economic Development — and does the staff move departments when they are moving the programs?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I apologize to the House. We are a bit perplexed by that preamble. If we could get a bit more detail on Tourism moving training programs over to Economic Development — I apologize. I try to be aware of all operations and I think we are, but if there could be a little more dialogue on that, maybe we can understand exactly what that question is focused on, Madam Chair.

Ms. Van Bibber: I don't have the exact program handy, but I do remember because I also have the Tourism and Culture file and it is just eluding me, but there was a program that was moved over to Economic Development. We can leave that.

Do the staff move as well when you take over those programs?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the \$300,000, we are not moving any staff. It is just the actual financial capacity that is moving over.

We will check on the Tourism piece. Maybe that was also referring to the work that we did. Labour Market was in Education and we did it move over.

To be open to the House, I think that the tough conversations that were happening within our business community were really about the need for better labour access. I know that the member opposite had asked me a series of questions. Certainly, when I had the Tourism portfolio, we heard a lot of concern about a lack of capacity. I know that, going into the 2021 season, one of the focuses I had was to ensure that we were optimizing the work off the Labour Market team and having those folks work with us, which, I think, has been a good success — having them be part of the Economic Development team. I also want to say that, when you look out, I am happy to see the fact that, as of last Friday, we still have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, but with that, we are seeing our businesses being open for full hours. There is one operation — I will leave it unnamed, but a well-branded coffee shop — that now is open until, I think, 12:00 at night and it reopens at 5:00 in the morning — something along those lines, or maybe even later. Maybe 2:00 — something along those lines.

We saw two years ago that we were in real need, and it was taking away the full ability for those businesses to operate — from our standpoint. I know that I went around and took some time to speak directly with business owners in this area — a great business just across the street such as The Kind Café and some of the coffee shops — just trying to get a sense from folks — part of that was, as well, to be open. We saw that there were some workers who have made decisions to leave other parts of Canada to come and work, especially in our hospitality and retail sectors. This is something that we wanted to try to see if we could help solve. I think that the teams have done a really good job of ensuring that we have capacity in some of those tourism-based, hospitality-based, retail-based jobs. Of course, when you have an unemployment rate as low as ours, it is still difficult. I think that anybody would say they are still looking for workers.

Again, we are not moving anybody with that \$300,000. As well, the team just mentioned to me that there was a bit of NGO funding that we had moved from Tourism and Culture but I

think it was probably pertaining to that other piece. And no, we are not, at this time, contemplating any other training-style programs moving from other departments to Economic Development.

Ms. Van Bibber: On to the Skagway platform — it was budgeted in the supplementary for \$20.461 million for the Skagway marine services platform. I know that we discussed the total cost projected to be \$17 million during the Spring Sitting, which was about \$24 million CAD. The minister indicates that this was the initial investment for the platform work.

Can the minister tell us if the amount now in the supplementary — \$20.461 million — is the actual total, and does this cover the complete budget?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The project being the marine services platform — we are looking at a total cost right now, on the high mark, of up to \$40 million CAD. Now, the reason that I'm saying "on the high mark" is because what we're trying to do is get a good sense of where we think currency exchanges will be. This is for payments over multiple years, so the money that we're looking for this fall is our first tranche of funding toward this project and we would have further payments for the project. We think it could be between — officials are saying between \$36 million and \$40 million based on where we think the fluctuation of currency prices can be for the project.

Ms. Van Bibber: Can the minister tell us the status of any negotiations or agreements that have been signed to date?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm just going to share a bit of information to put into the record and then I will also touch on the specifics of the question from the member opposite.

The Government of Yukon is negotiating for secure tidewater access in the port of Skagway for the Yukon mining industry as well as for further opportunities for export. Our objective is to secure waterfront space to ensure that Skagway remains an export option for Yukon industry in the future.

Maintaining an ore export option in Yukon's nearest deep-water port supports mine development, mineral exploration, and investment in the Yukon, and Yukon and Skagway both benefit from a port that supports both tourism and industry use. We're seeking a solution that works for industry and the community of Skagway.

I think it's important to note that, as a government and through the work of the Premier's office, we also have had significant discussions with the US Ambassador to Canada, the previous consul general who has now moved on, the new consul general in Vancouver now as well — we have only met virtually to date. But I'm just highlighting the importance — that would be, of course, the consul general of the US to Canada in Vancouver.

We have talked to industry associations. We have talked to groups that finance globally. We have talked to organizations in our time in Japan a couple of weeks ago. There are a number of organizations that we had a chance to meet with that have investments in the Yukon already — some that are looking to invest in the Yukon — and we shared with them the fact that we believe it's important to continue to have the tidewater access for Canadian and Yukon companies.

Skagway has launched a port redevelopment project to expand its cruise ship capacity. Again, this will eliminate its ore export capability. The ore loader will be demolished. This is, of course, what we have been dealing with as part of Skagway's project.

Yukon is proposing that a marine services platform capable of supporting ore-loading equipment be included in its port redevelopment project in Skagway's redevelopment project. We welcomed the decision by the Skagway assembly in March 2023 to approve proceeding with an export cooperation agreement.

We were asked already — Yukon had funded the design of the platform. The total cost that we have put in already — it was \$739,266. Skagway, of course, then put this project out to tender, which included the proposed marine services platform as an optional addition contingent on a final agreement being reached. There was one bidder on the project. Skagway has accepted the bid for its main project and we are working together in response to that.

I want to make sure for the record — the potential high mark on the project is \$44 million, not \$40 million. I want to make sure that officials in the Opposition have a chance to make note of that. That includes our contingency for the project as well.

We signed a non-binding term sheet on September 7 that outlines the general terms of an export cooperation agreement between Yukon and Skagway. We are working toward finalizing the export cooperation agreement under which Yukon will fund the construction of a marine services platform — the project I'm speaking to — in exchange for preferential access and fee discounts for Yukon mining companies using a future ore terminal.

Concerning the negotiations, negotiations toward the draft term sheet have concluded, but, at this particular time, we will re-engage with them quite soon and that is really the focus — the contract and cooperation agreement — that work has to continue on.

Ms. Van Bibber: When we discussed the port in the spring, the minister indicated that he would ask the Municipality of Skagway about any bilateral agreements for TPAs between the state and the municipality regarding investment from the Government of Alaska.

Could he now share how much the State of Alaska is contributing to this project, and also, has the Government of Canada agreed to contribute?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There are no contracts in place to date with the State of Alaska on this project or with Canada, but those conversations are ongoing.

Ms. Van Bibber: During the briefing, we were told that the business incentive program was underutilized and had limited demand; therefore, \$900,000 was moved. Previously, the minister had indicated that changes to the BIP, or the business incentive program, were being considered. Has that work now been shelved, or is there still work ongoing to consider changes to the program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, there is work — it is an early stage of the work, officials are sharing with me — but there is work

that will be ongoing, and the member opposite is correct: over the last two fiscal years, we have seen the program significantly underutilized.

Ms. Van Bibber: In 2022, the department utilized its full allocation of 300 spaces for the Yukon nominee program. Were there any applications that came in above 300? If there is a greater demand, and spots are available, how does the department choose who comes? Is it a first come, first served, or is there a prioritization?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, I do want to get just a bit of background on — I missed that — the 300 allocation — to which year? I will say, yes, it is first come, first served on folks coming through the door for their applications, but I do want to get a sense of which year, because we are in dialogue right now on our allocation from IRCC in Canada.

Ms. Van Bibber: It was year 2022.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, that is correct.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you. Earlier this year, the department indicated that Yukon is advocating for additional allocations for future years. Can the minister update on whether that advocacy has worked, and will we receive additional spaces from the 430 we have coming for 2023?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I guess I would say to the House that I think that the advocacy has worked, in the sense that we did go from 300 to the 430. So, we have seen an increase. We have asked for more, and right now, we haven't heard for this fiscal year if we are going to get a bigger allocation. What they tend to do is go through all of the provinces and territories, and they take a look to see if there are any unused allotments within other jurisdictions, and then they will recalibrate that and provide to other jurisdictions. I met with the new minister, Minister Miller, and did request that they continue to look at that, and we usually follow up those requests with a letter just summarizing the meeting, which I know I signed that off just the other day. So, that has happened.

I do want to just say for the House — I think what's important to note — because we are having real conversations about housing pressures. We are also having real conversations about labour needs. I think, as folks know, our program is an economic immigration program. That's the strategy that has been deployed over the last decade, and I think it's important to note that we believe that our focus should be going forward, that we ensure that folks have the right supports. We have to think about that, and that's part of the work that we're doing.

We have this first come, first served, but we also — all folks in the Legislative Assembly know that we have a very vibrant Filipino community that has great supports — probably more than any community. In many cases, it is probably important to note that the Filipino diaspora can do a great job of supporting more people coming into the country — family members and others — and they have the ability to support them through, maybe, additional room in their homes. We have to think about those things. We voiced that at the national level, and we contemplated that as well.

That's something we have to think about. It's the same thing when it comes to the recruitment we want to do around

health care. In some cases, we are seeing segments of our community —

We haven't discussed it, but I assume we will at some point — we were in south India two or three weeks ago, and we were really focused on recruiting nurses in that jurisdiction. The reason why is because there are a lot of nurses, and the state government supports those nurses going off to work in other countries.

What we are hearing now, in certain fields, which we have heard from the Philippines, is when it comes to nurses, there is a strain on the health system in the Philippines. We have seen western provinces do big recruitment. That doesn't mean that there aren't other amazing opportunities for people from the Philippines in different types of work. We are trying to figure out places where the home country supports us recruiting and that there are ample folks who can come.

When we think about that, why would you look at south India? Because there is a vibrant community here, and there are lots of people who have made it their home. There are nurses available, and there are supports. The Leader of the Official Opposition and I attended an event in August — which was well-attended — from that home state. We know there are people here, so our goal would be, can we recruit nurses? Do they have family members they can live with that is not going to put extra strain on our housing system? That is some of the thinking we are trying to do. We have to be strategic. There has been an ask at the table.

I work closely with Jeremy Harrison, who is the Economic Development minister from Saskatchewan, to ensure that both of us pushed IRCC Canada to take the data from CMHC and ensure that we had good data coming in. That was work that we did in Saint John, New Brunswick, two years ago. That is some of the thinking that is being done.

Ms. Van Bibber: We have heard from some businesses about the challenges with the application process and with wait times. Can the minister provide an update on this and information about steps that have been taken to improve the application process?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Our time period is about 61 days for the work that is done inside our department. It has been communicated to me from our officials that is probably one of the fastest that you will see in the country, but then we have another step, and the other step is that we work in conjunction with Canada and IRCC to finish that work. You are right, there have definitely been some challenges in timing. We get our work done very quickly, and then we are waiting for IRCC to do their work.

What I would say is that I think that the federal government — I think that the situation is improving, partially because there were so many individuals who were hired to complement that work. It was not going well, and I think that we have all heard that publicly, and we have seen that. IRCC had lots of strain, and I think that the disruption of two years of real pandemic problems and challenges exacerbated the problem that was already there. We see things getting improved. I think that the minister's focus on ensuring that it improves will continue to do work quickly here.

A couple things that the officials have shared with me, which I will share with the House — there is a new database and an online application portal, and there is a soft launch on that. We think that is something that is good, and it is going to make things a bit smoother. Also, the Yukon community program pilot is extended to 2025 for rural businesses, and there is flexibility there. I have to say that there were business folks in both Carmacks and Dawson who really were the ones who directed us to come up with something, and then our officials worked directly with them, because you have the businesses in smaller communities that may not have the full 40 hours. We have talked about this a lot, but there has been — just about the fact that, can we ensure that the person is respected and looked after in these roles. Of course, we have an agreement with the employers that we can monitor to ensure that, but also, programs like that do give us a bit more flexibility to support multiple businesses.

Ms. Van Bibber: Madam Chair, I would like to thank the minister and the staff for providing the answers today.

Ms. White: I thank my colleague for sharing the floor and, of course, echo the welcome to the officials, especially the first time — how exciting. It gets old after awhile, I'm not going to lie.

I actually want to jump right into the Skagway marine service and questions around that. During the briefing, we were told that partly it was an expectation that Casino, Kudz Ze Kayah, and Fireweed Zinc — because, of course, Minto is closed and is not using that port anymore — were prospective mines that could access that. They had indicated that they were maybe interested, but we were told that there was no specific commitment from those prospective operators.

I went online, because I was curious about what kind of timeline we might be thinking about. Of course, we know that Casino is quite a ways out. They anticipate their submission to YESAB in 2023. Kudz Ze Kayah, according to the website, is currently undergoing the executive committee screening assessment with YESAB; and Fireweed Zinc, in Macmillan Pass, doesn't talk about it. Right now, it's a drilling program. It's not talking about when they operate.

Knowing that we were told that these were three projects that would potentially be looking at this in the future, but we were also told that there was no specific commitment from them as prospective operators, what kind of timeline are we expecting, as far as possible mines to access this many-million dollar investment from Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It's a good point. I am not going to predetermine the outcomes of any processes that the projects that were stated before will go through. What I will say is that I think that we're getting probably into both a question about our return on investment and the timing of that. We are also getting into a conversation — probably a bigger philosophical conversation — about this asset.

The thinking on this side of the House is that it is extremely important to get access to tidewater. I think that the member opposite can hearken back to the days of another government that was here, which was the government of, I believe, Piers McDonald, and there was some very exceptional thinking that

was done at that point, where Economic Development and the Premier's office looked to acquire property in Skagway and for the Yukon to own that property, so that we would always have access to tidewater.

Probably members on the other side of the floor in the other party would know better than me, but I know that it didn't end up coming to fruition, but I have to say that, when I look at it now, I wish it had. I think that was a really forward-thinking opportunity that the NDP government of the day put in place, because they knew we would need to have this for decades to come.

Now we're in a position where this 50-year agreement has come to an end, and we — it's a moment in time. It's a moment in time, where the officials have done really exceptional work. It's not normal for a subnational government to be doing an international infrastructure deal, and we probably — for the House I'll say, and for the record for Hansard, I would say that we, you know — we would have easily have vacated the space for a federal conversation between Canada and the US on this subject, but we have very unique governing structures in both countries. You know, I have sat with the Ambassador in the US, who is really hands-off in the discussions of dealing with things at the state level. I've had discussions with Governor Dunleavy, even in the last two weeks, on this subject, and they want to defer to the municipal level. So, the municipal government in Skagway is the lead on the conversation.

Here, we have, over the last number of years, had conversations with multiple ministers, and I think my predecessor would even have had this discussion, I think — I go back on the records — with the Prime Minister's Office. These are important discussions.

We are left in a scenario where it's the Yukon government, in my mind, stepping up for this country, not just for this territory, because the conversation about critical minerals has been so important. We have 25 of the 31 listed critical minerals that we hear are listed. Countries sort of have different lists that they add to, you know, and over the last number of years — whether it's Indonesia or US or Canada — as we would say, 25 of the 31 critical minerals.

There are some very interesting opportunities for companies that are looking in the Yukon. Even more interesting is the potential, innovative partnerships they're looking at with First Nation governments — I think that is substantial — and the opportunities between those First Nations and those companies. So, I think, now it's important to say that we have done a lot of work, and will there be a lag time between the completion of the infrastructure and the use of the infrastructure? That is a possibility. That is absolutely a possibility, but my fear would be that we would get to a situation where we don't build this, we don't take this opportunity, and then, all of a sudden, there is substantial opportunity for export, and we don't have tidewater.

The other thing is, from a standpoint of — a lot of the planning gets done in long periods of time. So, when you are doing advanced exploration, and then you are going out and looking for people to start to fund that work — I will give you an example. You have a situation right now where some of our

companies have good, friendly, foreign direct investment from corporations — “foreign direct” meaning not from a government entity but from an international company — and they are asking: “Down the road, if this does ever — the decision is made to get it permitted — and it does get permitted — will there be a way to actually export that ore?” So, that is part of it. It is, in many ways, it is a “build it and they will come”, or “you have to build it or they are not going to come” — whichever way you want to look at it, but it is important to have that in place for this territory and this country really, if you look at our overall mineral strategy.

There is a process that is happening around the Minto mine. I will leave it to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources to speak to when there could be a conclusion in that work. If the outcome of that work is positive — what I mean is, is there somebody looking to take over that site, to stabilize it, to focus on remediation — but also to focus on future operation — then that would be a client in the short term that would look at it, but I don’t know. Somebody may look to acquire, stabilize, do further exploration, and then reopen — I don’t know enough about the access to the ore that is there — so, there is that opportunity.

We also know that Hecla, which is a significant mining company in North America, has done the acquisition of Keno, and there are operations ongoing, and there could be — they could look to move toward those spots. I can’t — it would be — it is theoretical for me to come out and say that it is going to be 36 months or 48 months, but I do think that it is really important, and it is a hard decision for politicians to make to build something that may not be needed right away, but we can also look at things that we didn’t build in different sectors, and I think that we would have hoped that we build it once the pressure comes. So, that is our mindset on this side of the floor.

Ms. White: I appreciate the response from the minister, but it comes down to the fact that if this is a Canada building project, has there been a request to Canada, and if so, what has been the response? Right now, the minister has just indicated that Yukon could be spending up to \$44 million on this project that is 100 percent in not only just a different jurisdiction but a different country altogether. It’s not like it’s in British Columbia where we are governed under the same laws. It is literally in a different country altogether. So, if it’s a Canada building project, what request has gone to Canada and what has the response been for funding this project?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We have had a series of conversations with Canada over the last number of years and, yes, absolutely we have voiced to the federal government that we think this is extremely important to the Yukon and it’s important to Canada. There is a bilateral agreement between Canada and the US when it comes to critical minerals. I have highlighted in a series of meetings that it would be difficult to undertake and successfully execute that agreement without access to tidewater in Skagway. We have talked to the minister in charge of Export Development Canada, ministers in charge of economic development — and we had Minister Champagne here in the Yukon. He really has been the lead on the critical minerals conversation in Canada and on innovation. We have talked to

Minister Wilkinson, we have flagged it to the Prime Minister’s Office, the Deputy Prime Minister’s Office — most in Cabinet. What we have heard is that Canada normally does not deploy capital to build in other jurisdictions. I challenged that, I will say. I think that the Canadian government funds aid relief. The Canadian government funds the Department of National Defence spending in other countries. The Canadian government looks at a number of different ways to deploy from its budget, but on this one — that’s why I said earlier when the Official Opposition was asking me questions — do we have anything in place from Canada yet? No. Is that conversation ongoing? Yes, it is, because I still think there is a need. We have also tried to speak to private sector interests, one being Blackstone.

Blackstone is the largest infrastructure asset holder in the world. They have acquired Carrix. Carrix owns White Pass, so they have a bit of a foothold in Skagway, at least when it comes to the rail line and the easement there. We have also said to them that this is something that maybe the private sector, in the future, will want to look at. But right now — I’m being very transparent with the House — there is ongoing dialogue but we find ourselves in a moment in time when we think this is important — when mining is our largest private sector contributor to our economy.

Ms. White: Understanding that the dock isn’t being used right now — and my understanding is that they are actually still — well, they may not be shipping out.

I will use this example. The wind turbines that were just brought in for the Eagle Hill wind project on Haeckel Hill. It came to a tidewater port — Stewart, British Columbia. It’s just over 1,000 kilometres. It’s just under 1,200 kilometres away. They are not saying that it’s as close as Skagway, but there is access to a deep-water port in Canada as opposed to the Yukon government paying \$44 million.

The reason why I keep coming back to this is — and I appreciate the minister’s points, but it’s going to be an asset that’s fully funded by Yukon in a completely other jurisdiction that we have no control over. I have an apprehension similar to the way I felt when we were talking about redundant fibre. Initially, it was suggested that we could go to Juneau, Alaska. There were concerns there. We would be putting it out in another jurisdiction, we would be paying for it, but we would not own it, I guess, because we are not in the right spot. So, I have those questions and I think they are valid. I put in a motion saying that if we go forward with the port, is it going to be big enough to receive wind turbine parts? Are we going to make sure that what we are paying for will benefit us in different ways?

One of the conversations that was had in the briefing — the question was: What happens if there aren’t any mines? We were told that it could be used for exports — exports like lumber or prefab houses — but how often is it going to be used for lumber? Again, I pointed out in the briefing that we have a hard time supplying firewood for personal use at this point, let alone exports of wood. It would be great if Walker Home Construction was able to export houses through a Skagway port, but I’m not sure if they are there yet.

What else will this dock be used for? The minister isn't going to have a guess as to when Casino, Kudz Ze Kayah, or Fireweed Zinc will come online and want to access it. Again, although we were told that they showed an interest, there was no commitment or signed documents saying that they are going to use it. What are the other possibilities for this \$44-million investment?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There were a number of questions there. First, let's start with the ecosystem of the mining sector. It's investment attraction. I'm going to beg for the flexibility of the House without going back to grab a briefing note — and say that, you know, you're getting a quarter of a billion dollars spent on exploration and advanced exploration sort of on an annual basis. I think that's a fair number. Officials can check, but let's say it's \$225 million on an annual basis. First of all, if people are going to look for something in the early stages and they know that there's nowhere at the end of that cycle to actually extract it and ship it in a feasible manner, you are probably going to see the front end of the investment into the sector really begin to retract. That would be one thing. That's the first piece.

I think that we are doing work on dual use. Are your questions valid? Yes, they are valid questions. They are good questions from both parties today because, yes, it's up to \$44 million. It is a unique situation in another country. I think that there should be lots of questions and there will be lots of questions on this subject.

Just to give you a sense at the front end — what we would have some real challenges with right away? We have the beginning of the ecosystem, which is the money going into exploration and advanced exploration and deposit appraisal. That's a very significant amount of money that gets spent throughout the Yukon every year. Then you have operations or mining projects that are then moving toward production. It's one thing to take a wind turbine, build it — and I spoke with the principals on that project. I mean, we have been close to that project that you speak about on Haeckel Hill.

I want to take a moment to thank the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources and Yukon Energy because that happened because — we actually used that project as an ability to figure out our modelling on costing and the IPP policy work. It was that project — because we tried to figure out how we could still be able to make it feasible and reduce the cap ex through the purchase of power. We thought a lot about: What does the infrastructure look like? What does the modelling look like? What does the hardware look like?

As you spoke about, that wind turbine came, I think, through the Panama Canal — down and then through the Panama Canal and back up to Stewart, BC.

We are looking at dual use and we are looking to answer your question about wind turbines. But I think the bigger challenge for a wind turbine — we might be able to get it in the port. It's going to be getting it up that hill and around those corners, which is a real challenge, so we have to figure that out. But we are looking at dual use.

I think, as members would know, it's really difficult to be in a position to — it's one thing to do one trip. If you have to

do trips every 30 minutes from the Yukon all the way to Stewart, BC, that's a totally different story — and then try to figure out how it is feasible, and is it even worth doing a project? Because you are still competing. It's about energy; it's about the type of energy you have. That's why we're talking about a grid connection to British Columbia. The people who finance projects are going to look at how you are fuelling your mining project; they're going to look at where your port is — a number of things. That's why we had the early discussion around rail as well. We had representatives here. I was in those discussions, and we talked to the new owner of the rail into Skagway and said: Are you open to partnering with us on a feasibility to look at industrial use, not just tourism use? Because that makes sense in the future — for us to be able to look — so I think that, in the future, you need to think about probably electrifying your supply chain, figuring out how to do that — sorry, your transfer of ore. "Supply chain" is, I believe, the right terminology for that. You are going to have to figure out if you are going to use electric truck or rail. You want to reduce your emissions. You have to have access to the closest tidewater and then you also have to be in a position where you are fuelling all of that with your cleanest energy source.

I think that Stewart, BC — from what we have heard in discussions — would be a real challenge for the feasibility of projects if they had to do that. You are right — I think that there have been some longer exports by truck right now with some concentrate — that has happened. But that is what we are aware of now.

I think that you have flagged questions and we have an obligation to come back, because you are right that they are valid questions and I think it is important for us to talk and share with you what the difference would be. Also, industry as well as previous governments have contemplated the use of Haines, Alaska, and we have contemplated that the same way but, again, there doesn't seem to be a feasible opportunity to work there. Skagway seems to be the appropriate option.

Ms. White: I thank the minister. I am not concerned about the validity of my questions. They are valid and that is why I am asking them, but I do appreciate the assurance.

The fact that the minister has just indicated that Haines has been looked at — and that gives another whole question because I don't know enough about the dock situation in Haines, but does Haines, Alaska, right now have the industrial dock for tidewater there?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, Madam Chair, it does not.

Ms. White: That is unfortunate because I could have just saved us \$44 million right there, easily. We could have really just made a big change.

Knowing that Yukon right now is going — I am not even going to say "lion's share". Let's be honest; they are paying the entirety. Yukon is putting all the money to it. What is the borough of Skagway doing? What are they contributing?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The borough of Skagway is providing the project management and engineering management on the project.

It's important to say that it has been the Yukon that has come to the table to say that we need this as part of the

redevelopment of the port. If we had not requested that and worked to ensure that this was integrated in, it was not part of the vision for their port. It's also partially the reason, as you can imagine, why they are not contributing to the capital expenditure of the asset. It is not something that they were looking to build. We think it's important for us to build, as well as their management and procurement, and they are providing the land to build the asset.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. We have a couple of people who will be doing project management. I'm not even going to go into how many people and how much do we think they are being paid, because I think it really already shows that there is a significant difference between what Yukon is paying and Skagway.

When someone would access that port — so, for example, we were importing, someone was coming in — do they pay a fee to access that port? As an exporter, do you pay a fee to access that dock?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I am going to ask is that I will bring back more details based on our cooperation, the agreement that we are still in the middle of negotiating, which will have a fee breakdown and give a sense to the House of what it would look like for the folks who would potentially use that. The Alaska marine services dock right now, I believe, is used — not this dock — when you have imports coming in, but I want to be able to give accurate information. To get to the heart of the question, which I understand is, yes, there is technical advice and oversight being provided. That is a fact. There is land being provided.

The conversation that happened with the community — our officials have done an eloquent job of being able to go in and talk to folks in the community and talk to leaders in the community — has been this: There are 1.2 million to 1.4 million tourists coming to Skagway. There is a very significant industry happening when it comes to tourism. Many people in Skagway don't have an understanding of the ties between the Yukon and Skagway. We have, on a number of occasions, talked about how the mining and mineral sector helps our territory and our economy to be very vibrant, and we have seen that over a long period of time. When some people from Skagway, as many people do, come up over the Skagway pass and they come and want to go to a restaurant or go to a store or go to a dentist or get a haircut or whatever they want to do, what we have tried to say is that part of our economy is really important for the Yukon so that we can continue to be the place they know right now.

There are a lot of individuals in Skagway who are focused on tourism, and whether there is a marine services platform there or not is not something that they are supporting being built by their municipality. They know that it is a small borough; it's a municipal government, and they are redeveloping their entire port. It's a big step for that council, because for 50 years, they didn't control it, but now they do. They are redeveloping and paying for all of that. For them to now come to the table and say, "Now we are going to go out and potentially spend another \$44 million Canadian on this asset", which is really something

that is going to benefit Canada and the Yukon in the end, is going to be a tough conversation.

I understand where you are going. Yes, it is an asset that will be of advantage, I think, to both the borough of Skagway, but more importantly, to the Yukon and Canada. At this point in time, through a series of negotiations, we have knocked on the doors of Canada and the State of Alaska for money. We have flagged this in many ways. This is the state of play that we are in. We think that this is something that we have to do for the future of the economy of the Yukon and Canada. It is a challenging undertaking. I agree. It's not the norm. Like I stated, a former NDP government that was here, they were willing to buy land and they were willing, I would assume, to develop that land to have a port. It's something that people have thought about before. I think it probably goes back to 2000. Here we are 23 years later and that land isn't owned by the Yukon government. Now, we are in a position where the land is owned by the borough of Skagway, and we now have an obligation to have a different type of negotiation with them, because we don't own the land, and we are in a position where we have to invest.

As I said, Canada has said to us that they are normally not deploying Canadian government capital into these areas; we think that there must be an opportunity for them to do that. We want to continue to have that discussion. We have gone to the infrastructure bank as well. The infrastructure bank of Canada will provide funds for activities that happen within the country, or primarily in the country. We have tried to look through that to see if there is an option as well but, again, that is debt that we are not looking to take on. We are trying to work within our means to ensure that there is access to tidewater for future generations of folks in the Yukon and companies that operate in the Yukon.

Ms. White: The reason why I was asking the question as to whether or not there was a fee that was paid, I want to know where the fees go. So, is the borough of Skagway collecting the fees? Is Yukon government collecting the fees? I want to know who is going to manage the port. Does Yukon government manage the port? Does the borough of Skagway manage the port? Who pays the employees? Are they paid by Yukon government or are they paid by Skagway? Those are some of the questions I have.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The borough of Skagway operates the port. The fee distribution, the distribution of salaries toward the employees who are there — those details I have committed to bringing back to the House. I don't want to pre-determine the outcome of a negotiation on the cooperation agreement, and I want us to ensure that we have the accurate information coming back to the House — meaning, is the borough of Skagway having a direct relationship with the employees, or are they going to — I am not sure. An option, potentially, would be that they have a corporation that is owned by the borough, and then that corporation, in turn, pays — those are detailed modelling and structure that I want to get the right answers to the House for. I will bring that back.

If the question is — we are not looking at this time for the borough of Skagway to be providing us with any revenue

source — no. I will cut right to it, if that's what we getting at. We are not looking — there is no revenue source from the borough of Skagway coming to us in the activity that is there. We are paying for the capital, and we are building out the oversight and management of it. I think that is fair.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I guess the question that I have then is knowing that, typically, in cases like this — so, for example, Air North has to pay the Vancouver airport to use the airport, right? They have to pay the airport here to use the airport. So, if a company is taking shipments to this dock in Skagway and they're paying to be able to load it onto ships there and all the rest of it, what is the cost recovery model from Yukon government? Are we in some kind of agreement with mines, where they are paying Yukon government to be able to access the dock that we paid, or is this just one of those things where we're paying the \$44 million so we're that much more attractive as a place to do business?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It's not that we're — I think, what was the term that was just used? — "more attractive". I think that we're not in the game at all if we don't have access to tidewater. It's 211 percent more expensive for ore for Minto to go to Stewart versus Skagway, so that's to give you a sense of sort of where we're at on cost to be able to ship.

We are looking at a reduced rate for companies coming from the Yukon to use that infrastructure, because, of course, there is still the operational piece for it. There is a reduced rate for those companies from Canada and the Yukon to use it. I'm going to hold there. I hear the points; I'm committed to being accountable to the Assembly; I'll bring back the details, but I think, at this point, we're in the midst of these discussions with the borough, and it's probably prudent to hold there on details.

Ms. White: I will have so many more questions as we go forward. One thing that we were told in the briefing is that the reason why this was not put in the actual budget is because bids were received in early July and the costs refined later in the summer. It's interesting, because I'm sure my colleagues here from the Yukon Party will remember — but one of the things — an accounting practice is, for example, if you know that you were going to be budgeting money for something later, you put a placeholder in; it's a dollar. It doesn't mean that it's going to cost a dollar; it means that this is an indication that, in the future, you're going to be putting money into this.

When I go through the budget document from 2023-24, there is no placeholder for this, right? So, then, you know, I can look at the budget — I can look at the supplementary budget that we just got, and I can go through it, and I can say that, you know, there was a \$6-million cut from Community Services; \$157,000 from health; \$7.4 almost \$7.5 out of Highways and Public Works; \$200,000 out of tourism; \$380,000 out of Yukon Development Corporation; and \$6 million out of housing, and interestingly enough, if I add all that up together and then I add the \$900,000 decrease from the business incentive program, it equals \$21,361,000.

Did the minister request that other departments find that money? Did the minister say that we need to pay the \$21,361,000 now for this project? Was it requested of other departments to find that money?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to put one point on the record concerning the conversation about revenue. In our due diligence on this project, we hired a law firm both in Canada and in the US because we were working internationally. In the advice that we received, if we were receiving — I will be open to the House again — any revenue from the asset in Skagway, it also was going to expose us to any potential liability that was occurring on that project, so part of our decision has been to ensure that we safeguard the Yukon government in the activities that are happening there and that we're not operating a project Outside. That has been the advice that we have received.

Secondly, I think I understand the question. Why do we put in a placeholder? I am going to do my best to answer this question. I can go back and have further discussion with officials. In the springtime, a couple of things happened. We weren't sure, first of all, if we were going to get a bid. Even going through this, it has been a sensitive conversation. There are folks who have lots of different feelings inside the borough. I think that's a fair public statement. We are in a position where, as we have seen clarity from the borough, we have made decisions based on that clarity. We have not predetermined the outcome of anything. I am just going to say that.

When it comes to the project, we have worked toward being able to fund this project now that we see a pathway to do it on the first tranche of funding.

We have worked with officials across government, led by our Finance department and our officials at Economic Development, to be able to see where we have an opportunity to fund this at this time. I hope that if there is extra detail required, I am open to gathering that detail and bringing it to the House.

Ms. White: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I thank the minister for that. I am just going to ask for a little bit more clarity. Am I right in understanding that the Department of Economic Development then requested that this money be found across government departments?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just a note on the placeholder — we have not done that for some years. It is usually, typically, for reoccurring costs as well, so I just wanted to say that.

No, we didn't — we requested the funds through submission. That's what we did as a department. The department then responds to that. Finance is the coordinator of our budgets, and we have been able to fund this project on our first tranche of funding. That's what we have done.

Ms. White: It's going to sound very repetitive because I'm still just trying to figure it out. So, the Department of Economic Development through the Department of Finance asked if there was \$21 million within Yukon government that could go toward this project, and is that what we are seeing in this supplementary budget?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As with any expenditure — and I can go back and I can confer with other colleagues and departments — what happens is that in order to get the right to make that expenditure, we put in a submission to Management Board. It is analyzed by the Department of Finance. We then look to figure out where we can identify the resources, if approved, to

make that expenditure. Of course, two things have to happen. We have to have the actual funds to be able to deploy toward that expenditure, and we also have to have the right within the vote of this House to be able to work within the funding caps that have been approved through our budgeting exercises. We are looking to expend more than we have planned in the mains; therefore, we are coming today to request the ability to spend more in our department. We have worked within the resources of the Government of Yukon to be able to do that.

I don't know if there is something I am missing, but that is my understanding of the process and I think I have an accurate sense. If there is something I have missed, we can go back and do that. That is the work that has been undertaken.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I am going to put out that I am at a disadvantage in this Assembly as the only person asking questions on the Opposition side — well, not the only person, but the only party — and I have not been in government so I haven't gone through the Management Board process.

The question is: Did the request go in for the \$21 million before, for example, you, as the Minister responsible for Yukon Housing, made the decision to defer \$4 million for the northern carve-out and \$2 million for the developer build loan program? What went first? Did the request go out for money and then departments looked at being able to defer projects until a later point, or were departments already making decisions to defer projects and it just so happened that it added up to the \$21,361,000?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I can come back with a legislative return. All I know is that I signed a Management Board submission — and we then go through a process. That process is confidential within Management Board. We make a decision. There are conversations that happen. Then we look at the resources that we have. I think what normally happens within government is that you go through the resources or the programs you have. You make sure that the funds that need to be available to execute that work are there, and if you are in a position where you are not using those resources, I believe, Madam Chair, that you would allocate them somewhere else. So, if you had an expenditure that you planned for the year and it has been delayed for another year, then you may look at that. Maybe there is a program that has been undersubscribed; maybe you have made a decision to defer work. That is the normal series of things that I think are contemplated. The central agency, being the Department of Finance, would then work with directors of other departments to see where there are funds available. That is something that would be taking place during the supplementary budget process across government.

Ms. White: Again, I'm at a disadvantage. I haven't been in government, I haven't been part of Management Board, but my understanding is that it's a Cabinet committee so I'm trying to figure out if it is a chicken and an egg. What came first: the request for the funding for the dock or the decision within departments to defer projects? Maybe the minister can't answer but really, right here, it's a chicken and an egg situation. What came first: the request for the money to fund an ore dock or the decision to defer projects — for example, the \$6 million out of

Yukon Housing and \$7 million out of Highways and Public Works?

I think that I have probably talked myself into knots at this point in time so I'm going to move on to immigration, which is one of my favourite things. Although I appreciate that the minister has referred to a nominee program as an economic program, for me, it has always been the idea of immigration. It's the idea of people being able to leave whatever country they are coming from to come to Canada to re-establish and they will do almost anything to do that, including whatever jobs that they get, so for me, it has always been an immigration program and not an economic program.

As we heard my colleague from the Yukon Party ask about timelines, applications, and how it goes, one of the things that I indicated in the briefing process was that I wanted to know if it had ever been audited — whether or not we had gone through policies within programs and application processes, or whether we interviewed, for example, business owners or people who had gone through the application process themselves, because one of the things that people have said is that it is unfair. They have said that they have done what they were told to do and that things have been really hard. Of course, a business feels responsible for the people who they are sponsoring to bring over. If you get a person over and they can't actually work because the process hasn't gone through yet, all of a sudden, you have a person who is in a foreign jurisdiction and unable to work.

I am going to have more questions on that, but seeing the time, Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:24 p.m.

The following document was filed October 12, 2023:

35-1-155

2022 Annual Report Yukon Minerals Advisory Board

(Streicker)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 141

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Monday, October 16, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, October 16, 2023 — 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. Pillai: There are a number of visitors who are here with us today for Small Business Week tributes. I would like to welcome to the Assembly — and have my colleagues welcome — Mr. Ben Pereira, who is a director with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce; Mellisa Murray, executive director of the Yukon First Nation chamber and also a well-known city councillor; and Stuart Murray, entrepreneur and director of the Yukon Chamber of Mines. Also here today is Lucas Brown.

Thank you all for coming.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Small Business Week

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Small Business Week, which is being recognized across Canada from October 15 to 21. For 44 years, the Business Development Bank of Canada has coordinated this national celebration of entrepreneurship, acknowledging the significant contributions that small businesses provide to the economy. There are over 1.2 million small businesses across the country. Small- and medium-sized businesses together contribute more than 50 percent of the country's GDP.

The Yukon is home to over 3,100 small- and medium-sized businesses, and it's impossible to overstate the positive impacts of these businesses on our community. In 2022, small businesses in the Yukon contributed to retail sales exceeding \$1 billion for the first time. Mr. Speaker, it takes an extraordinary brand of determination to transform an initial business concept into a living, thriving reality.

Entrepreneurs stand as trailblazers. They are leaders who have dedicated themselves to their passion projects despite the obstacles. As we move through the transition to a post-pandemic economy, we continue to face the difficulties of labour shortages and supply-chain disruptions. This has resulted in Canadian entrepreneurs channelling their efforts toward innovation and sustainability, ensuring their continued growth in the face of the challenges. They are also pioneering inclusive and environmentally conscious business practices while driving the Canadian economy.

As a northern jurisdiction with a small population, we face unique challenges that require entrepreneurs to be creative and resourceful. It is imperative to support local options. These businesses and the incredible people behind them not only support the economic prosperity of our territory but also contribute to the social well-being. They provide community spaces, support, and sponsorship to local events and causes and so much more.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank Yukon entrepreneurs, once again, for their resilience and for their work to innovate and adapt to changing circumstances. Small Business Week is about recognizing these efforts and, as always, I encourage Yukoners to shop local.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the chamber of commerce and other industry associations for their Yukon businesses. They play an invaluable role in representing the interests of our business community.

The Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce is recognizing Small Business Week by profiling the entrepreneurs in small businesses who participated in Yukon University's Innovation and Entrepreneurship PIVOT program. I also invite Yukon entrepreneurs to join the variety of online events this week, hosted by the Business Development Bank of Canada, by visiting their Small Business Week website.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to Small Business Week. Each year, we rise to praise all the small businesses who support and make our communities the wonderful and interesting places to live. Each time you support a general store, a coffee shop, a restaurant, or a clothing or hardware store, you help those who provide a local service. The entrepreneurs who take on the challenge and joy of having their own small business are to be applauded. They go through a rigorous system to ensure that all of the necessary permits and regulations are in place before they even begin to hire employees and open the doors.

Having done this routine for many years on a seasonal basis, I know that it is not for the faint of heart — the wonder and worry of it all. You want to ensure that your customer base has a great experience at your business or shop, so one does not expound on the trials and tribulations — behind-the-scene work — of taxes and permits.

The world has changed quickly in the retail world and many shop online, which has its benefits. However, never forget to check locally first, as the item might be handy today and in line with the cost posted online. We want to get to know the names of the local owners or the people who work the front line, and this is part of the beauty of personal interactions, as a small business will also back their products should they not work out as planned.

We hope that you will support your community business economy, as most of the dollars will most likely return to the community through wages, sponsorships, gifts, and assistance for various charities. Take time to thank an employee. They, in

turn, need support for their service, and it only takes a minute. As customer appreciation days approach in early November along with the Christmas holiday season, we encourage you to shop local. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate Small Business Week. Every October, Small Business Week pays tribute to the entrepreneurs who continue to contribute so much to our communities. Small businesses provide well-paying local jobs within our communities, and they bring energy, vibrancy, and uniqueness to our streets.

Being a small business isn't for the faint of heart; it's for the brave, the patient, and the persistent. Small business owners are doers and problem-solvers. They are invested in our communities and the people around them.

Our small business community is dynamic and responsive. It is the small businesses that sponsor our sports teams and art events and they are the organizations that donate all sorts of things to fundraisers. Small business owners are our friends and they are our neighbours, and we can all agree that it's important to support the local businesses around us but never more so than now.

Small businesses still aren't through the uncertainty that was created by the pandemic and, in a post-pandemic world, the normal challenges for businesses are even more daunting.

So, before ordering from a huge online retailer, look closer to home. Buying from the people in our community who continue to invest so much in the Yukon is a great show of support.

Businesses were grateful for the government's support during the pandemic, but now it's important that this support not be their undoing. Small businesses are still recovering from the loss of earnings during COVID and they're trying to pay off debt while keeping their doors open. Any business that closes due to the pandemic is one business too many. So, we want to thank every business owner who has persevered during these challenging times, and we want to thank every Yukoner who has and continues to support our local small businesses.

Applause

In recognition of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I'm here today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, which takes place from October 16 to 20. This week was created to raise awareness and promote action to end poverty and homelessness in the Yukon.

Since 2005, Poverty and Homelessness Action Week has drawn attention to these imperative community concerns. We know that income and access to housing are two of the social determinants of health, meaning that they are inseparably linked with our overall health and well-being. Living in poverty or having poor access to housing can intensify health inequities. We also know that having a safe home is a necessity for

everyone to move forward out of poverty and be able to achieve their life goals.

The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition and other community partners put together an amazing week of events and discussions, including the popular Whitehorse Connects events. This year's events are being organized around the theme, "What's on the Line: Actions to End Poverty and Homelessness in the Yukon".

We encourage everyone to participate in this free programming sponsored by community organizations throughout the week and learn more about our community's inspiring work to end and prevent poverty and homelessness in the territory. Volunteering for one of these organizations is also a powerful way to have an impact and be part of the solution. Thank you to the many non-profit organizations and the individuals behind those organizations. You are making a difference.

Supporting Yukoners in need is an action that must always be centred on collaboration and the involvement of the broader community reinforced by the foundational elements of cultural safety and humility. We remain committed to ending and preventing homelessness through community collaboration initiatives such as the housing action plan for Yukon, Safe at Home, housing and homelessness task force, and the federal Yukon Reaching Home program. We must always be learning together, so we continue to work in partnership with Yukon First Nations, other governments, and the non-government sector to address homelessness in the territory and to help people access the services that they need. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 16 to 20 as Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, which was started in 2005 by the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition to bring attention to these issues and bring the community together to help address them. The work that this organization does is so important for our community and for those who have dealt with poverty in their lives.

This campaign helps to get the word out about poverty and homelessness. The campaign is being led by grads of the Voices Influencing Change program — another one of the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition's important initiatives. This program offers training, support, and opportunities to those who have experienced poverty and homelessness. True understanding comes from lived experience. So much good has come from this program and through the great work put into Poverty and Homelessness Action Week by these grads. Each day this week, there will be a different event taking place in the community — lunches, workshops, forums. Each important discussion is open to the public and more information is available on the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition's Facebook page and website. Thank you to all those organizing this week's events and to those who make the effort to get involved in discussions and events. Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. I want to thank the staff and many volunteers at the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition who put together an information-packed week based on the theme, “What’s on the Line”. As we all know, it’s Yukoners’ lives that are on the line. Every year, the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition holds a week of activities so that Yukoners can be heard and share their lived experiences while also bringing attention to poverty and homelessness in the Yukon.

Our hope is that, at the end of this week, each of us will show a renewed commitment to ending poverty and homelessness. We need to take action.

Mahsi’.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

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

THAT the membership of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees, as established by Motion No. 12, be amended by:

- (1) rescinding the appointment of the Hon. Ranj Pillai; and
- (2) appointing the Hon. Jeanie McLean to the committee.

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

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 in response to the analysis and report conducted by the Association of Yukon Communities in July 2023.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to commit to meeting the treatment needs of Yukoners abusing substances such as hand sanitizer, hairspray, and mouthwash in a timely manner, including:

- (1) access to medically supported detox; and

(2) treatment options in the Yukon or outside of the territory.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Missing Persons Act and regulation

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to announce that the *Missing Persons Act* and regulation came

into force today. Our government is, and always will be, committed to increasing public safety across the territory. The *Missing Persons Act* represents a significant milestone for all Yukoners. Using this legislation, the RCMP can now apply to the Yukon Territorial Court for orders providing the timely access to records needed to locate a missing person, such as their telecommunications, financial, and/or health records.

Under the act, the RCMP can request a person’s records with an emergency demand for records or a records access order once a person is established as missing. If the person is a minor or a vulnerable person who is believed to be at risk of imminent harm, a search warrant may also be issued by the court. The act includes provisions that: set out criteria for certain orders to be granted by the court; outline specific rules about how information and records are managed and used; place limits on what information can be disclosed when and to whom; provide reporting requirements so that use of the orders under the act can be tracked; and supply forms and methods of service for orders granted to the RCMP.

Best practices from other jurisdictions and feedback received during engagements have guided the design of the legislation. We have worked closely with other jurisdictions to ensure alignment on key aspects of the legislative framework. This is important to support investigations of missing persons that may cross provincial or territorial borders. I am grateful to all of the governments, organizations, and individuals who provided feedback and to all those who worked with us to complete this important piece of legislation.

The act and regulation carefully balanced the needs of the RCMP to have access to information with the rights of affected individuals to have their privacy protected. It includes clear, specific rules setting out how information records can be obtained, managed, and used and sets strict limits on what may be shared and with whom. Orders granting access to personal information may only be granted if the RCMP can satisfy a judge that it will help to locate a missing person. Information gathered in an investigation must also be kept confidential. It may only be used to locate a person and it may only be shared with the police or individuals responsible for protecting the missing person’s safety.

The legislation also includes accountability measures such as requirements for the RCMP to report annually on their use of orders granted under the act.

Before this legislation was proclaimed, the RCMP could not compel people or organizations to release personal information about a missing person, which might have resulted in the loss of valuable time in locating someone or the stalling or halting of an investigation. Bringing the act into force fulfills call for justice 5.8 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which urges the provincial and territorial governments to enact missing persons legislation.

The act also supports the implementation of *Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity and Justice — Yukon’s Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit+ People strategy*.

Mr. Speaker, our government is pleased to bring this important piece of legislation into force so that it may be used to support the safety of all Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to this ministerial statement on an issue that is important to many Yukoners. I would note for the record that since the regulations associated with this were only shared with us about half an hour ago, we are not in a position to comment on the details of those regulations right now but do support the original legislation and bringing it into force.

The *Missing Persons Act* was tabled and passed in the Legislature back in the Fall Sitting of 2017 and has not been brought into force until today. I note that the act passed with the unanimous support of all members. In 2017, in speaking to this legislation, I noted that we had received a request from the RCMP at the tail-end of our last term in government to bring in missing persons legislation similar to that in place in Alberta and British Columbia, and we are supportive of the government acting on that request from the RCMP.

Despite what the minister just implied, this legislation was passed by the Yukon Legislative Assembly before the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls issued its final report several years ago, including the recommendation urging provincial and territorial governments to enact missing persons legislation. When the Minister of Justice tabled this legislation, her comments implied a real sense of urgency for bringing this law into force. At second reading on October 5, 2017, she said — and I quote: “In many cases, the safety of the missing person may be at risk. It is crucially important that the RCMP have the ability to conduct timely, robust investigations to locate the missing person as quickly as possible.” She also said that — quote: “With this legislation, Yukon will join much of the rest of Canada in recognizing the need to provide this tool for our police services to locate missing persons as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

In speaking to the bill, the Minister of Justice used the word “quickly” and the phrase “as quickly as possible” multiple times.

I think it is only fair to ask why it has taken six years to bring this act into force. The minister was clear in 2017 that there was urgency to this issue, but that urgency does not seem to be reflected in a six-year wait, so can the minister explain why it has taken so long? What work was being done on this and why did it take six years?

I look forward to the minister’s response and her explanation of the timing for bringing this act into force.

Ms. Blake: I find the timing of this ministerial statement to be disrespectful to the community of Old Crow, the citizens, residents, and search teams, as the continuing search for our elder in our traditional territory is ongoing.

We know that there are open cases of missing persons in Whitehorse and across rural communities — some being open for decades. Despite the Yukon’s *Missing Persons Act* not being implemented since being passed in 2017, the Yukon’s

volunteer responders for search and rescues such as the RCMP, the Canadian Rangers, and numerous volunteer agencies and citizens have continued to show their great ability and determination to work collaboratively, to deploy resources, and to actively respond to emergency situations of missing persons.

What the Yukon needs is a clear process on what steps to take when a person goes missing. Do they call the RCMP? Do they reach out to the media on their own? How do First Nations determine what supports they can provide for a search mission? How are First Nations and communities supported by this government when there is an active search happening? What decisions has this government made to ensure that there is government support to families, agencies, and volunteers during a missing persons search?

I want to thank all the people conducting this search for our elder in Old Crow. My deepest gratitude goes to citizens, the RCMP, and search organizations for their immediate help. Like many, I continue to hold onto hope that our elder will be found safe and sound and returned back to our community and to his family.

I think another time or a press release later to announce steps that can be taken to assist those involved in search and rescue missions would be better timed, rather than today.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Time is of the essence when a loved one is missing and every piece of information counts. With the *Missing Persons Act* and regulation now coming into force, we are helping to address delays experienced by the RCMP when investigating cases of missing persons — in particular, where there is no evidence of criminal activity.

Unlike the former Yukon Party — which received requests, as noted by the member opposite, in 2015 to take action on this matter — they also received such requests from the RCMP as early as 2012 — we have taken action to move forward.

Missing persons legislation is a direct response to the call for justice 5.8 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Yukon’s MMIWG2S+ strategy. In late 2017, the *Missing Persons Act* received royal assent. Since then, we have been working hard to assess options, to explore community needs, and to work toward a regulation that balances the need for help to find missing people with privacy protections.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the importance of getting this done. All Yukoners suffer when someone is lost or missing and the absence of answers only increases anxiety and stress. We have worked to carefully balance this new law with privacy rights and to ensure that it meets the needs of the territory. It is our goal to provide the RCMP with the tools and the means to locate missing loved ones as quickly as possible while balancing the privacy rights of individuals. This is a serious responsibility that we carry as legislators, and I truly appreciate the support that my colleagues have shown, albeit somewhat begrudgingly, today and will show for this important new piece of legislation.

Our government has always pursued system reforms and significant transformations, but we have always been careful to

consider the concerns, input, and rights of individuals in that process. It takes time, resources, effort, consultation, and research, but it is crucial to ensure effectiveness and legality. Our timeline was also impacted, of course, by the COVID-19 pandemic, the technical nature of the regulation, the time needed to properly engage with First Nation governments, manage the issues, and for the RCMP engagement, the Territorial Court of the Yukon, and stakeholder groups, including women's advocacy groups.

The *Missing Persons Act* allowing the RCMP to access protected information for missing persons investigations where no crime is as yet suspected is a significant step toward addressing a crucial gap in our current system.

One of the provisions of this legislation is that when a missing person is located, the first question the RCMP must ask that person is if they wish to be located — if they wish their whereabouts to be known. This helps to protect individuals — women, men, and all people — who might be fleeing or choosing to remove themselves from their regular lives and work for whatever reason, including their own safety.

Our government is committed to completing this new law and its protections. We are implementing our MMIWG2S+ strategy, we're promoting gender equality, and we're strengthening community safety. Today, we have taken a step forward and done so. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health care services in rural communities

Mr. Cathers: Over the last year, the Yukon has seen an unprecedented number of gaps in rural health services. Health care centres in rural communities have been closed for weeks at a time, leaving residents of those communities without access to basic health care services. This Liberal government and the Minister of Health and Social Services have been asleep at the wheel, ignoring calls from the Yukon Party and from health professionals to develop a new health human resources strategy for years.

These closures come after the Minister of Health and Social Services revealed that the vacancy rate for rural nurses soared to as high as almost 50 percent under her watch.

Why did it take so long for this Liberal government to pay attention to the growing health care crisis in rural Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think the member opposite should get the facts straight with respect to — I believe what was said was: closed for weeks on end. We are very concerned about shortages that occur as a result of nurses being absent or shortages that might occur in health centres across the territory.

Like the rest of Canada and around the world, Yukon has been impacted by a health and human resource shortage. To mitigate the impact on Yukoners, the Yukon government continues to work to recruit and retain health care providers. We know that, in order to have fully staffed health centres ready to serve Yukoners when and where they need it, we need to continue investing in our health care professionals and in

affordable housing. We must also continue to support our health care workers who are working in such health centres, because they too have issues of burnout and are required to have some time off. Some of the shortages that we've had this summer in some health centres across the territory have been a result of us supporting our essential front-line health care workers.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, this problem did not happen overnight. Rural nurses have been expressing concern about burnout for a long time, and the Liberal government was repeatedly told that the Yukon needed an updated health human resources strategy.

This Liberal government is again neglecting the needs of rural Yukon and ignored this developing rural health care coverage crisis until almost 50 percent of rural nursing positions were vacant. The minister has belatedly taken some action, but the current gaps in rural health care coverage are serious, and we have yet to see a plan from the government to fix the problem.

When can Yukoners expect to see a plan from the Minister of Health and Social Services to end the ongoing closures of rural health centres and provide reliable health coverage to all Yukon communities?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Minister of Health and Social Services, you are on mute.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I apologize.

In March of this year, we launched a health and human resources steering committee led jointly by the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which represents many, many Yukon decision-makers here in the territory. There are representatives from the Yukon Medical Association, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, the Yukon Medical Council, the Yukon Employees' Union, the Yukon University, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and the Council of Yukon First Nations.

In addition to this, we are always eager to work with the communities directly and have done so on many occasions over the summer, which is the period of time being asked about here — including being directly in touch with Yukon First Nation governments and communities, as well as working diligently to make sure that any of the shortages in a community are continually trying to be met.

I have reached out directly to chiefs on many occasions during the summer, and we have been working together to make sure that this important opportunity exists for us to provide service to those in the communities that might otherwise be feeling the concerns here.

The Yukon communities and the nursing —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Cathers: This Liberal government is developing a reputation for ignoring the needs of rural Yukoners. Whether it is shutting down garbage facilities, cutting road maintenance, failing to increase resources for the RCMP, or neglecting

essential services like health coverage, this Whitehorse-focused Liberal government repeatedly shows they are completely out of touch.

Multiple community leaders spoke up about concerns with ongoing closures of rural health centres. The Chief of the Ross River Dena Council said that it left his community in a vulnerable state and negatively impacted citizens. The Chief of the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun said that the cuts were incomprehensible and wrote a letter to the minister to express concern. The Association of Yukon Communities noted that there was a lack of action from the Liberal government and that concerns being raised by Yukon communities seemed to be falling on deaf ears.

Why do community leaders need to criticize this government publicly in order to get any action, and when can Yukoners expect to see a plan from the Minister of Health and Social Services to resolve ongoing gaps in rural health care services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very pleased to be able to speak to Yukoners about the important work that is being done by the Health Human Resources Steering Committee. We expect them to report to us with the development of a strategy to address these very important issues in Yukon communities during this fall, and I'm expecting it at any time.

Again, the facts are not exactly correct with respect to the member opposite. Community nursing has been experiencing a vacancy rate, more recently, of approximately 19 percent for primary health care nurses, which is an improvement of approximately 29 percent since the fall of 2022. I have been in touch with the communities about this important issue throughout the summer. I have reached out directly to Chief Loblaw from Ross River to discuss ways in which we can better work with communities in advance of any service centre reductions — to minimize the impacts of service reductions and to find solutions that eliminate service reductions entirely.

I have also committed to working with the chiefs, mayors, and community leaders to do the same for each of their communities, should such a service reduction occur there. We have worked most recently — up until the last minute, including during the period of time when there might be an announced slowdown — and have filled a vacancy more recently in one of the communities during the period of time when they thought —

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: City of Whitehorse drinking water

Ms. McLeod: Last Friday, the *Whitehorse Star* reported on a letter that the Minister of Community Services sent to the City of Whitehorse regarding drinking water supply that was — and I quote: "... scolding the council for not taking action quickly enough."

According to the *Whitehorse Star*, the letter said — and I quote: "... city council appeared to be second-guessing expert recommendations on technical information."

We know that the Minister of Community Services has had a tense relationship with the biggest municipality in the Yukon for number of reasons, but now it seems that the minister has

taken to publicly scolding the municipality and accusing their council of second-guessing experts.

Why did the minister send this letter to the City of Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the record for the member opposite. First of all, I did not send a public letter to the City of Whitehorse. I sent a private letter to the Mayor of Whitehorse expressing my concern and offering help to get the city's water treatment plant underway.

I think that water is a very important issue to the citizens of Whitehorse. Recognizing the importance of our water system to the residents of Whitehorse, seeing that city council had previously voted against actually proceeding with planning for a new water treatment plant for the City of Whitehorse, and in light of some new results coming out, I wrote to the city mayor underlining the importance of the issue in a private manner and then asking how we can help.

Ms. McLeod: Last week, the minister blamed the lack of attention to emergency planning on the municipalities. This was despite the fact that it was his government that promised to have emergency plans in place for every single community by 2022. That wasn't the first time that we've seen the City of Whitehorse and this minister disagree publicly. We saw a similar situation when the minister unilaterally announced the cancellation of the bid to host the Canada Games without letting the city know. Now we see the minister publicly scolding the City of Whitehorse for their plans to address the city's drinking water.

Why is the minister antagonizing the largest municipality in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, despite being corrected by me, the member opposite continually repeats information in this House that is incorrect. I did not write a public letter to the City of Whitehorse. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if I want to write a public letter or an op-ed, I will do so. I'm fully capable of doing that and know the procedures very, very well. But no, I wrote a private letter to the City of Whitehorse, to the Mayor of Whitehorse, appreciating the concern that I have heard from constituents and others about the water system in Whitehorse and pledging the territorial government's help in addressing this problem.

We have, in the letter — and I know the member opposite does not have the letter because I have been told that the Leader of the Official Opposition has asked for it, and I am happy to provide it.

What I told the mayor was that this was a concerning issue. We have planning and engineering expertise that we are willing to share with the City of Whitehorse. If they want to speak with me about this issue, please reach out. That's what we're doing — working very closely with the City of Whitehorse to address needs within municipalities.

Ms. McLeod: According to the *Whitehorse Star* article on Friday, the minister is reported to have said that he expects the City of Whitehorse to fund a new water treatment facility on their own without the support of the Yukon government. It has been reported that a new water treatment plant could cost between \$40 million and \$55 million.

Can the minister confirm that this government is unwilling to provide any funding to the City of Whitehorse to build a new drinking water treatment facility if it is needed?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I have said to the mayor — even this morning when we had another conversation — I speak with the Mayor of Whitehorse on a regular basis and I consider our relationship to be cordial. We work well together, Mr. Speaker.

As I said to the mayor this morning — at the moment, the city has reserves, but the federal government is going to be launching a new infrastructure program. We don't know the criteria for that new infrastructure funding or how it will be allocated and what sort of process will be used to access that money. I did tell the Mayor of Whitehorse that a plant such as the one that the city is now considering would more than likely fall under the federal criteria, but we don't know yet. Once we know that, we will work with the City of Whitehorse to secure the funds from Ottawa.

Question re: Skagway marine services

Ms. White: Last Thursday, I asked the Premier a series of questions about the \$44 million that this government is planning to spend on building an ore dock in Skagway, Alaska. One of my questions to him went unanswered. What was heard instead was that it is confidential, but Yukoners want to know.

Can the Premier confirm that other government departments were asked to cut their own budgets in order to finance this fall's \$21 million for an ore dock in Alaska?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will go back and look at the Blues; I don't remember saying that something was confidential.

I said that the process is that, when there is a project that needs to be funded, we go through a submission to Management Board. That process of deliberating and analyzing the package is something that is confidential — that part of it. Then, as a government, the decision is made to see if the funds are available to be used.

Every year, when it comes to our capital budget, for instance, we will go through and will identify what is in the mains in the springtime budget for the capital budget. If projects have some cost overruns, which we have seen in the last couple of years because of challenges with the supply chain, sometimes there are changes that have to be made or, if projects are delayed, sometimes we would reallocate the funds to another part of the project.

Again, for this project, we have a terms sheet that is non-binding in place. We have submitted a proposal to Management Board. That was approved and now we are in the position, if supported, that we would then use resources that are approved by the Legislative Assembly to do that work.

Ms. White: Just to clarify, Management Board is made up of Cabinet ministers, so elected politicians.

Whether the Premier wants to confirm it or not, numbers don't lie. In this year's supplementary budget, when you add up all the cuts from various departments, they add up exactly to this year's budget for the ore dock. There is no pretending that those cuts are not financing this government's new project.

At a time when the housing crisis is hurting Yukoners everywhere, this government is cutting \$6 million out of the

Yukon Housing Corporation's budget. That money could build badly needed units to house teachers in communities or cover the costs of new bedbug ovens and literally do all of the renovations that Yukon Housing Corporation tenants have been waiting for.

Why is this government cutting critical housing funding to build an ore dock that no mining company in the Yukon will use for years to come?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It is a good spin from the Leader of the Third Party. I would say that, every year, we rebalance and then look at our priorities. The areas where there have been reallocation are areas where there have either been programs that have been undersubscribed — and I'm happy to speak to these in the House at any point in time — or projects that have been moved ahead. What we're actually talking about is the authority to spend the money. In some cases — we have a program called the northern carve-out. We will take that housing money, which we have received from the federal government, and we will be looking to use it in the next fiscal when we have a project ready for which that money can be used. But we need the authority to spend within our budget, and so that's why we have come to the table. We are moving money forward and we are looking at areas that are under-subscribed.

So — not really doing justice here in the narrative from the Third Party — really giving poor information to Yukoners. I would say to go back and take a look at the budget. I am happy to have a conversation offline if there is more information required.

Ms. White: So, this rebalance will see this government spend \$21 million this year and another \$23 million next year on a facility that will be outside of our country and that will be of no use to anyone for at least several years.

I am going to continue with the cuts. The Yukon Housing Corporation is not the only one on the chopping block to finance the Premier's new project. Community Services also got cut by over \$6 million, and this money was originally earmarked for fire protection, infrastructure, and home retrofits — all here in the Yukon.

Highways and Public Works is also losing \$7.5 million — money that could pay for badly needed repairs to roads and bridges and other infrastructure throughout — again — the Yukon. So, these millions of dollars could support Yukoners by keeping transfer stations open in rural Yukon for years to come, or they could jump-start a new school in downtown Whitehorse.

So, why did the government — the Cabinet ministers — decide to cut from so many important projects instead of putting Yukoners' needs and interests first?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just looking at new capital builds and partnerships, the Yukon Housing Corporation continues to expand its stock of housing — 60 new housing units in the last two years. There are 24 currently underway and 128 more units are in planning. The latest intake for the housing initiatives fund — construction of 159 new, affordable, energy-efficient homes. Yukon Housing Corporation, of course, has supported 470 new housing completions since 2020.

We will continue to invest in housing, but my question back is — we clearly have defined that the NDP does not support mining. If you do not have access to tidewater, you might as well just look at all your exploration going away. The \$185 million that has been spent in the territory that supports programs, supports volunteerism, and actually provides quality of life to people — and all the other mining projects — again, would then look to end.

I guess we have heard it very clearly today that the NDP does not support mining, they don't support exploration, and they feel it is that simplistic — that we should just not support tidewater access and that we should just close up shop. If that is their understanding of the economy — my lord.

Question re: Addictions treatment

Ms. Blake: People from rural communities and here in Whitehorse have repeatedly shared with us their struggles with consuming hand sanitizer, hairspray, and mouthwash.

These substances are just as addictive and even more harmful than regulated alcohol. However, they are often overlooked. Too often, Yukoners looking for help with these addictions are falling through the cracks. It may be that their local nursing station is closed, there are no detox beds available in Whitehorse, or there's no funding to access treatment out of the territory.

Can the minister tell Yukoners why addiction treatments are so often unavailable when people living with different types of addictions reach out for help?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think the work that's being done, pursuant to the substance use health emergency as well as through the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services unit at the Department of Health and Social Services, is increasing the availability of services for Yukoners. It is the number one goal in the ability to respond to the substance use health emergency, which, as everyone likely still knows, was intentionally declared back in January 2022 and intentionally named the "substance use health emergency" in order to take into account the use and abuse of all substances, including alcohol — which is a serious issue here in the territory — and including suicide.

The work that is being done pursuant to that is to expand services to make sure that we have community outreach and to make sure that services are available to Yukoners here in the territory or Outside, when necessary.

Ms. Blake: Regardless of the addiction and no matter how hard staff are working to support users seeking treatment options, there are still wait-lists for detox beds, counselling, and for available treatment options.

When Yukoners who use drugs or other substances make a decision to seek help and ask for treatment, too often they are told that they will have to wait — sometimes waiting for months. It's even harder in rural communities where Yukoners continue to face health centre closures and where there is no access to medical support for addictions and mental illness. Without access to supports, users, their families, and their communities are caught in the cycle of addiction.

What immediate solutions can the minister provide to Yukoners who continue to struggle so hard with addictions?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think it's critical for Yukoners to know that services as described by the member opposite are in fact available in the territory and are available on an emergency basis.

We encourage individuals who are having difficulty to reach out to their health centre, to their primary health care provider, to the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services unit at the Department of Health and Social Services — we have, on many occasions, intervened and worked with an individual who has contacted us to make sure that, if they are in crisis, their crisis is responded to in the most appropriate way. We appreciate that individuals in communities might need to travel farther or be in touch with individuals in Whitehorse if they are looking for emergency mental health services and others. There are services available and I am happy to speak about those, but we also encourage individuals to call the nurses line — which is 811 — or 911, if necessary, in an emergency. We look forward to working with individuals as best we can to connect them to the services that they need. That is the goal.

Ms. Blake: I think that it is important for us to remember that there are citizens across the Yukon Territory who have been struggling with the consumption of sanitizer and other forms of alcohol substances since before pandemic. Struggling Yukoners turn to this government for support and help. The confidence and supply agreement with the NDP stipulates that this government will make funding available to Yukoners to seek out-of-territory treatment when all other government agencies are at capacity. This is good news for many Yukoners, yet this funding isn't reaching everyone who needs it.

Can the minister confirm that all Yukoners seeking mental health and addictions treatment that isn't available locally will receive funding for out-of-territory treatment?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I can indicate that the reason that this was supported as a CASA commitment by our government was because it is also a goal for our government and the Department of Health and Social Services. I can also indicate that individuals who have managed to get support through any of the places that I have noted — through the 811 nurses line, through their own health centres in communities, through outreach to individuals, at the Referred Care Clinic, at the safe consumption site, at Sarah Steele services, at the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services unit at the Department of Health and Social Services — are being provided with the care that they need.

We do have funding available. We are working on an individual, case-by-case basis to make sure that barriers are removed and that individuals who need care here in the territory or outside of the territory are being supported.

Question re: School busing

Mr. Kent: We have been hearing a number of complaints from families about school bus cancellations. In fact, there are only a few days so far this school year that haven't seen bus cancellations in the Whitehorse area. One of the problems that we have been hearing about is around

communications. Often the notices are at the last minute and students are already at the bus stop. Parents are then forced to adjust their schedules to ensure that their kids can get to school. So, what work is the minister doing with the contractor to improve communications around bus cancellations to make them more timely and more accessible?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise today to talk about busing services. It is certainly a very important aspect of day-to-day education for our students. The Department of Education provides school busing, city transit passes, and transportation subsidies to families to support students travelling safely and effectively to and from school — certainly very live to the issues that are being raised today on the floor of the Legislature. Standard Bus is responsible for notifying schools and families when there are bus route cancellations. We are working with Standard Bus to ensure that notifications are sent out as early as possible. In some instances, routes may be cancelled for the day due to extreme weather conditions, unsafe road conditions, or driver shortages. We acknowledge the impact that cancelled bus routes can have on families and we are working with Standard Bus to find solutions wherever possible.

Like may other jurisdictions, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon is facing driver shortages and we are working with the contractor — which is, again, Standard Bus — to support them in their recruitment efforts.

Mr. Kent: As the minister mentioned, one of the factors contributing to the cancellations is the recruitment and retention of school bus drivers. The contractor has been advertising for additional drivers using social media and more traditional means of advertising. So, can the minister tell us how many school bus driver positions are currently vacant in Whitehorse and rural communities? Exactly what assistance is her department giving to the contractor to recruit new drivers?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, as I have stated already today, many jurisdictions are facing driver shortages. We are working with the contractor to support them in their recruitment efforts. All Whitehorse routes were staffed for the start of the 2023-24 school year, while the two routes in Dawson City were combined and the route in Mayo was not operational due to lack of drivers. Both Dawson and Mayo routes are now staffed and operational. The month of September saw many cancellations in Whitehorse as Standard experienced unforeseen driver shortages. Standard Bus continues to recruit and is optimistic that they will be entering a period that is more conducive to retaining and recruiting staff. Efforts will be made to limit any service disruptions in Whitehorse. We will continue to work with Standard Bus to develop contingency plans, which may include bringing in out-of-territory drivers and combining routes where possible.

In terms of how many, there are 41 active bus routes in Whitehorse and 12 in the communities, including Ross River.

Mr. Kent: When there are cancellations, some students, as the minister has mentioned, can use Whitehorse city transit. Secondary school students are provided with a city transit pass as an alternative to the school bus. However, officials from the Department of Education informed one family that students cannot have both a city transit pass and a school bus pass at the

same time. This, of course, presents challenges when school buses are cancelled with little or no warning.

Can the minister confirm that this is the case and please explain the reasoning for this policy?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I will just start by talking a little bit about the transportation subsidy. If families live more than 3.2 kilometres from the nearest school bus stop and the student goes to the catchment area school, they may apply for a transportation subsidy to offset the cost of driving. We will be reviewing the student transportation program to ensure that it supports the needs of families and those eligible for transportation allowances. We recognize that students with exceptional needs may need additional support. We make best efforts to accommodate students' transportation needs.

Safe, reliable transportation is a key aspect of any student's educational experience. Right now, in the 2023-24 school year, there are 2,102 registered riders for school buses in Whitehorse, and as I stated, there are 41 active bus routes in Whitehorse and 12 in the communities. We certainly did see a really good uptake in registrations and we will continue to work with Standard Bus and our policies to make sure that they meet Yukoners' needs.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Government House Leader's report on length of Sitting

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 75(4) to inform the House that the House Leaders have met for the purpose of achieving agreement on the maximum number of sitting days for the current Sitting. I am informing the House that the results are that there shall be a maximum of 28 sitting days, with the 28th sitting day being Thursday, November 23, 2023.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare that the current Sitting shall be a maximum of 28 sitting days, with the 28th sitting day being Thursday, November 23, 2023.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 29: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 29, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Pillai.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege and honour to rise today at second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*. The amendments proposed in this bill will enable an electoral district boundaries

commission to be appointed prior to the next scheduled territorial election. In the 2023 Spring Sitting of the Assembly, this government moved that an electoral district boundaries commission be established to review and make recommendations on electoral boundaries in advance of the next territorial general election.

In reports delivered to the Speaker and tabled in the Legislative Assembly in 2019 and 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer recommended that a commission be established prior to the next election to ensure effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. The bill amends the *Elections Act* to ensure that the commission can be appointed by January 2024. This date was chosen to give each political party the allotted 60-day time frame to provide a nominee for appointment to the commission, should the proposed bill be proclaimed toward the end of this Sitting. However, if the bill is proclaimed early in this Sitting, the commission and its work could commence sooner. This ensures that amendments to electoral district boundaries could be made on or before April 2, 2025, which is the latest date under the *Elections Act* for proceeding with the November 3, 2025 election with new boundaries.

Once appointed, the commission will commence its work to review the electoral district boundaries and deliver its recommendations in time for implementation ahead of the next election. The recommendations of the commission will be put before the Legislative Assembly in the form of amendments to the *Electoral District Boundaries Act*. The *Elections Act* provides for the appointment of commissions after every second territorial election. The last commission was appointed in 2017, following the 2016 territorial election. With only one election since that time, the next commission would otherwise not be appointed until after the 2025 election.

Mr. Speaker, there has been significant growth and movement in the Yukon's population since the last adjustment to the electoral district boundaries in 2008. As the Chief Electoral Officer pointed out in his reports, a commission should be established prior to the next election to ensure that there is effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. The role of the Electoral District Boundaries Commission is to make proposals to the Legislative Assembly as to the boundaries, number, and names of electoral districts.

As the Yukon's population grows or shifts, regular electoral boundary adjustments protect the principle that voters are entitled to fair and effective representation in the Legislative Assembly. Fair and effective representation is part and parcel of the right to vote, set out in section 3 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

Our government is committed to ensuring that the principle of effective representation is reflected in the context of the next election. Yukoners, whether in urban or rural settings or in new or existing neighbourhoods, need to know that their voice is being heard and their interests are being represented. Without this change, Yukoners would be going to the polls for a fourth time since 2009 under the same electoral district boundaries.

Yukon of today is quite different from the Yukon of nearly a decade and a half ago. As part of its work, the commission takes into account relevant considerations as set out in the act

— for example, the density and rate of growth of the population of any area, the boundaries of municipalities and First Nation governments, and public input obtained, to name a few.

Guided by the relevant considerations contained in the act, each commission makes its own decisions about how it wishes to receive input and submissions from the public and others.

The bill before us also corrects two technical deficiencies in the act regarding the time frames for appointing commissions and for implementing amendments to electoral district boundaries. These technical errors were identified in working with the Legal Services branch while drafting the bill. The act provides for a six-month period after the *Electoral District Boundaries Act* is amended to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to prepare for an election with new boundaries that may be established. However, the act incorrectly states that this six-month readiness period begins on the date that the election is called. Since the election period is much shorter than six months, the act renders it impossible to use any newly enacted electoral district boundaries for the upcoming election. Unless this error is corrected, any new district boundaries established by the 2024 commission would not be used in the 2025 election; they could only be used in the election following four years later.

The bill would correct the error by specifying that the six-month readiness period provided to the Chief Electoral Officer begins on the date that the amendments to the *Electoral District Boundaries Act* receive assent rather than the date the writ is dropped.

The second technical deficiency relates to the timing to establish an Electoral District Boundaries Commission when elections occur less than six years apart. The act prohibits a commission from being established less than six years after the last commission was appointed. It does not, however, specify when a commission should be appointed if two elections occur less than six years apart. The bill would clarify this in the circumstance a commission must be appointed no later than six months after the six-year period following the appointment of the last commission has elapsed.

The overarching aim of the bill is to ensure that we have the legislation in place to protect the principle that Yukon citizens have the fair and effective representation that they are entitled to as the territory grows. I thank officials from the Executive Council Office and the Department of Justice for their help in preparing this bill.

Ms. White: I thank the Premier for his opening remarks. It's really important to note that when we talk about electoral boundaries, we're really talking about the reflection of Yukoners. When we talk about the review of electoral districts, it's designed to ensure that electors have effective representation in electoral districts reflecting changes in communities across the territory and that the review is conducted independent of government. I don't think that any of us disagree on all of those factors. As a matter of fact, there have been quite a few conversations recently around the need for a boundaries commission and what that would look like.

One of the things of note — and I'm not sure how far I can or cannot go, but this has been a conversation within Members' Services Board and we have actually had conversations with the Chief Electoral Officer around the issue.

During the briefing on November 4, the question was asked: Was there consultation with the Chief Electoral Officer? One thing we were told is that there was an exchange of letters — that the Chief Electoral Officer wasn't able to see the draft ahead of it being tabled and didn't see it until the rest of us, for example, saw it once it was tabled.

In response to the tabling of the amendments to the *Elections Act*, the Chief Electoral Officer did send the Premier and the chair of the Members' Services Board a letter indicating some suggestions or thoughts on things that should change. The reason why I bring this up is that there is not an opportunity for us here in this Assembly to hear directly from the Chief Electoral Officer on the issue, and I do think that's important.

There has been another time in discussion around amendments to the *Elections Act* — that a different course has been taken or was taken.

I apologize, Mr. Speaker. After printing it out — I don't have the dates on it. I can tell you the page number, but I can't tell you what date it is from, so that's not very helpful. I can guess. It's between 2011 and 2016, based on the members that are here.

In the 33rd Legislative Assembly, my colleague Elizabeth Hanson, who was the Member for Whitehorse Centre, moved an *Act to Amend the Elections Act with Respect to Political Contributions*. There was a debate in the House; there were conversations in the House, and ultimately, it was decided by all members of the House that it should go to Members' Services Board. We know that at the time, because of the makeup of the Members' Services Board and what it was, it didn't go past there.

But there is good news. Since 2021, things have changed. We are able to have more conversations more openly in boards of this House because the makeup has changed. No one holds that balance of power anymore. There is a precedent — it has been set before — of legislation being referred to a board for further discussion. I think that is important, because, I can tell you, as an elected member who has been here for a while, I would actually like to have a conversation with the Chief Electoral Officer on the issue — and more than just in a casual way by knocking on his office door; I would like to hear more in, for example, that board setting.

With that in mind, I do actually have an amendment that I would like to move right now.

Amendment proposed

Ms. White: I move:

THAT the motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be amended by adding immediately after the phrase “be now read a second time” the phrase “and referred to the Members' Services Board; and

THAT the Members' Services Board report the bill to the Legislative Assembly no later than October 26, 2023.”

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

The Leader of the Third Party has moved:

THAT the motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be amended by adding immediately after the phrase “be now read a second time” the phrase “and referred to the Members' Services Board; and

THAT the Members' Services Board report the bill to the Legislative Assembly no later than October 26, 2023.”

The motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, if amended, would read:

THAT Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now read a second time and referred to the Members' Services Board; and

THAT the Members' Services Board report the bill to the Legislative Assembly no later than October 26, 2023.

Is there any debate on the amendment?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I am reading the annotated Standing Orders — I think it's the most recent one — of 2021, and under section 57(3), it says: “Notwithstanding Standing Order 57(1), a bill may be committed to a Select Committee after First Reading.” In the annotated section, it says: “This would be done by way of a stand-alone substantive motion. See Standing Order 27(1)(f). The motion would have to be moved after the bill has received First Reading and before it receives Second Reading.”

What I'm trying to understand is that this sounds like an amendment to second reading and that it would then come at the end of second reading, not before second reading. I am trying to understand how this is being interpreted and I'm just looking for your clarification, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: The amendment is in order.

I will be bringing clarification for tomorrow's discussion.

Ms. White: I do always appreciate my colleague from Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes in his reading of things. It is always impressive.

The reason why I am bringing this amendment forward and the reason why it has a timeline — that it would go to Members' Services Board but would have to come back next week — is that I have no interest in delaying this legislation. I have no interest in delaying the legislation, but what I do have a real interest in — and I believe that it is both reasonable and responsible — is having the representatives of the three parties — so all of us who sit on the Members' Services Board — be able to hear directly from the Chief Electoral Officer and consider the input that he put down in his letter. I very clearly understand that nothing can change this legislation that is outside the scope of what these amendments are. There are

some things in the letter that the Chief Electoral Officer sent that are outside of the scope of what could be looked at, but I do think that it would be responsible and reasonable to look at it together.

This amendment is not aimed at delaying the legislation. I, like all others, understand that the amendments to the *Elections Act* right now for this specific thing around electoral boundaries are critically important, which is why I included the timeline for when the Members' Services Board would have to get back. So, really, the reason I am bringing it forward is that I believe the three political parties in this Assembly should hear directly from the Chief Electoral Officer on the proposed amendments and that we will get back to the House next week with our thoughts on it.

Mr. Dixon: We will be agreeing with this amendment. I think that it's appropriate that we refer this bill to the Members' Services Board. I am of the view that the *Elections Act* is something that should be changed only with the support of all parties. The way that this should be done is through an all-party committee like Members' Services Board. That has previously been the approach that we have taken and that's what we want to see taken here today.

Now, with regard to the substance of the timing, I agree with the Member for Takhini-Kopper King. We've expressed an interest in seeing things expedited in a report back to the Legislature in very short order. I'm aware that we have a meeting booked on Friday for the Members' Services Board, and we'll be able to address this at that meeting.

So, we will support the amendment that was brought forward by my colleague today.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the amendment, I just want to put on the record that we will not be supporting the amendment because we feel that we've put together a good piece of legislation. It's quite simplistic, really. It's the nine elements that we've seen previously and really just getting the authority to do it out of the normal cycle that we would do it in. I think that all parties have had an opportunity to review the letter that was presented from the Chief Electoral Officer. There are a number of things, as stated by the Leader of the NDP, that are out of scope. We know that this won't be considered.

Taking into consideration the legislation that we have tabled, you'll see that there is ample opportunity to take good advice from the electoral officer. I believe that the electoral officer sits with the commission in a non-voting fashion. I also know that every Member of the Legislative Assembly has an opportunity to provide an intervention in the process and therefore would be able to take the letter that we have access to and to put that forward to be contemplated, which, I think, is another good reason.

When we get into committee, we'll go through a number of interactions that did occur between the Chief Electoral Officer and our folks from the Executive Council Office and Legal Services branch as we were preparing the bill.

But again, we will not be supporting the amendment because we feel that there has been good work done to put this in place, but we support the conversation that will happen.

I hope that our colleagues do have a chance to bring this back right away. I will say today — I was going to share this in Committee — that I think that, Mr. Speaker, what normally happens is that each political party identifies an individual who then has the opportunity to sit on that commission. I think that — for all of us, let's get those three individuals identified so we can move very quickly. This does stretch it out a bit — only about until the 26th, I think, is what the time period was. But again, we could be through Committee this week and we could be looking for this bill to be signed off and we could be starting this work next week. I also respect the comments that have been made today.

Hopefully, we can move quickly on it. I will say this now and I will say it within Committee: This work does not have to wait to be completed until the spring of 2025. We can have individuals chosen; we can be ready to get this work done. We have to make sure that we have the drafting capacity, but there is no reason that we can't have an interim report completed in a shorter period of time. We can potentially have this legislation coming back in the fall of 2024, which is what the Chief Electoral Officer identifies when he talks about a more efficient process.

I fully support that and my colleagues fully support that, so we just need to make sure that we get this work started and that we have an opportunity to support the work of the commission, and hopefully they can be as nimble and efficient as possible.

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: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are nine yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the amendment carried.

Amendment to motion for second reading of Bill No. 29 agreed to

Speaker: Is there any debate on the main motion as amended?

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.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Ms. Blake: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 16 yea, nil nay.

Speaker: I declare the motion as amended carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 29, as amended, agreed to

Speaker: Bill No. 29 now stands referred to the Members' Services Board.

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 — continued

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Economic Development — continued

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: Last week, on October 12, we were having a conversation and the minister said that next week — so this week — the landlord support program would be announced. Can I just get more information about what day that's expected to be released?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We are tracking for the end of this week.

I also want to just welcome our officials who are here with us today: Deputy Minister Prochazka and our director of finance, Jamie McAllister. Thank you for coming in to support me today.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak to the budget for Economic Development. I will jump right in. A number of questions that build off of things that were raised either by my colleague the Member for Porter Creek North or the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, both of whom have asked questions already.

I will start on that question of the landlord assistance program or whatever it is currently called. The Premier indicated that they are tracking for that to be complete this week. Does that mean that it will be released publicly this week or that the program has been completed already and that they will be sharing it with stakeholders for consultation later this week?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, that we would be sharing the public details for the program this week.

Mr. Dixon: What are the goals of the program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The goal for the program is to provide some support to the landlords who are currently part of the rental market.

Mr. Dixon: So, it is available to all landlords who are part of the rental market — okay. And is the intent of the program to address the negative implications that have come as a result of the changes that the government has made to the regulations related to rent caps and the ban on no-cause evictions?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, I think that there is a misunderstanding by the member opposite when speaking to no-cause evictions. I don't think that it has anything to do with no-cause evictions. What I would state, as I did last week, is

that I think that having a rent cap in place is something that has been valuable. We are hearing, even this morning across this country, about skyrocketing rental rates. We are seeing individuals leaving provinces to find other areas where they can find rental space if they are not in a position of ownership. We are cognizant of the fact that there is a rent cap of five percent and inflation came in at 6.8 percent. We have looked at that delta between the five percent and 6.8 percent and feel that it would be appropriate to be able to provide a grant to landlords to make up some of the difference. It is, again, public policy; it won't be a perfect science, but we think it is something that can support landlords who are in our rental ecosystem.

Mr. Dixon: Normally, if a landlord were to face rising costs as a result of inflation or anything else, they could simply increase the rent, as they are required to do, but they are limited in the Yukon now by, of course, the rent cap. From what I can tell, Madam Chair, this is a case where the government is intervening from a policy perspective in the market, recognizing that the interventions to the market have been negative, and then turning around and subsidizing the negatively affected parties for their policy failures, which I think seems counterintuitive to a lot of Yukoners, but it's something that we have seen before from this government. We have seen them intervene in the firewood market and fail to provide an adequate amount of firewood, and so they respond by offering subsidies to firewood producers and consumers. In this case, they have intervened in the rental market and caused a market disruption that is, in their view, negative — so much so that they need to replace that negative impact with a subsidy to landlords.

I think that what Yukoners will be looking for when they see this program is whether or not this is simply a subsidy for landlords.

So, I'll skip ahead though, Madam Chair. Can the Premier tell us if the NDP was consulted on the creation of this program?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm good with giving a bit of room on some of this, but I think that was quite a soliloquy and more of a bit of pondering and thoughts by the member opposite. Sure, I think maybe — not in a position to be paying any rent — if the experience was that the member opposite was in a position to pay rent and saw the escalating cost, then he might be a bit more understanding or empathetic to the situation. At the same time, I also understand that we are looking at a rewrite of a piece of legislation that was flawed. The member opposite, I think, was at one point the Minister of Community Services overseeing that piece of legislation and didn't take an opportunity to correct it and the situation that was occurring, and now we have committed to making sure that the legislation over the next 24 months is modernized.

This is work that we have been doing. Our program has been built based on what we have heard from people in the rental market, as well as landlords and organizations that have spoken very publicly about some of the challenges they have had over the past year.

Mr. Dixon: My question was whether or not the Premier consulted the NDP on the creation of this program.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, we didn't consult the Yukon Party or the NDP on the creation of this program.

Mr. Dixon: I would note for the Premier that he is not in a confidence and supply agreement with the Yukon Party, so there is no obligation to consult with us; however, there is an obligation to consult with the NDP, as per section 2 of the confidence and supply agreement, which states that events and policy changes with territorial or budgetary implications would be a matter of consultation between the two parties. It would seem that, since this has a budgetary implication and the Premier has admitted that he has not consulted with the NDP, it is clearly a violation of the confidence and supply agreement.

But I will move on. Is the program intended to apply to all landlords in the residential market?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As I stated last week, the details of the program will be coming out later this week. At that point in time, the member opposite will have an opportunity to hear those details and we will share them with the public. I am not going to be sharing any other details of the program at this particular time.

Mr. Dixon: So, the budget contains a line item for this program, but the Premier is refusing to answer questions about it — am I am understanding that correctly?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, there are some details that we would like to roll out later this week. I am willing to speak to any other part of the Economic Development budget that the member would like at this time. Certainly, we don't have to clear Economic Development today; we can come back and have further questions later this week.

Mr. Dixon: Then I will ask a few different questions on different policy issues and then, toward the end of this debate, move that we adjourn on this department so as not to clear it today, because we clearly do not have the information available to us today or willingness from the Premier to answer questions about this.

I will move on to another comment that the Premier made earlier in debate in this Sitting. He said that we were in the early stages of making changes or considering changes to the business incentive program. Can the Premier explain what changes he is considering to the BIP?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The business incentive program has been undersubscribed significantly for the last two fiscal years. The department has chatted with me, and the discussions in briefings have been that they would like to go back and take a look at the program to see if it could be better utilized. I think I can bring back — probably in a legislative return — the scope of the review. There have been multiple program reviews concerning the business incentive program. I am not sure how much different the scope of this review will be.

I will share a little bit of background for Yukoners. The business incentive program supports local economic activity by providing rebates to businesses working on eligible Government of Yukon contracts. Rebates are available for hiring Yukon youth, apprentices, adults, and also for Yukon-made goods and services. Since April 1, 2023, the business incentive program — “BIP”, as it is sometimes called — has processed three applications totalling \$62,776 in rebates.

Again, the business incentive program must comply with Yukon's domestic and international free-trade procedure thresholds. The department is exploring options to modernize BIP in response to changing labour market conditions and low unemployment. Any changes to BIP would have to comply with the rules and spirit of trade agreements, as the member opposite knows full well from previous work.

The department is taking a look at it. I can come back, as I stated, with a bit of scope on the work they are doing, but what we are trying to do is understand: Could it be better utilized? Is there a way that we could stay within the scope of our trade agreements but still be able to provide this incentive that was used previously over the years? It seems that there is not as much interest now — or at least over the last two fiscal years.

Mr. Dixon: I will just remind the Premier that Yukon actually sought an exemption for BIP under the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*, so it doesn't need to follow the rules and intent of the agreement, as he said; it can operate outside of the normal rules, which it does, of course.

The proposed amendments to it would simply have to keep with the original intent of the program, and you will see that in the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement* under the footnote for that program.

I will move on because it sounds like we don't have a lot of detail around what is being contemplated at this stage for changes to the business incentive program.

I will move on to the port. The Leader of the NDP has asked this a few times. We had a few questions from the Member for Porter Creek North about it. The Premier said a few things that caught the attention of some folks.

The first is that he indicated that we had paid for the design of the MSP already, so some money has been spent on this. I would like to ask: How much we have spent on the design for the MSP so far?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to ask the member opposite just to repeat that question.

I do just want to make a clarification. In that quick response or advice from the member opposite and having spent time on the trade file — just missed the fact that we do have CETA, and so BIP is affected by CETA. Yes, we did have an exception. Most of the exceptions, I think, came to me, and then I signed off when we were looking for the exceptions in the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*. But, again, with the Canada-EU comprehensive agreement, there are other thresholds that we have to watch. That's what I'm getting at. There are some other pieces — but again, if the member opposite could just stand again and share that question with me around the port.

Mr. Dixon: Earlier in this Sitting, the Premier indicated that we had paid some amount of money already for the design of the MSP. Can he tell me how much we have spent so far to date on the design for the MSP in Skagway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Sorry to the member opposite — I didn't catch it the first time. It's \$739,266.

Mr. Dixon: So, what did we get for that \$700,000-plus? Did we get input on the design? Did we get to lead the design? Did we get to be consulted about what the design would look

like? What is the status of the design? Is it complete or is it still underway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: So, with our funding of the \$739,000 — I'm going to do my best to talk a little bit about the scope and the work that we've had an opportunity to have undertaken. Skagway — of course, we worked with the engineering firm that was hired by the borough of Skagway to do some of the early conceptual works and drawings. We have had input through that process from our department around the design.

We do have a full package that was completed, which is the actual early work right through to the finalized drawings, with the borough of Skagway for the marine services platform. I think what I've just asked our team — one of the things that I think would be fair, based on that level of detail that is being requested, is that we would come back with a legislative return. I can give a bit of chronology on how we have provided input and then the finished product that we have had. That can be cross-referenced first — the \$739,000. I think that is what the member opposite is looking for: What value have we received for that money, what is the input, and what is the finalized piece of work that we have? So, again, we can pull that together and can provide that to the Assembly.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the offer to come back with detail. At this point, I would be satisfied even with a high-level explanation of what it is we received for the \$739,000 that we spent. Was it a completed design? If so, is that design available publicly?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, it was the completed design.

Mr. Dixon: Did the government consult the industry in any way about the design that they paid for?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will share with the House that it's actually available on the borough of Skagway website as well.

Mr. Dixon: Indeed, it is. I have it available here to me, but my question was: Did the government consult industry about the design?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: We have been in dialog with industry as we have gone through the last number of years with this work. The bigger conversation has been really about how to move ore. The marine services platform, which is the initial piece of work, gives us access through our agreement to tidewater. As stated, it is the platform where we can then add additional infrastructure that would then help us with actually moving ore. That's, again, part of the discussions. As well, we have talked to industry as of late and have committed to continue to have a constant conversation with industry.

I can tell you that in the work that we have done, there have been our chambers here but also some of the bigger organizations that are looking for significant investment in the Yukon. We have sat down and requested input and conversation with organizations such as Western Copper but, moreover, with organizations such as Rio Tinto. We have sat down with their team and their specialists. We have also had discussions with some of the other junior miners who are looking to go to production.

I would say that, out of the bigger players who are looking to build projects, it would be Rio Tinto. Then, when Minto was in operation, there was a constant dialogue happening with

Minto and, of course, we have, in our discussions with Hecla as we have gone through, talked to them. They are still using other supply chain — but at this point in time, we also would like to see potentially some congruency between what they want to see and the port of Skagway with Hecla.

Mr. Dixon: I would just like to seek some further clarity from the Premier. He said that he has consulted with Rio Tinto, Western Copper, and Minto about the design of the marine services platform; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I am stating is that there has been a constant dialogue between the Department of Economic Development — primarily, the conduit that is used is the joint transportation and infrastructure committee. That is one place.

Also, as we have moved to make decisions, we have had discussions with Western Copper and we have had discussions with Rio Tinto. When Minto was in operation, we were having constant dialogue with Minto and it was about some of the work that we were doing through the department.

I will clarify. I think that the marine services platform was part of our discussions — but making sure to future-proof the infrastructure that is in place and looking at the different ways to ensure the efficient movement of their commodities.

Mr. Dixon: So, was the expenditure of \$739,000 made to the borough of Skagway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes.

Mr. Dixon: So, we gave \$739,000 to the borough of Skagway for the design of the marine services platform, but as far as I can tell from the Premier's comments, we haven't consulted industry specifically about what that design would be. Can he clarify? Has he consulted with industry about the specific design of the MSP?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, I just want to clarify, as the officials are here. The officials are confirming that we have had those discussions and we have had consultation on the marine services platform. I want to say that, from the dialogue I have been part of, I know that when we have had discussions where potential investors in the Yukon, such as Rio Tinto, have sat down, we have been very open about requesting their expertise, as they are looking at investment in the Yukon. We have had discussions with Minto while in operation; we have had discussions with Western Copper around this discussion — not just the early works that we have been doing but also ensuring that we have a good sense of what infrastructure would look like into the future, depending on the magnitude of activity that's happening in the Yukon.

Mr. Dixon: So, ultimately, from what we can tell, the Yukon will be spending somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$30 million to \$44 million for a marine services platform that will come with no additional infrastructure for ore loading; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes.

Mr. Dixon: The concern I have is that what we are paying for may not indeed ultimately be what meets the needs of industry. I guess I'm asking for the Premier to perhaps reassure me or reassure Yukoners that us spending up to \$44 million will result in a piece of infrastructure that can

actually be used by the mining industry here in Yukon to export their ore.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I guess I would want a further explanation on that particular question, because we have access to tidewater as part of our goal, Madam Chair. The second would be a platform where you would have the ability to use a number of different types of infrastructure that you would be able to use and that are available within the mining sector. I think that having access to tidewater — a 227-foot marine services platform that is adaptable to multiple infrastructure that could be used in modernized movement of ore — would be appropriate. Maybe I have missed something. I will just wait to get further clarity from the member opposite.

Mr. Dixon: For anyone who is familiar with the port, they know that currently there is an ore-loading facility on the site. There is a conveyor that transports the concentrate from the storage shed up into where it can drop into a large ship, which will then send it off to market.

That loader will be removed and Skagway will construct a new marine services platform that, as far as I can tell, is essentially a blank slate. The actual ore-loading infrastructure that will ultimately need to be built in order for a prospective client to load ore with it is not included in this platform.

That is my question: What further infrastructure would be needed on the platform in order to allow a mining company to ship out with it, and is that infrastructure going to be included in the project?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I appreciate the clarity from the member opposite. Absolutely, there is currently a conveyor system that is in place that would be removed. It would be hypothetical for me to say that I am defining or understanding exactly what an operator will want to see on that platform. It is a clean, open slate, as the member opposite said — sorry if I am paraphrasing — but what we are going to have the opportunity to see is: What is the most appropriate infrastructure that could then be placed on that 227-foot marine services platform? I think that, at this point in time, the key piece is that we need to have access to tidewater. Having an agreement in place that gives us 35 years of access to tidewater and an additional 15-year extension is a good thing.

I think that having a modern, appropriately built marine services platform — when we come back, we can provide — we have gone out to use the best in class when it comes to the organization that we've worked with to design that — an organization that builds industrial ports across the globe and has experience working in a number of different sectors. It has experience working with a number of different mining companies with different types, from my memory, of infrastructure that could be additionally added. So, we are in a position where that platform is very adaptable. Our whole goal is to ensure that we would be able to move the concentrate that is coming from a multitude of different projects and be able to future-proof it.

I have to add, though, that, depending on the magnitude of mining development in the Yukon — that will define a number of pathways. One is that we are still looking at a really

significant increase in Skagway throughout the summer when it comes to the tourism sector.

I think they are moving between 1.2 million to 1.4 million customers. Anybody who goes to Skagway in the summertime knows that there is a tremendous amount of traffic coming in and out of Skagway. That's why we feel that it is prudent to have that discussion, which we started last year, around dual-purpose rail. Inevitably, having multiple projects in the future is going to lead to potential congestion. There is already concern within the community around both industries moving at the same time. Of course, then you have the marine services platform and you will have to understand how that fits into the potential of moving concentrate, not only by truck but potentially a different way in the future.

I think a number of things have to be contemplated to ensure that Skagway and that tidewater are going to be used to the full potential. Of course, on the back end of this, it depends on what projects will be moving forward. Inevitably, there will be conversations with the individuals moving concentrate, the borough of Skagway, the mine operator — understanding how they want to move the concentrate. Right now, to be open with the House, we are in a position where we believe that we have a marine services platform that is a great foundation for us to be able to work in Skagway. With the magnitude of the dock, we think that the ability to bring in other types of other infrastructure to work off of it makes sense, and locking down that tidewater is important.

In Question Period today, there was a little back-and-forth about our decision to do that. I have to give kudos. In a break today, I had former members of the NDP reach out and say that there was a reason that the McDonald government of the day purchased land in Skagway, knowing that it was important to look into the future. Things have changed now with the NDP, but at that point in time, it was important to do that. They knew that they wouldn't be moving ore at the time, but it was important to lock that down.

I think it's important to make this commitment now. The member opposite knows — especially from his time in Economic Development — that it's important. Debate aside, it's important when you are going out and having conversations nationally and internationally that you will be able to provide clear solutions for the sector but also for investors — where they are going to be looking at policy, they are going to be looking at the port, and they are going to be looking at people. They are going to be looking at those key things. It's really important for us in the Yukon to ensure that the port piece is in place.

I will say — it may be a bit of a controversial comment, but I would like to see an approach more from a national perspective from Canada on this type of work. I think it's important for the whole country; it's not just important for the Yukon. That's why we continue to have those discussions with both the infrastructure bank and with federal officials.

Mr. Dixon: Recently, the borough of Skagway passed an ordinance at the municipal level banning the shipment of open bulk ore and instead requiring that ore be containerized in order to ship out.

This, of course, would prevent the kind of shipping that we saw with Minto over the past number of years where ore concentrate was shipped on the conveyor that I referenced earlier.

Was the Yukon government consulted on this ordinance, and did they support it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There have been discussions back and forth with officials from both the borough of Skagway and the Department of Economic Development.

This ordinance that's in place right now, as the member opposite has stated, does really lead to a direction of looking at a particular type of infrastructure that would be required on that dock. That's why I wanted a bit more clarity from the member opposite when the member was talking about the previous system that was in place. Basically, it was a conveyor system not unlike — for anybody who is listening, if you haven't seen it in action, it's not unlike a baler conveyor system that you would see on a farm. It is essentially something that was used for many years.

To be open, there is a tremendous amount of concern about that system in Skagway. There has been a conversation that the Yukon government has been witness to, but it has really been around the conversation — many people in Skagway feel there is a tremendous amount of contamination in their community, in their harbour. A lot of that, they feel, is directly connected to Faro mine operations. There have been overtures that there is other contamination that has occurred. So, there are many in the community of Skagway who feel that there needs to be a new type of system in place.

One of the systems that is starting to be used across the world is really — I will just speak to it as a bulk container, but it's really a container system where you would be moving concentrate in a container and then you would use a mobile system on top of a marine services platform to lift that container and pour the contents into a ship, with the same destination as a conveyor system would be used.

The ordinances in place right now — I think what we would like to do is continue to work with industry to understand if there are significant limitations to the container system. We also know that, across the world — I shouldn't say "know"; we have been made aware — and the officials have briefed me that there are more modern, environmentally safe conveyor systems that are being used. My understanding is that they are being used in both Nordic countries and in South America.

So, we want to continue to have that conversation, but the first steps right now will be — there was an election that just concluded in the borough of Skagway. A new mayor and council have been elected. I think it's prudent to be able to sit down with them and talk to them about what their vision is moving forward; we haven't had that opportunity yet. I believe that this ordinance was in place previous to the election that just occurred. I think that is probably our next step, but I want to be open to the House that we have heard mixed reviews from industry on this, with many in industry wanting to see a conveyor system, feeling that is the most appropriate, that is the most feasible, and that is what they're comfortable with. Then we've seen other industry leaders who are used to larger capital

investments and who are comfortable with the container bulkhaul. I have only seen one of them in action, in British Columbia. It is copper concentrate that is moving to a port that is run by DP World in British Columbia. The system seems to be moving well in other areas. I believe there is interest in moving to the system. This, of course, from my understanding or briefing, is that, from an environmentally responsible standpoint, this seems to be the best way to contain any spillage. Also, we have been told that many companies are looking to invest in this. We have a marine services platform that could use and be adaptable to a number of different methods for loading. Again, it is the 227-foot fixed concrete T-shaped dock. It would be capable of supporting multiple ore-loading methods as well as the loading and unloading of other heavy goods, which we have talked about.

We have advocated to the Municipality of Skagway to remain open to the widest range of ore-loading technologies possible. We may have to work with industry to ensure that officials from Skagway have a chance to see a multitude of different methods that are in a modern context before any final decisions are made. Right now, it seems like there is a strong push through this ordinance, of course, toward not having a conveyor system in place. We believe, through our research, that there are some systems that are being used globally that are very safe and wouldn't have the same outcomes as the ore transfer did during the days of Faro's operation.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, in a newspaper article from the KHNS Radio Station in Skagway discussing the ore-shipping ordinance, there is a quote from then-councillor Orion Hansen, who said — and I quote: “I had a phone conversation yesterday with a member of the Yukon government who said that they are in favor of this ordinance, and have reached out to the mining industry who said that they generally are in favor of it as well.”

Can the Premier confirm that Skagway consulted with the Yukon government on that bulk or containerization ordinance and that the Yukon government did indeed consult industry and that industry was supportive of it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, we did have an official in that conversation and I spoke to that official shortly after that media comment. I think that there has been an ongoing dialogue, I would say, versus a consultation, and I would also state for the House that the official went back and had a detailed conversation and felt that the comments from the councillor misrepresented that conversation.

We have continued to advocate for a number of different methods. For the House, here is where we are. We can go back and forth on this one. Here is the state of play: We have a very significant tourism industry that is continuing to grow. From the start, as officials, we have walked in and sat with Skagway officials, and there is a huge interest to continue to increase the amount of cruise ships that are coming into that harbour and the amount of people coming through. There are many folks in Skagway who truly see the value of having a diverse economy. Many long-time residents of Skagway do understand the history between both the Yukon and Skagway when it comes to mining, not just tourism. There are people who live in

Skagway who love using our services and like the opportunity to come here, whether it is to go out to eat, see a dentist, or go to a store — whatever it may be — and many of those folks understand that a vibrant mining sector contributes to what we have here significantly.

We are in a position where the first thing we had to do was make sure we got access to tidewater. I think that this was really important. I am not going to shy away from the fact that this is a significant investment. This first tranche of over \$20 million is a significant investment, with more to come, as the member opposite said — I believe up to \$44 million at the high mark for this piece of infrastructure.

I would love to have a clear path in front of us when it comes to a technology that we know right now can be used on that platform. I think that, as members know, this makes for good debate, but it's a sensitive subject. We are trying to make sure that we are highly respectful of the people of Skagway and we are highly respectful of the officials who are elected there. When you go to Skagway, you can see from the conversations you have with people that there is a lot of angst around the fact that the harbour has a lot of cleanup that needs to be done. The Canadian government's responsibility that they took on in Faro has not crossed over the US border, so that's an inevitable conversation between White Pass and the borough. Again, that is another sensitive subject.

We feel that it is important and prudent to get the marine services platform designed so that it can be used for a multitude of different types of ore movement. We feel that the professionals that we have engaged to do that design and scope of work are appropriate, and we also have the opportunity to move other materials across that port.

There were some questions in the House around: Are you taking any revenue from it? We've engaged both lawyers in Canada and the US to make sure that we're doing our proper due diligence. What we've come to understand is, if we invest in this and we reduce the fees for Yukon companies that are exporting, we think that's going to be an incentive for the companies.

Before we get into a question of about what that looks like per tonne load, that's part of our cooperation agreement which is still being negotiated. When it comes to the actual work that's there or the actual the business model, the legal advice we have is that, if we're not in a position where we're drawing a revenue from it, we're also not going to be connected to that liability. We're trying to make sure that we're protecting Yukoners in that sense because, yes, we are a subnational government, but engaging in a revenue-generating activity in another country where there's an organization running that is, from our mindset, too much liability for us to take on. We think a reduced fee for Yukon or Canadian companies exporting is a good thing. Grabbing the tidewater and making sure that we have that opportunity is the next thing.

Again, I'll be open to the House: Yes, we have an ordinance in place, but we still feel that we will continue our conversations and hopefully see an openness toward different types of technology that can be used to transport ore. Hopefully, that will fit with the companies.

The companies right now — we've had a lot of companies that are junior miners that are more in advanced exploration that are looking for bigger players to either partner with them or to buy those projects. What we're seeing from the projects that are moving toward production or that are in production is an openness to work with us on the technology that would be deployed to move ore through the Skagway port.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I'll move on to the negotiations that will ultimately result in an agreement.

The Premier said that the negotiations are underway, although he did reference that something that the Yukon will be seeking would be a commitment to a reduced fee structure for Yukon companies. I would like to understand that a little bit better, because I'm not sure that I do understand it.

The fees that a mining company pays to export their ore through a facility like this are a matter of commercial negotiation. They're not drawn off of a menu. So, there's no menu price and therefore no ability for a simple 25-percent reduction to be applied. Earlier this spring, the Premier noted that he had hoped that Yukon companies would be eligible for a 25-percent reduction, and so I would like him to comment on that. Is that still the position of the Yukon government, and what is the status of the agreement?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Chair, we signed a non-binding term sheet on September 7, 2023 that outlines the general terms of an export cooperation agreement between Yukon and Skagway. We are working toward finalizing the export cooperation agreement under which Yukon will fund the construction of a marine services platform in exchange for preferential access and fee discounts for Yukon mining companies using a future ore terminal.

Speaking of the last topic on the technology we used, we respect the priorities and responsibilities of the Municipality of Skagway as they plan for future off the ore peninsula post-2023, again, including the need to modernize the port for cruise ship traffic, which we talked about.

Reliable access to Skagway's port helps attract investment — which I have shared with the House over the last number of days in this discussion — supports mine development, and encourages mineral exploration in the Yukon. We believe that we are working toward a solution that will secure long-term tidewater access for Yukon's industry and work for the community of Skagway. Specifically, the agreement's negotiations toward the draft term sheet took longer than we had hoped, but, really, because of some of the work — it's definitely more detailed than initially anticipated. That's why we're still working through it. Most of the most challenging issues have resolved in developing the non-binding text, which will greatly help us work through the binding agreement that we are talking about. We are pleased that we have that opportunity to get that work done to date. Some of the work the term sheet proposes — and I will go back to the comments from last year: In exchange for the work that we are doing and contributing to, we would have preferential access to the ore facility for 35 years and an option to extend for an additional 15, including upland space for preferential use by industry.

So, there is an area where we have looked to get access to have operations in place and there are a multitude of activities that could happen on that, along with a 25-percent discount on all the fees associated with using the platform for 20 years. That is the work we are looking at.

The designation process is procedural and it would not be discriminatory. The process would confirm that the port of Skagway — that these companies are operating in Yukon. It is for Yukon companies that are working through.

We are looking at the municipality to be able to define what their operation is going to look like. They now have the responsibility to put that team — that model — together as well. We will continue to have the discussions on the cooperation agreement. That's what we are looking at. It is the same number as last year.

I want to be able to share with the House, but I also don't want to negatively impact the negotiation that's ongoing. I know that folks in the House understand that. We are trying to get to the right spot, and we are trying to make sure we have the right technology that will support —

I think that at least most of us in the House support this. From the tone of the questions, I think that the Official Opposition wants to ensure that industry have an opportunity to feed in. Of course, I feel the same way. I have talked to our officials. We continue to have conversations with operators who are going to come into the sector — but also to ensure that we are having an ongoing dialogue with industry — not just on this infrastructure but on all infrastructure. That was the commitment that I wanted our officials to make. Whether it is going to be roads or port, our grid connection — all those things are going to be important to continue to update industry on — in this particular case, if we can have a bit of time still to go out and get this cooperation agreement and the details of it finalized.

Mr. Dixon: So, what is the status of the binding contract, and what are the milestones that we should look at over the course of the next few months, weeks, or maybe years? I'm not sure as to when it could be concluded.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Just conferring with officials, I think that we should be able to come back early in the new year — even before we come back to the House — with more details on the binding agreement. Those conversations are ongoing right now. We do have a brand new assembly. I haven't had a chance to meet with any of their members. Some of them are returning as elected officials in the borough. The mayor is in a brand new position. I think that, as we go through the next number of months, I want to be realistic in that time frame and to sit down and have a discussion to make sure that we have a clear understanding of their vision and how that's going to feed into the negotiations with our officials. We are in mid-October now, so we are probably looking at the remainder of the calendar year to try to get to some finality on the binding in the new year.

I think what I can do is twofold. One is that we come back to the House through the fall, and even if there is something substantial, I can at least table a document. I believe that our discussions will be ongoing with industry as well. I think that

this will be a significant topic, based on the cycle going into Roundup in Vancouver, which tends to be a time when you are meeting with investors and operators to find out and share the biggest and newest updates.

Again, we are in a sensitive conversation on negotiation. I don't want to predetermine a timeline for an elected official who I've never met in person. I have asked my officials to reach out and set meetings up, so we are going to engage. The commitment is that I would like to bring anything back to the House before the end of the session and ensure that if there is anything that I can share into the new calendar year, I would certainly do that with officials, even if it's outside of the normal cycle of the Legislative Assembly's sessions and Sittings.

Mr. Dixon: Just so I understand the series of events here, the Yukon government won't expend any of the \$20-odd million in the supplementary budget until after the contract is assigned; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That is correct.

Mr. Dixon: I just have another question about the detail because the Premier has alluded to it. He has indicated that part of the negotiation would include the Yukon having preferential access to the marine services platform. I'm just looking for some clarity on that. If we own the marine services platform and it belongs to us or we pay \$44 million for it, would we not naturally get that anyway?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: For clarity, we do not own it. We do not own it. We are paying to build it; we are paying to lock down access to tidewater. We do not own it. The operations that are being undertaken are developed and overseen by the borough of Skagway and what we're looking at is preferential use. There could be other areas of Canada that would potentially use a Skagway port. What we're saying is that we have preferential use over other activities that would happen. Again, these are details that we will be finalizing within the cooperation agreement.

Mr. Dixon: The Premier said that there were other Canadian users of the port for export. Is the Premier aware of what that might look like or against whom we are getting preferential access?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I'm just trying to give a hypothetical example of what could happen. It could be activity — somebody who is undertaking activity from Skagway who would want to use the port — because you can use it for more than just ore loading. The example I was giving is that maybe you would have somebody else from northern British Columbia, as an example, who would want to transport. I don't know of anybody; nobody has come and talked to us; I'm not sure if that would ever happen. I'm just saying that this could be an example of a Yukon versus a BC operation. But again, we are saying that we would have preferential use of the marine services platform.

Mr. Dixon: Other than shipping ore, what other uses might the marine services platform have?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Because of the magnitude of it, it could be used for heavy freight; it could be used for the moving of materials. A number of different commercial uses can be used

on the marine services platform, so you could have import or potentially export through that port.

Mr. Dixon: I will move on. I think that we have exercised the Skagway port sufficiently today, but I do look forward to hearing more about the contract negotiations and what those details will look like once they are signed.

I will move on to some questions I have about the Premier's trip to India. My understanding is that this was led by Economic Development or at least portions of it were. I will start with confirmation of that. Did Economic Development lead the planning of the trip to India, or was that done through ECO IGR?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Our international trade missions play an important role in the development of Yukon's economy and its businesses. The 2023 Asia trade mission was focusing on attracting foreign direct investment, promoting economic immigration, and addressing Yukon's health and human resources challenges. The business delegation of the trade mission was looking to support Yukon's burgeoning tourism, film and media, and technology innovation sectors while also bolstering the territory's established mining sector.

The mission to Japan — the Tokyo portion — was from September 11 to 13, and the India portion from Trivandrum and Delhi, India, was from September 13 to 19. Most of the early work was led by the Executive Council Office — in particular, some of the early planning work to communicate with Global Affairs Canada in preparation for the trip.

Mr. Dixon: Who went on the advance trip to India that occurred some time before the actual main trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to ensure that I go back and check, but I think it was just one individual from our Executive Council Office team who was on the advance stint. I will add that they were visiting Japan and India but also the Philippines because we were still waiting to hear from the Philippines' federal officials about our agreement. Of course, in the interim, what happened on that trip was that the lead federal official passed on, and so I think that they were waiting to have somebody else in that place and had asked us to hold off, but those were the three destinations — three countries — that the individual from the Executive Council Office travelled to.

Mr. Dixon: So, the Premier has said that there was an individual from the Executive Council Office who travelled to those three places. When did that trip occur?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I don't have the exact dates. In a discussion around Executive Council, I can — because it was led by Executive Council. I'll give a little bit of room on this for now.

It occurred in July. Just for clarification, on the India portion, there was one other individual from the Yukon government who was helping to guide through the India portion with our official from Executive Council Office.

Mr. Dixon: Is the Premier able to tell us how many people went on the trade mission, as a whole?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I just want to clarify that the advance trip was July 30 to August 4.

The total numbers on the Yukon delegation included me and Minister Streicker. There were 11 Yukon government staff

over the total of the trip and five Yukon industry association and business delegates. Those business delegates came from the Tourism Industry Association of Yukon, TechYukon, Screen Production Yukon Association, and the Yukon First Nation Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Dixon: Just so I'm clear, there were 11 government officials, two ministers, and five representatives of the private sector; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, they were from industry associations and business delegates.

Mr. Dixon: So, following the trip — there are a few questions I have. My understanding is that the Premier invited a delegation from India to visit the Yukon and assured the government's full cooperation for an Indian delegation to come to explore investment opportunities and the acquisition of minerals. When is that trip planned?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It was really about scientist to scientist as a first step. It was inviting the geological survey, at the time, from India to meet with the geological survey members from the Yukon.

Of course, we have seen some real challenges in the relationship. That conversation was had on Monday. By 12:00 that night, the climate had certainly become quite different from that afternoon. It was about having geological survey staff from India.

Just for clarity, we have met with the delegation from India on a number of occasions — usually at the PDAC conference in Toronto. Of course, there are Yukon companies that have done work in India — I think through the geological survey as well. It was always good to have a Yukon company with us that was able to access business in India previously. There has been a bit of a working relationship there on the service sector side, but as soon as we sat down in that discussion that afternoon with the support of one minister and the senior public servants, the Western Copper project was brought up very quickly before we talked about any of the bigger opportunities here.

It was not unlike the meetings in Japan. There are a number of projects in the Yukon that are now starting to be looked at globally. Inevitably, it is up to Western Copper; it's up to Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation; it's up to the Selkirk First Nation and others, but we try to share some of those opportunities and ideas when we are doing investment attraction.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, who picked India? Who decided that Yukon should send a delegation to India?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, part of what we were doing is focusing on health care attraction. What we are seeing right now is that it is a primary destination to look for health care attraction. Newfoundland was just about to send a delegation. We are seeing a lot of interest coming out of Saskatchewan. We are seeing interest from British Columbia. We are seeing interest from Ontario. We are seeing partnerships that are being built with other provinces. When you think about health care, what we are hearing right now, especially when it comes to nurses, is that it is a key destination.

We have looked at other areas, which I have touched on a little bit, such as the Philippines. We are hearing from some

Philippines officials that they are having a real challenge with the number of nurses who are leaving the Philippines while still trying to sustain their own health care system.

The meetings that we had in both southern Indian and in New Delhi were very positive meetings about being able to identify different pathways to bring nurses, even to the point where our health officials, in their discussions, had the opportunity to look at engaging with some of the best health care providers in India and actually defining exactly what types of nursing expertise they could work with those organizations to attract.

When we look at it, we have had a tremendous amount of interest from officials over the years. When we think about where we have been as government — and the member opposite could probably think back to his time in Economic Development — whether it has been officials from Japan, India, Indonesia, South Korea, or Taiwan, there has always been some interest. What we were looking for on this mission was first to look at how we could bolster tourism. We know that there are some companies right now from Japan that are doing some significant investment in the Yukon, so that would be part of it. From the health human resources side of things, it was: Where is a destination that we can find great expertise when it comes to health human resources and plus have an opportunity to look at other investment attractions, such as film? We had very good conversations and meetings with our film industry folks. Again, there is potential in geoscience as well. That's why, when you look at India, it makes sense when it comes to recruiting for health care human resources. There were discussions that my office had, because our Economic Development team gets invitations all the time, as well as our health officials through some of their work looking at what is happening across the country.

Mr. Dixon: Was it the Department of Health and Social Services that recommended targeting India for health human resources?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, I think that we pulled our team together, which was everything from my office to the Department of Economic Development to Health and Social Services. I know that, right now, part of what they had seen there was another partnership with the University of New Brunswick, which has also gone and built a strategic partnership in India. So, Health and Social Services was also looking at some of these affected programs. So, collectively, it seemed like a good location, which I would say we have come to understand is a great location for recruiting nurses. What we hope is that some of the geopolitical challenges that are happening right now subside. I hope that there is still an opportunity for us to be able to recruit nurses from India. I think that the current community here can support that. There are some nurses here already from India, specifically from south India. The State of Kerala has the highest literacy rate in the country of India. It has phenomenal training programs in the health fields for both nurses and doctors and there are a number of nurses who have moved from Kerala and have now lived in Yukon for a number of years. That's part of the work we are trying to focus on when it comes to bridging credentials.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 7, Department of Economic Development, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Copperbelt North that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Committee of the Whole will recess for two minutes to bring in officials.

Recess

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

The matter now before Committee is general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Education

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to the Department of Education Supplementary No. 1 budget for 2023-24. I would like to welcome our officials from the Department of Education: our deputy minister, Mary Cameron, and our director of finance, Andrea McIntyre. Thank you very much for being here today to assist in the debate in Committee of the Whole.

The Yukon Department of Education is on a mission to reshape our education system to better serve all Yukoners. Working in collaboration with Yukon First Nations and our education partners, our primary goal is to enhance our schools, making them more inclusive, safe, and attuned to our diverse communities.

This school year, our focus is on our ongoing commitment to safer schools and our broadened vision for inclusive and special education. For us, “safety” and “inclusion” aren’t just words; they are foundational elements of the work we do every day. We believe that student and staff safety within schools is crucial and that everyone should experience an environment free from fear or abuse. Our dedication to this is evident in our actions.

The Yukon government recently implemented all 23 actions from the safer schools action plan focusing on safe

environments, transparency, and collaboration. The plan emphasizes victim-centred approaches and promotes reconciliation in schools. Though safety is an ongoing mission, the plan marks significant progress on reinforcing trust and partnership. Our goal remains to provide an education system where safety is assured and where everyone feels secure and respected.

Regarding inclusive and special education, we’re working to ensure that every student feels valued and empowered. Reimagining inclusive and special education, or RISE, is our lead initiative that encapsulates this ethos. RISE is — and you’ll hear me talk about it a lot — a collaboration with the First Nations Education Commission and the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education.

The key component of RISE is the Ready-to-Learn Schools initiative, which was formally introduced in 2022. Ready-to-Learn aims to foster an environment of safety and calm so students can absorb knowledge more effectively. We are training educators to recognize how trauma and stress can affect a student’s learning so we can meet all students where they are at.

As of this school year, 14 schools have adopted this approach, enabling teachers to better address individual student needs. We’re making tangible strides with RISE and we’ll continue to focus our resources on expanding it.

Over the next three years, 81 new full-time roles — including school wellness specialists, education assistants, and learning assistance teachers — will be introduced. The hiring schedule for these positions is: 40 positions in 2023-24; 21 positions in 2024-25; and 20 positions in 2025-26.

Note that we have added these 40 FTEs, or full-time equivalents, to the department’s FTE count, but we have not yet included this funding in our 2023-24 budget request. This will come in a later budget exercise for the related dollars as the positions are hired.

I want to highlight the addition of school wellness specialists and First Nation wellness support positions. The role of the school wellness specialist will be to provide a range of direct supports to students, families, educators, and community. These supports may include assessments, counselling, consultation, programming, case management, and education, depending on the specific needs of the individual schools and communities.

The First Nation wellness support role will be to provide culturally appropriate supports that meet the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and academic needs of students. It is essential that our fiscal planning aligns with our vision and values. This ensures the continued success and vitality of our education system.

The Department of Education’s commitment to safety, inclusivity, and progress can only be realized with appropriate and necessary funding resources. In the supplementary budget, the Department of Education is requesting a net increase of \$3.57 million. This increase will be allocated in its entirety to operation and maintenance expenditures, with no net increase to capital spending.

The most significant change in expenditures requested for 2023-24 reflects a newly ratified collective agreement, which includes a 10.5-percent wage increase to Yukon Employees' Union members over three years. This wage increase recognizes the valuable contribution that our employees make to improve outcomes for all learners in Yukon from kindergarten through to grade 12, college, university, and training programs. The collective agreement increase requests are as follows — and I will go over this in more detail. The majority of our request, which is a total of \$1,879,000, is for wage increases resulting from the collective agreement. I will break down the department divisions. This represents: \$289,000 for educational support services; \$526,000 for administration and support; \$441,000 for school authorities; \$551,000 for policy and partnership; and \$72,000 for First Nation initiatives.

While these figures shed light on the distribution of funds across our department divisions, it is crucial to understand that our staff are not just numbers on a balance sheet; they are the engine powering the whole transformative change in our education system. Their unwavering commitment and expertise are the backbone to every initiative that we embark upon. By ensuring that they are justly compensated, we are not only recognizing their invaluable contributions but also investing in the future of Yukon's education.

The remainder of the request — a total of \$1,691,000 — will go toward enhancing French language education across the territory. The Department of Education works collaboratively with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon to support the learning needs of French first language students and the path for the administration of French first language education in the territory. I am happy to report that in this school year, French first language students enrolled in elementary grade levels have access to in-person French language program instruction in Dawson City. With approval of the supplementary budget, we will be providing CSFY with \$764,000 to support the programming. We are also requesting \$927,000 to enhance French second language immersion programs and to further support the Explore program. The Department of Education offers excellent French second language programs to students and we continue to work with our partners and the school communities to address the long-term needs of these programs. We have committed long-term planning for French second language programs. In the spring of this year, I approved a vision statement created in collaboration with the French second language advisory committee that will enable graduates to be inspired, proud, and confident to live, learn, and work in French. The French second language advisory committee includes representatives from the Department of Education, school councils, Canadian Parents for French, school administrators, and teachers. French immersion is a popular program in Whitehorse and is offered in Whitehorse Elementary School, Selkirk Elementary School, and F.H. Collins Secondary School. The Explore program is for students aged 13-15. This three-week French immersion program takes place in different locations during the summer.

The Supplementary No. 1 budget for 2023-24 demonstrates our unwavering dedication to cultivating an education environment that values safety, inclusion, and growth. With this supplementary budget, we are reinforcing our commitment to our students, educators, and partners by investing in the people who drive change and in the programs that support our shared vision for the future of Yukon education.

From the wage increase for our invaluable employees to the bolstering of our French programming and the continuous expansion of the RISE initiative, each dollar requested represents a step toward a stronger, more inclusive education future. Together in collaboration with Yukon First Nations, our education partners, and our school communities, we are shaping an education system that is responsive to the needs of every learner and that prepares them for a world that values diversity, empathy, and understanding.

Thank you for your support and for joining us on this journey to evaluate Yukon's education experience for all. I will end there and am happy to take questions from members opposite.

Mr. Kent: I thank the officials for coming here today to provide support to the minister. I also wanted to thank them for the briefing that they provided the week before last. As I mentioned during the Energy, Mines and Resources debate, I was out of the territory for personal reasons and was unable to attend, but my colleague the Member for Lake Laberge and staff from our office attended, so we appreciate the information as well as the documents provided by the department. It was very helpful for us.

I do want to ask a couple of questions with respect to the supplementary budget. The minister mentioned, under the school authorities, a total increase of \$1.548 million — that there is an increase of \$764,000 for CSFY programming in Dawson City. I'm wondering if the minister can tell us if that programming is being offered within Robert Service School or if it's stand-alone, and how many French first language students are in Dawson City?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This is an important initiative that we are undertaking within the Department of Justice and working with the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon to support the learning needs of French first language students in the path for the administration of French first language education in the territory.

As I stated in my opening remarks, we were very happy to report that, this year, French first language students have access to in-person French language programs of instruction in Dawson. This is a priority for the CSFY school board. We are continuing, always, to work with CSFY and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in as they move toward this programming.

I think that the specific question was about where the location is for the CSFY French first language, and it is at 486 King Street in Dawson City. There were seven students enrolled back in August. There was an indication that there would be 12 students, but as of October 11, we have seven students enrolled now. I believe that those were the questions that were asked.

Mr. Kent: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister. Yes, that addressed the questions that I had with respect to how many students. So, seven students as of October 11 — and it is not within the existing envelope at Robert Service School. It sounds like it is on King Street and so it is a stand-alone school.

I have just a couple of questions, then. Is any of the \$764,000 increase recoverable from Canada? Perhaps the minister could just give us a breakdown of that specific line item — the \$764,000 — and how much is for personnel and how much is for space — that type of a breakdown, if she has that with her.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, this is a very important initiative for the Department of Education. We are still working out some of the details and we will return to the House with those details through a legislative return.

Mr. Kent: Just jumping down — I know the minister referenced it under policy and partnerships — there is the total increase of just over \$1.3 million. Included in that is an increase of \$927,000 for additional French language programs.

The briefing material that we received from the department said that there was an increase in bilateral agreements of \$899,000 and an increase from the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada — \$28,000 for the Explore program. It says it is 100-percent recoverable — so a net-zero impact on the government. I just wanted to clarify that, first of all, this is French immersion we are talking about with respect to this funding and that the 100-percent recoverable amount is for the entire amount of \$927,000.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, this is an enhancement to our Yukon schools. As members of the House will know, we follow the BC curriculum with adaptations to include Yukon content and Yukon First Nation ways of knowing, doing, and being in the curriculum. Schools administrated under the Department of Education offer three different types of French second language programming: French immersion for K to 12; intensive French, grades 5 and 6 to 12; and core French. I believe that the question was whether these dollars are fully recoverable, and they are. This is a net zero for Government of Yukon.

In addition to the classroom teachers, other French qualified education staff support French second language programs in schools. The question is always: How many there are? We have a variety of educational staff that support students in French second language programming at 15 schools administered by the Department of Education.

As I already stated in part of my answers today, there is French immersion at École Whitehorse Elementary, F.H. Collins Secondary School, Selkirk school, and Wood Street.

Then, we have intensive French at Christ the King Elementary School, Holy Family Elementary School, Selkirk Elementary School, St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Secondary School, and Robert Service School in Dawson.

We have core French at Elijah Smith Elementary School, Golden Horn Elementary School, Hidden Valley Elementary School, Jack Hulland Elementary School, Porter Creek Secondary School, Del Van Gorder School in Faro, and J. V. Clark School in Mayo.

As I've stated, these dollars are fully recoverable from Canada. I'm excited about the enhancements.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate that update from the minister with respect to that spending line.

Just a question about French immersion in general — École Whitehorse Elementary and Selkirk are the two elementary schools that offer that programming and then, from there, the students will go into F.H. Collins Secondary School to continue their French immersion through to grade 12.

I'm just wondering if there are any plans at this point to expand that program beyond those three schools in Whitehorse and if there are any expansion plans for community or rural schools with respect to French immersion.

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Department of Education offers excellent French second language programs to students, and we're working with our partners and school communities to address the long-term needs of these programs.

Currently, the overall student demand for French immersion programming is being met. The Government of Yukon plans to continue with École Selkirk Elementary School as a dual-track English program/French immersion program. We have committed to long-term planning for French as a second language programs.

In spring 2023, I approved a vision statement — as I've already spoken to today, but I'll repeat that — in collaboration with the French second language advisory committee that will enable graduates to be inspired, proud, and confident to live, learn, and work in French. The French second language advisory committee includes representatives from the Department of Education, school councils, Canadian Parents for French, school administrators, and teachers. I think that was the gist of the question today. If I have missed anything, please let me know and I will address that.

Mr. Kent: Before I come back to the 40 additional FTEs as part of RISE and CASA, I do just have a couple of quick questions with respect to capital. I know that an older play structure was removed from Hidden Valley Elementary School and then there was some back-and-forth on a replacement. I'm just curious if the minister can give us an update on where we're at with respect to the play structures at Hidden Valley Elementary School since the older wooden ones were removed, I believe, toward the end of last school year.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We certainly continue to work with school communities on planning for their short-, medium-, and long-term facility needs. Of significant importance to me is ensuring that all of those who support the school community are working well together and that there are great learning environments for students and staff and that facility and outdoor needs are addressed. It is a priority of Yukon government to continue to invest in school infrastructure and ensure that our schools meet the demands of the unique school communities they serve.

The Department of Education is committed to installing new playground equipment, and the new structures were installed at the Hidden Valley Elementary School over the Thanksgiving long weekend. Planning is underway for purchase and installation of a larger playground structure at

Hidden Valley for the 2024-25 school year. Safe outdoor learning and play is an integral component of a child's education, and we are certainly committed to ensuring that these opportunities are available for students. I am happy to share photos — we do have those on file — of the newly installed equipment. I would be happy to share that with the members opposite if they wish to see that.

Mr. Kent: Madam Chair, yes, that would be great, and then we can perhaps follow up with the minister, if necessary, on that play structure.

In the documents shared by the department at the budget briefing, when it comes to capital, there is a decrease in the school van replacement of \$500,000 and then that amount was reallocated to \$200,000 for experiential learning spaces and \$300,000 to the Selkirk parking lot. It says that the reallocation of the school van replacement related to supply chain issues for electric vehicles and anticipated increased costs related to experiential learning spaces and the Selkirk parking lot.

I just have a couple of questions here. The experiential learning spaces — can the minister tell us which schools those spaces are being built or adjusted at? That \$200,000 increase — what does that bring that total budget to for the experiential learning spaces?

Then, with respect to the additional \$300,000 for the Selkirk parking lot, can the minister give us an update on that project, where we are at, when it is expected to be completed, and what the total cost will be upon completion?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Chair, there is a huge focus within the Department of Education to be responsive to the needs of inclusive and special education. Again, our initiative is changing a whole culture within the education system. The acronym we use — and you will hear it often — is “RISE”.

We continue to work closely with our partners and stakeholders to reimagine and create schools that are safe and inclusive and that build on student strengths to ensure that every child feels connected and supported to thrive. This includes developing — and I have had some chance to talk about this — the comprehensive mental health and well-being approach that aligns with the Yukon mental health strategy.

The specific question, I believe, is just about the actual dollars that are being allocated. The experiential learning spaces will see an additional \$200,000, which will bring it up to \$1 million. The current schools that we are working with are Jack Hulland, J.V. Clark, St. Elias, and Tantalus schools. I can bring back further details on exactly those projects through a legislative return.

Mr. Kent: Just the second part of that question — sorry if the minister responded to it — I am looking for timelines around the Selkirk school parking lot, the total budget, and when that work is expected to be completed.

I am going to jump back to the increase of 40 FTEs. This was part of the confidence and supply agreement, or the CASA, that the Liberals signed with the New Democrats. On August 4, a news release went out talking about 81 new full-time student support positions over the next three years and a \$1-million investment in student support initiatives. The minister

mentioned — and her budget documents mention as well — that 40 of those 81 positions will be added for this school year.

Can the minister give us a breakdown of those 40 new positions? How many will be educational assistants? How many will be learning assistance teachers, and how many will be the wellness counsellors who were promised?

Could I just get a breakdown of what those 40 new positions will look like? Does the minister have information as to what schools they will be deployed to and when the recruiting will be completed? I know that, last week during Question Period, the minister mentioned that the recruiting would start this week — the week of October 16. I am just looking to get a sense for when those 40 new positions will be in place.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I'll just go back to the Selkirk parking lot. Again, the Government of Yukon is committed to providing safe learning environments for all students during the 2023-24 school year. Construction of a new staff parking lot area located behind Selkirk Elementary School will be underway and is expected to be completed in the summer of 2024, for the start of the 2024-25 school year. This project is part of the overall plan for the Riverdale education campus that will help improve traffic flow, reduce traffic congestion during peak times, and make school drop-off safer for students and families. To help ensure student safety, the alternative drop-off zone established for parents last year will again be used this year. Additionally, drivers will be redirected to Nisutlin Drive after using the drop-off zone. During construction, the existing front parking lot will also remain open with limited traffic disruptions. Hopefully, that will be the result of that. We have worked collaboratively with the school council throughout the design process of this project to reflect the needs of the Selkirk community. I believe that covers the last part of that other question.

In terms of the new positions that we are introducing, these are important additions to our staffing for schools to again support our educators and our school communities and to meet our commitments in the new confidence and supply agreement that we entered into, which is known as the “2023 confidence and supply agreement”, that really sets out the relationship between the Yukon Liberal caucus and the NDP caucus. The opposition NDP shares the Yukon government's desire to improve the Yukon's education system. To this end, the 2023 confidence and supply agreement contains many areas of focus in education. We are working very hard to meet those.

I have spoken a few times this Sitting about the work that we have done on reimagining inclusive and special education and the reshaping of our education system. When we were entering into this confidence and supply agreement, we shared a lot of the desire to improve the Yukon education system. We were on track with our communities of inquiry to really dig into each area in inclusive and special education and this was certainly one of them. We were definitely on track to work toward additional positions to meet school needs.

Of the 40 additional positions, 15 FTEs in the learning assistance teacher roles have been hired and six educational assistants have been hired. We have seven more that we're

continuing to recruit. As I stated late last week, we are starting the recruitment on the school wellness specialists, so those positions are now being recruited for and we will continue to seek the best educational professionals that we can to meet our needs in our schools.

Mr. Kent: I caught a little bit of what the minister said there with respect to the numbers. It sounded like there were six EAs already recruited and that there are seven more to go, and I think the minister mentioned 15 learning assistance teachers, but she can correct me and let me know if there are any additional ones who still need to be hired of the 40. The minister did then mention the wellness counsellors — that the recruiting is starting this week. I think it was early August, around August 4, when the deputy minister sent a letter to the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education mentioning that the job description for those wellness counsellors had not been completed yet.

I will just ask the minister if the job description is complete and if it's available publicly anywhere or if it has been shared with the Advisory Committee for Yukon Education or some of the other partners in education.

Hon. Ms. McLean: These are brand new positions. The wellness specialist — as I stated last week, the recruitment and all of the requirements that are required through the Public Service Commission are now met, which is why we are able to now begin the recruitment for these brand new positions. That includes everything from job descriptions to classification, and we have multiple postings out now. These positions will work closely with executive directors of the school boards; they will work closely with the superintendents, the administration of schools, and the community at large to ensure that they are meeting the specific needs of that education community but also of the community that they live in.

Mr. Kent: Just to clarify then, the postings are out for some of the wellness counsellor positions. Are the job descriptions available publicly with the postings? Is that how it works with Education?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, they are publicly available through the postings.

Mr. Kent: We will take a look at those and reach out to some of the organizations that we have been talking to about what input they had to the job descriptions prior to them being finalized. Perhaps we can have an opportunity to come back and ask the minister follow-up questions on that.

I know that the minister, others, and I were sent a letter from the Holy Family Elementary School Council with a request to attend a meeting to talk about the situation that they have with teachers on call or substitute teachers. You know, they are having some significant challenges with getting their TOCs to answer the calls in the morning. They are juggling staff around like many of the other schools, particularly like the smaller schools have to do — moving EAs and LATs into substitute roles for the day or having them teach classes where the teacher is not there. They mentioned, I think, that 15 percent to 20 percent was the staffing absentee rate that some were facing on a daily basis — as high as 20 percent. They have asked a number of stakeholders, including the minister and me,

to attend a meeting on October 23 to talk about the situation that they are facing, so I am just curious if the minister is planning to attend that meeting or not.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We've already had some debate about this during this session — certainly something in terms of our teachers on call. I'm very aware of the challenges that school councils are expressing to us, particularly Holy Family.

I've had some chance to talk about the numbers of teachers on call whom we currently have registered. The majority of them are in Whitehorse, with that being 129. I'm not sure if we have updated numbers because this was as of September 26. Then we have 30 in rural communities.

We continue always to recruit teachers on call and recognize that demand for coverage continues to be a challenge. I'm very alive to that issue. We continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for teachers-on-call roles and to support staff in accepting assignments as they are available.

We definitely know that there are some things that we can do differently, and we're going to continue working with our education partners to look toward some solutions in this regard. Some of this, I think, flows over from during the pandemic. We are certainly hearing from other jurisdictions about similar issues around recruitment, retention, and also the acceptance of assignments within schools.

So, certainly, I'm aware of the request from Holy Family for my attendance at their upcoming council meeting. I'm still considering my availability, but we will absolutely have senior folks available at that meeting to work directly with them, including our deputy minister.

Mr. Kent: So, hopefully, the minister will be available to attend as well, because I know that this specific request was for a number of individuals to attend to try to assist the school community in the challenges they're facing with respect to substitute teachers.

I do want to jump into the CASA, section 2, which is on education. It is: "to allocate an additional \$1 million in each of the next three budgets to enhance recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals across the Yukon. This may include a program aimed at supporting Yukon students pursuing studies in educational fields who commit to working in the Yukon after graduation."

So, just from a budgetary standpoint, I'm curious about: Of the \$1 million that has been allocated in this current budget, how much of it has been spent so far, and what are the results for recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Part of our confidence and supply agreement does include additional resources for recruitment and retention. I have had some chance to speak about some of the various actions that we have taken to date through enhanced marketing and recruitment, posting jobs earlier, participating more widely in job fairs, providing supplementary funds for rural teachers where housing is not available, enhanced onboarding and training for staff, and examining the potential, right now, for bursary incentives for Yukon students to attend educational professional post-secondary programs.

From the 2023 CASA to improve the Yukon's educational system, the Government of Yukon has committed to allocating an additional \$1 million in each of the next three budgets to enhance recruitment and retention of new rural education professionals across the Yukon. This may include a program aimed at supporting Yukon students pursuing studies in educational fields who will commit to working in the Yukon after graduation.

We are currently working through some of the details around that commitment. I will be happy to bring forward more information as I am able to. These are commitments that we made in the new 2023 CASA, with a large focus on education. They were commitments through the work that we were already doing to reshape education within the Yukon. These commitments all very much align with the path that we were on and that we will continue to work toward in reshaping our education system.

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

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mountainview that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 142

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Tuesday, October 17, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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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Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, October 17, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Yesterday, the Government House Leader stood on a point of order after the Leader of the Third Party moved the amendment to the motion for the second reading of Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*.

I stated that the amendment was in order but committed to providing further clarification today.

The Government House Leader cited Standing Order 57(3), which states that a bill may be committed to a select committee after first reading. That Standing Order was not applicable in the circumstance. The relevant Standing Order for the amendment proposed by the Leader of the Third Party is Standing Order 57(4): "Unless otherwise ordered by the Assembly, when a Government Bill or a Private Member's Bill is read the second time, it stands ordered for consideration by Committee of the Whole."

By adopting the amendment to the motion for second reading, the Assembly ordered that, after second reading, Bill No. 29 be referred to the Members' Services Board instead of standing referred to Committee of the Whole.

I hope that this clarifies the matter for members and I thank members for their attention to this statement.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome a number of distinguished guests we have here with us today. They are here to support us in our tribute that we will be giving in a few minutes. I would like to welcome: Bonnie Venton Ross, president of the Rotary Club of Whitehorse; Bruce Ross, Rotarian; Lois Craig, Rotarian; Ramesh Ferris, Rotarian and polio survivor; Adele Collingwood, Friend of Rotary; Lee Pigage, Rotarian; as well as Brent Collingwood, Rotarian.

Thank you all for being here with us today.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we have several people here today for our tribute to Canadian Library Month. We have Alison Lindsay, who is the circulation supervisor; we have Rachel Travis, a librarian; we have Summer Xuan, an administrative assistant; we have Naomi Collins, a library technician; and we have Winnie Hoe, a library assistant.

Please join me in welcoming them to the House today.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of World Polio Day

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to World Polio Day, which is on October 24. World Polio Day is a global day to raise awareness and resources for the worldwide effort to eradicate polio.

Poliomyelitis is a highly infectious disease that commonly affects children of five years and younger. It is spread through contaminated water. It attacks the nervous system and, in some cases, leads to paralysis.

People born in the 1940s and 1950s will remember the terrifying images of healthy children going to bed and waking up paralyzed. By the mid-20th century, polio killed or paralyzed over half a million people every year worldwide.

There is no cure, but there is a safe, effective vaccine developed by Dr. Jonas Salk in 1955. In 1979, Rotary International began the fight against polio with a multi-year project to immunize six million children in the Philippines. Then, in 1985, they launched PolioPlus to make eliminating polio a top priority.

Mr. Speaker, global polio eradication is a team effort. Rotary is proud to work alongside members of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative. That includes Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; UNICEF; the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; the World Health Organization; the World Bank; and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as governments around the world that have provided more than 2.5 billion children in 122 countries with oral polio vaccine.

Although Rotary and their partners have reduced cases by 99.9 percent worldwide since 1988, their efforts must continue. If not, a global resurgence could happen with as many as 200,000 cases annually over the next 10 years.

Since 1979, Rotary members have contributed over \$2.1 billion and countless volunteer hours to vaccinate nearly three billion children in 122 countries. Rotary International, through the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, has also advocated worldwide for more than \$10 billion in government funding to eradicate polio.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative has launched a Make Polio History campaign to begin on October 24 to rally existing and new supporters of polio eradication from all over the world to champion the cause.

I encourage everyone who wants to see a world free from polio to join the fight.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize World Polio Day, which will take place on October 24. I would also like to thank the visitors here today for attending.

Polio is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus that affects mainly children of a young age. The polio vaccine protects children by preparing their bodies to fight the virus. Almost all children — more than 99 percent — who get all the

recommended doses of the inactivated polio vaccine will be protected from polio.

Polio cases have decreased by over 99 percent since 1988, from an estimated 350,000 in over 125 endemic countries to nine reported cases today worldwide. Of the three strains of polio virus — types 1, 2, and 3 — type 2 was eradicated in 1999 and type 3 was declared eradicated in 2020. However, there is more to be done.

Vaccination is the best way to protect ourselves, prevent the spread of polio, and move toward the goal of eradicating this virus worldwide. In 2019, 92 percent of two-year-old children in Canada had received all recommended doses of polio vaccine. However, higher polio vaccination rates will help to protect people from imported cases of polio from countries where the virus may still be circulating.

I would like to take a moment to recognize Ramesh Ferris, who is no stranger to any of us here, and also the Rotary members in the gallery and Rotary Clubs locally, nationally, and internationally for their continued support of polio eradication and their efforts on it.

The work of Ramesh Ferris has taken him around the world, and he raised awareness through the Cycle to Walk campaign across the country and approximately \$300,000 to fight polio when he pedalled his handcycle from Victoria, BC, to Cape Spear, NL, and 2013 marks 15 years since this journey. We were also pleased to support Ramesh on that journey during our time in government with a donation from Health and Social Services and matching donations by Yukoners up to a specified amount. Ramesh spent time in Afghanistan working with doctors and officials administering vaccinations to children, and he has been honoured with a number of prestigious awards for his work and continues to be one of the most influential polio eradication advocates and activists in the world.

I would like to thank Ramesh, the Rotary members here today and those listening, and everyone involved in the efforts to eradicate polio for their dedicated efforts and contributions to this worthy cause.

Applause

Ms. Blake: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to World Polio Day. World Polio Day reminds us of the importance of the polio vaccine to protect not only ourselves from the virus but to also protect those around us, including the elderly, children, and babies. World Polio Day also raises awareness about polio vaccination and eradication not only in Canada but also across the globe, while also highlighting and honouring the important work that has been done, and continues to be done, by organizations and numerous advocates who are doing the important work to have a world free from polio.

In 1994, Canada was certified as being free of the polio virus by the World Health Organization. In 2022, the presence of the virus was detected in two waste-water samples, but luckily, there are no reported cases.

When I was younger, I never truly understood what it meant to have polio or the detrimental impacts that can occur to one's physical health due to contracting polio. All I knew at

the time was that we are given the polio vaccine after birth. It wasn't until I discovered that my maternal grandfather lived with polio that I was able to realize how very close this virus is to those around us. I learned that the polio virus has a direct impact on one's nervous system that often causes paralysis. My grandfather lived with partial paralysis on one half of his body due to this virus. Having the privilege of growing up close to my grandfather throughout my childhood without knowing that he was impacted by the polio virus allowed me to witness his physical limitations and health challenges that he fearlessly embraced in his daily life.

Today, I am grateful for the public health system which ensures that all Yukoners have access to the polio vaccine.

Mahsi'.

Applause

In recognition of Canadian Library Month and Yukon public libraries

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Canadian Library Month and our Yukon Public Libraries. According to American writer Stuart Dybek, the public library is where place and possibility meet. This October, I encourage everyone to explore the possibilities unlocked by their local public libraries. The Yukon is fortunate to be rich with libraries that are at the heart of our communities. They expand our world view and transport us from our remote, northern territory to every corner of the known universe and beyond. Libraries enrich our lives by promoting cultural awareness, providing educational programs, and supporting freedom of expression.

Throughout October, the Whitehorse Public Library will be offering story time on Tuesdays and introducing French story time on Wednesdays. Are you interested in discovering the library's services? Then book a tour and learn how to use and access the library's resources. In Dawson, you can attend Berton House author readings or attend the write club. In Haines Junction, you can join the bimonthly story time or attend Lego club. If you are in Burwash Landing, you can join the Kluane First Nation language programs.

There are so many wonderful in-person events for people of all ages to be involved in. If you can't make it in person, don't worry. Yukon Public Libraries will be hosting an online campaign to highlight their new catalogue, which was introduced in July. This new catalogue allows for automatic renewals, saves reading history, gives reading recommendations, and much more. I encourage you all to go out and explore that.

Our territory not only has 15 public libraries, but we also have the Yukon Public Law Library, the Yukon Archives, the Yukon University Library, and the Energy, Mines and Resources Library, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, not to mention all the school libraries in our communities. Each of these facilities is one of a kind with their own resources and programming. Even though each library is unique, what these facilities have in common is the passion of the people who work there. That truly makes a difference to all of our communities throughout the territory. They are the ones

organizing the programming that we enjoy so much and ensuring our access to the books. They are also the ones providing Wi-Fi passwords and creating safe spaces for all walks of life to foster a community connection.

Please join me in thanking the many library staff and volunteers for the amazing work they do.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October as Canadian Library Month. This month, libraries across the country are celebrating the valuable role that libraries play in our communities. Libraries provide access to information and resources, promote lifelong learning for all, and support education and literacy. They are critical to schools and an important resource for families raising young readers.

I understand that the Yukon libraries have made the leap to doing away with fines for overdue books. This is a great step in ensuring that libraries are accessible to all. Without the barrier of fines, individuals can still check out multiple items without the fear of accumulating significant fines if they are unable to make it to the library. Other jurisdictions have implemented this practice and have since seen positive changes in borrowing habits.

Results reported include an increase in patron memberships, including more children and families and entire classes of students, and an uptick in materials returned on time or close to the due date.

I would like to thank the librarians and staff of all of our public and school libraries across the Yukon for their passion and dedication and for the work they do to instill the love of reading in people.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate Canadian Library Month. Libraries are often the hub of our communities. They give people the opportunity to access and share information. They provide parents with the opportunity to share the magic of stories with their children. People can come and read a local or national newspaper, and everyone has access to a computer with Internet.

Public libraries are funded by our community for our community. They are a place for everyone and anyone to access support, knowledge, and tools with no barriers and no cost. They are one of the very few places in our society where you don't have to pay to access a space that is comfy, cozy, fun, and helpful.

Thank you to all of the staff and volunteers who keep our libraries available to everyone.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

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: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House recognizes and thanks Northwestel for 20 years of ongoing support for the Yukon Hospital Foundation:

(1) through their partnership in the Festival of Trees; and

(2) for their recent \$450,000 donation over the next five years in support of the Building Better Together campaign.

Ms. McLeod: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to consult the territorial governments about a northern exemption from the carbon tax.

Mr. Hassard: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to suspend the fuel tax to support Yukoners coping with record-high inflation.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works to improve safety on the Old Alaska Highway by taking actions including the following:

(1) installing "Children Playing" signage in residential areas;

(2) ensuring that overgrown ditches are brushed to provide better visibility;

(3) improving drainage along the road to prevent more damage caused by standing water;

(4) repairing and maintaining culverts; and

(5) fixing the road surface where damage has occurred.

MLA Tredger: 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 any rental market analyses or related research justifying the creation of the temporary landlord assistance program and its current allocated budget.

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

THAT this House urges the chief medical officer of health to mandate mask requirements in all Yukon hospitals and community nursing stations for staff and visitors while COVID-19 numbers remain high in the Yukon.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to submit comments in support of the Porcupine caribou herd to the US Bureau of Land Management on the draft supplemental environmental impact statement for the Arctic refuge oil and gas leasing program before the submission deadline of October 23, 2023.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

***Cannabis Control and Regulation Act* five-year review**

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the launch of the five-year review of the *Cannabis Control and Regulation Act*.

As you know, cannabis was legalized for recreational use in Canada in 2018, and since then, this government has taken steps to establish regulations around its sale, possession, and consumption.

The *Cannabis Control and Regulation Act* ensures that Yukoners have the option to purchase and consume cannabis products if they so wish. It also provides the Yukon's licensed retailers with a clear legislative framework to serve those individuals who choose to consume.

The act mandates a review every five years, and I'm happy to announce that the Yukon Liquor Corporation has kicked off that review today, October 17. The five-year review will determine whether the legislation remains responsive to the health and safety of Yukoners while also continuing to ensure support for Yukon's legal cannabis industry. We are seeking input from all Yukoners — including cannabis retailers, First Nations, municipalities, and other stakeholders — on this important subject. This review will assess the effectiveness of the act in achieving its objectives, including restricting youth access, eliminating the illicit cannabis market, and protecting public health and safety overall.

We know that the legal market continues to displace the illicit market, and we want to better understand this action, particularly when it comes to keeping cannabis out of the hands of our youth. For this reason, Yukon youth can also provide responses anonymously through the engagement process. This review will incorporate findings into a report that details recommendations on how to make Yukon's cannabis framework even better. Additionally, the federal government is in the process of carrying out a three-year review of the federal *Cannabis Act*. As our legislation is aligned with the federal act, changes at the federal level may therefore impact our legislation in the future.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to hearing from Yukoners, listening to their perspectives, and using their valuable feedback to make informed decisions that will serve as a road map for the future of continued cannabis regulation in the Yukon. This government commitment to safeguarding public health and safety, keeping cannabis out of the hands of youth, and displacing the illicit market remains unwavering, and we are dedicated to the task of continuously improving our approach to cannabis control and regulations.

Mr. Dixon: I'm pleased to rise in response to this ministerial statement about the review of the Yukon *Cannabis Control and Regulation Act*. I'm happy to see this review being launched today and note that it is being conducted at the same time as the review of the federal *Cannabis Act*.

When legalization was first announced, there was considerable optimism about what it would mean for Canada and, more specifically, what it would mean for the Yukon. However, when we look back at the last five years, we see a very mixed bag in terms of outcomes.

First of all, on the health front, according to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* commentary, we have seen outcomes such as prevalence of cannabis use, cannabis-related emergency department visits and admissions to hospitals, and cannabis-impaired driving either remaining steady or increasing. The commentary also notes a significant increase in rates of emergency department visits related to cannabis poisoning among children aged zero to 9.

On the other hand, the paper also notes some social justice benefits in the reduction of criminal arrests and charges, as well as an increase in active cannabis users who get their cannabis from a legal and therefore safe source.

On the economic side, the results have been far less positive than many anticipated. In most cases, the difficulties faced by the cannabis industry almost all stem from the government model chosen by both the federal and provincial or territorial governments. Here is what the Cannabis Council of Canada, which represents licensed producers and processors of cannabis, said in their submission to Canada last year: "The reality for most LHs is earning unsustainably low margins, which are the result of continuous price compression compounded by high taxes, regulatory fees, and provincial distributor mark-ups." Here in Yukon, we have certainly heard the industry make very similar complaints about Yukon's regulatory framework and the substantial burden of red tape, high taxes, and lower than anticipated profitability.

Mr. Speaker, this matter is not just because there was a missing economic opportunity but because this burdensome system is hindering legal sellers of cannabis from competing with the illicit sellers. One of the core goals of legalization at both the federal and territorial levels was to displace the illicit market and, quite simply, that's not happening nearly as much as it should be. In the words of the Cannabis Council of Canada: "A financially viable legal cannabis industry is critical to the accomplishment of the public policy objectives of the Cannabis Act." I would echo that sentiment entirely in regard to the Yukon *Cannabis Control and Regulation Act*.

The regulatory burden on this sector has also led to a consolidation in the industry and many smaller local businesses being forced to either reduce operations, sell out to larger chains, or simply fail to sustain themselves against those larger chains.

As the Yukon government reviews this legislation, I do hope that they look at making changes to the regulatory framework that will make it possible for the legal cannabis industry to remain viable and find ways to reduce their costs and lighten their burden so that they can fulfill one of the key goals of this legislation, which is to displace the illegal market.

I will conclude with a few questions: Has the Yukon government made a submission to the federal *Cannabis Act* review yet? If not, will they consider making that submission to that review as well?

Also, the act requires a report on the comprehensive review be made to the Yukon Legislative Assembly within one year. Can the minister tell us if the goal will be to have legislative changes ready by then, or will Yukoners need to wait longer than that for the changes that will inevitably come from this review?

I do look forward to this review progressing and changes being made to this act.

MLA Tredger: We are happy to hear that the government is meeting their obligations by doing the scheduled five-year review of the cannabis act. We have seen the success of the act in allowing for consideration of socio-economic impacts in decisions made about the locations of new stores.

During some of the public conversations that happened over the last couple of years about potential new cannabis stores, I was asked many times: What about alcohol? Why aren't schools, daycares, and other community spaces considered when deciding where, how, and when people can sell alcohol, not just cannabis?

It's a great question, and I hope the Liberals will turn their minds to how they can put in similar safeguards around alcohol sales.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thank you to my colleagues for their comments today in the ministerial statement responses. We are following up through our commitment that we made when we legalized cannabis in 2018 with the federal government to conduct this review. This review is absolutely going to help the government understand the evolving landscape of legalization. It's aimed at ensuring that the Yukon's cannabis legislation remains effective and responsive to the needs of all Yukoners while also continuing to support Yukon's legal cannabis industry. We want to hear from Yukoners. We want to gather this information and complete the public surveys.

In order to do that, please, anyone listening or reading this in Hansard, go to [yukon.ca/engagements](https://www.yukon.ca/engagements). The online survey will be open until December 1 of this year. It's very important to remember that, prior to legislation, illegal sellers had 100 percent of the market. We were starting from scratch here. It's not like there was another nation that we could emulate in the legislation, so I would concur with the member opposite — the Leader of the Official Opposition — that there is work to be done. There is a necessity to continue to review the processes. I will add, though, that according to national data from Statistics Canada, there is data to suggest that we are capturing approximately 70 percent to 80 percent of the illicit market currently.

As the minister responsible for the Yukon Liquor Corporation, my goal is to find appropriate balances between the needs of the licensees, the need to return dollars to government to fund critical services for all Yukoners, and also a social responsibility piece as well. The Yukon Liquor Corporation spent more than \$230,000 in the last three years on social responsibility measures and educating Yukoners on the health impacts of cannabis as well as alcohol consumption. I will note that the corporation works with strategic partners,

other departments, other governments, licensees, and other stakeholders to encourage responsible consumption and to help reduce cannabis- and alcohol-related harms.

The corporation continues to provide excellent service to all Yukoners while educating them on the harms associated with alcohol and cannabis consumption. Compliance officers continue to share information about the *Cannabis Control and Regulation Act* and its regulations to encourage voluntary compliance by all licensees.

Also, for example, compliance officers promoted the Check 30 program in cannabis retail stores, which encourages the retail staff to request identification for customers who look 30 years old or younger. We also continue to offer the Be a Responsible Server-Cannabis training, known as "BARS-C", for free through [yukon.ca](https://www.yukon.ca) to all licensees and the public. This certification course is mandatory for everybody who wants to sell cannabis in the territory.

Annually, the corporation funds "safe grad", which promotes substance-free high school graduation events throughout the territory. The Department of Health and Social Services has coordinators for school health who do presentations in the schools on the effects of cannabis, vaping, and smoking overall.

During this report, we look forward to hearing from Yukoners, First Nations, cannabis retailers, municipalities, and other stakeholders to better understand the current context for cannabis in the territory.

Speaker: This then brings us to the Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Carbon tax

Mr. Dixon: Yukoners continue to grapple with the rising cost of living in the Yukon. Throughout the past year, we have seen the Yukon sit at the top of the charts in the country, with often the highest rate of inflation of any jurisdiction in Canada.

Despite this, Liberal governments in Ottawa and the Yukon continue to push the cost of living even higher with inflationary measures like the increase to the carbon tax. This year, the Liberals increased the carbon tax by 30 percent, bringing the total to 14 cents a litre on gasoline. This drives up the price of everything in the Yukon from construction to food and basic necessities.

When will the Yukon Liberal government finally stand up and tell the federal Liberals that Yukoners cannot afford any more Liberal tax increases?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will begin by thanking the members opposite for supporting the carbon tax changes that we made to the legislation just here in the Legislative Assembly within the last year. I will also remind the member opposite that, in Yukon, 100 percent of all of the money that is collected through the carbon rebate is returned to Yukoners.

We could have this conversation with the members opposite ad nauseum. I see that they have a motion on the floor requesting again to have some kind of exemption from the federal carbon tax, yet they know that this wouldn't be accepted

by the federal government, as the legislation is there to effect the price signal.

We work extremely hard within those parameters to make sure that, in Yukon, we have the exemptions in place and also return the money in an appropriate manner. We do stand by the carbon-pricing mechanism as the most cost-effective way of dealing with putting a price on carbon and making sure that taxpayers aren't paying for floods and fires but the polluters are paying for floods and fires, because that is the world that we live in right now. I want to commend the Yukon Party for signing Yukon on to carbon pricing through the Vancouver Declaration. So, I appreciate the work that the Yukon Party did to make sure that we did have a carbon-pricing mechanism here in the Yukon.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the only way we will see change to federal policy is if other levels of government start speaking up about the impacts on their citizens. That's what we have seen from leaders across the country. In the NWT, Premier Cochrane was clear. She said that a carbon tax might make sense in some places but not in the north where we don't have alternatives. The Liberal Premier of Newfoundland has said something similar. He has written to the Prime Minister and asked that the recent increases be reversed and any future increases be cancelled. The leader who has been noticeably silent on this matter has been the Liberal Premier of Yukon.

Why hasn't the Premier stood up and told the Liberal government in Ottawa that Yukoners can't afford the cost of living to increase any further due to the rising Liberal carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the work that we did here in the Yukon Liberal Party from the pan-Canadian framework on clean energy and climate change was to make sure that we understood the complexities of the federal price-signalling mechanism. When we worked extremely hard to make sure that we had our exemptions in place, it was based upon following the rules that were set out by the federal government. We made sure that all of the money that is being spent in the Yukon is returned to Yukoners. That means that Yukoners as a whole put in less than they get back out.

The Yukon territorial government — that money is going into that pot as well — as well as tourists and others who are coming through — so that money does all come back to Yukoners. Again, we could have this conversation back and forth about the necessity. We honestly believe that we need to have a price on carbon. If it's not going to be this mechanism, if we're not going to actually show up and have some kind of policy to fight climate change, I'm begging to hear from the Yukon Party what their plan is. They did sign on to the Vancouver Declaration. That Vancouver Declaration said that, yes, Yukon will have a carbon price. What's their plan?

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, our plan is to make life more affordable for Yukoners. Yukoners continue to face some of the highest cost-of-living increases in the country. Individuals, businesses, and even NGOs are struggling to make ends meet. Yet, despite this, the Liberal carbon tax keeps increasing and driving up the price of everything even further. It has gotten so bad that even Liberal MPs are starting to speak out. Liberal

MPs from Atlantic Canada have been pushing the government to halt these increases and start helping people in those regions.

Yet again, the voice that has been noticeably absent from this has been the Premier of the Yukon. Why hasn't the Premier raised the concerns of Yukoners about the rising Liberal carbon tax with the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, as the price at the pump goes up, so do the dollars going back into Yukoners' pockets.

The members opposite are doing a disservice to Yukoners by only talking about one side of the carbon-pricing mechanism. In every single jurisdiction, the pricing mechanism is different. In the Yukon, we remain committed to ensuring that the full rebate groups continue to receive more — more — on average than they pay in carbon pricing levels. We are distributing 45 percent to individuals, 36 percent to general businesses, 12 percent to mining businesses, 3.5 percent to First Nation governments, and 3.5 percent to municipal governments. All of that money that the members opposite are saying is causing — a few election campaigns ago, they were saying that diapers were going to be so expensive that Yukoners were going to leave en masse, but our population is growing bigger than any other jurisdiction in Canada. The narrative from the Yukon Party does not hold water.

We believe that climate change is something that is extremely important and taxpayers shouldn't be paying for climate change, Mr. Speaker — polluter pay.

Question re: Cost of living

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, the carbon tax isn't the only Liberal policy that is driving up the price of everything and making life less affordable for Yukoners. This summer, the Liberal government introduced the so-called "clean fuel regulations", which many observers have called a second carbon tax. According to an analysis by the parliamentary budget officer, when fully implemented, these regulations will increase the cost of gasoline by 17 cents per litre and 16 cents per litre for diesel fuel. These new rules introduced by the Liberals will drive up the cost of everything and will disproportionately hurt northerners.

Why hasn't the Premier stood up against these new regulations that will make life even more expensive here in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I guess today is the federal government's day in the Legislative Assembly here. This is another example of a federal tax, but I will say that the Government of Yukon is committed to striking a balance between appropriate levels of taxation, affordability for Yukoners, and meeting our commitments to climate change under *Our Clean Future*.

Currently, when we want to talk about our tax on fuel, taxation on fuel in the Yukon is the lowest in any jurisdiction in Canada at just 6.2 cents per litre of gasoline and 7.2 cents per litre for diesel, and these rates have not increased since 1993. Yes, there are some other jurisdictions that have temporarily suspended their tax on fuel. Two provinces have done that. But if you consider the two other provinces and the temporary reduction in their fuel tax, Yukon's tax rates are still lower,

even after taking these temporary measures into account — except for Alberta, which went to zero.

Again, we are always looking at affordability measures. We have a suite of those in both of our budgets, making sure that we deal with inflation, but the dog whistle from the Yukon Party to say that we need to allow fuel subsidization to continue and we should just keep on going in the fossil-fuel future is something that we are opposed to and we believe there are better ways for us to strike that balance.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I will remind the minister to maybe pay attention to the question, because we are talking about clean fuel standards here.

Other leaders around the country have been speaking up against the federal Liberal measures that will increase the cost of everything. Here is a quote from the Council of Atlantic Premiers this summer: "... we are increasingly concerned that federal measures with a known disproportionate impact on Atlantic Canada are proceeding and will take effect on July 1, 2023, resulting in significant price increases for gasoline and diesel."

If they think that Atlantic Canada will be hurt by these regulations, they should see the impact here in the north. Again, why has the Premier of the Yukon not stood up for Yukoners and written a similar letter to the Prime Minister about the impacts that this new Liberal regulation will have on the cost of living here in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, again, we are talking about a federal tax. Now I hear we are talking about looking for our government to talk to the federal government to somehow talk about subsidizing fossil fuel or making fossil fuel more accessible. That's not necessarily what we want to do here in the Legislative Assembly.

We have talked about the millions of dollars we have put into affordability measures here in the Yukon, but, again, the Yukon Party would have us commit to a fossil-fuel future decades into the future. We don't believe that is sound government policy, knowing full well that events that were considered once in a century are now happening right across the country and the world on a very, very regular basis. This is an extremely serious topic.

We don't think a future where we continue to subsidize fossil fuel is the right way to go — not only just for Yukon but for the rest of Canada. On our side, when we talk about our taxation, we have the lowest taxation of any jurisdiction in Canada when it comes to fuel. We are doing our part to make sure that we both are looking at *Our Clean Future* and the pages there to make sure we are actually looking toward a cleaner future for Yukoners and also being extremely careful and diligent with the taxpayers' money that we do have. I believe this is the best way of moving forward. I won't speak on behalf of the Premier, but I do know that we believe that we need to put climate change at the forefront in our policies.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, it's very unfortunate to hear the minister stand up here in the Legislature and say that standing up for Yukoners isn't something that this government is interested in doing.

I would like to offer another quote from the Council of Atlantic Premiers: "These increases will create additional inflationary pressures on Atlantic Canadians and come at a time when the cost of living continues to increase."

Mr. Speaker, here in the Yukon, our cost of living has been more than a full point ahead of most of those provinces. In fact, for the vast majority of this year, we have had the worst cost-of-living increases in the country. Despite this, our Liberal Premier has been unwilling to criticize his federal cousins.

Why hasn't the Premier stood up for Yukoners and pushed back against policies that will increase our cost of living like so many other premiers in this country have done?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I don't think the member opposite has seen the national news, where our Premier has been very critical of the federal government, but I digress.

Again, standing up for Yukoners is absolutely what we do in every page of this budget. The members opposite can stick their head in the sand and not listen to the answers, but we have said that when it comes to carbon pricing, all that money goes back to Yukoners. They don't want to hear that part. They just want to hear that it's going up at the pumps and that's what they tell their constituents, but all that money goes back into the pockets of Yukoners. We have the lowest tax on fuel in the country when it comes to our territorial tax, yet the members opposite will still ask why we won't stand up and be more accountable to Yukoners. Well, we are. We have a whole suite of items that we've talked about in the Legislative Assembly in the fall and in the spring. We are diametrically opposed to the Official Opposition when it comes to subsidizing fossil fuels.

Question re: Electricity rates

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, one year ago, the Yukon NDP exposed the fact that ATCO Electric Yukon had been earning millions of dollars for years on top of what they are supposed to make. We asked the Liberals to force ATCO back to the negotiating table. All they had to say was that it's complicated.

While the Liberals were silent, months of public pressure forced ATCO back to the table, but now ATCO wants to hike electricity rates. ATCO has been allowed to earn millions of dollars in excess profits since their last rate increase and now they want to profit even more. We asked the Liberals to prevent the hike. Again, they said that it's complicated — not good enough.

What exactly has this government done to stop ATCO from increasing rates by over 13 percent next year?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to say to Yukoners is that when I was informed by — I think it was the chamber of commerce which came to talk to me about the ATCO rates — I reached out to ATCO right away. I have said in the Assembly that I talked to ATCO. I talked to them about rate relief right away. I have tabled those letters here in the Assembly.

This is not actually prompted by the NDP; it is prompted by seeing that ATCO had over-earnings. I asked for an investigation of those over-earnings. I found out that it was due to how active our mines were — okay. Still, in talking with

ATCO, I said that, you know, that is too much over-earning — please consider rate relief. And I encouraged them by way of letter, which I have also tabled here, to go in front of the Utilities Board. I think that I also mentioned to the member opposite that if they go in front of the Utilities Board for a general rate application, it is possible that they will ask for more money. I will look that up; I will find that reference in Hansard and I will remind the member opposite.

We have the rates in front of the Yukon Utilities Board and that is what the Utilities Board will do now; they will consider that application and they will, on behalf of all Yukoners, decide on what an appropriate rate is for ATCO.

MLA Tredger: Yukoners are looking at a potential 13-percent increase from ATCO in 2024 even though ATCO has made millions in excess profits for years. This is unacceptable. What is worse is that this Liberal government is letting them get away with it. From housing and gas to food and home heating, everything is getting more expensive for Yukoners. Yukoners shouldn't have to pay more for electricity so that an Alberta corporation can post ever higher profits.

When will the Liberals take action to stop ATCO's unfair rate hike?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Look, I have spoken with ATCO. I have talked to them about their rates. I have expressed concern and I have tabled that correspondence here in the Assembly. Because the member doesn't seem to have it, I will look it up again and I will share it across again, but I think that there is a part in the question that is just missing completely — that is that we have a Yukon Utilities Board that is a quasi-judicial board that is separate from us as government that has the job to consider Yukon ratepayers. That is their job; that is who is considering these rate applications. It is not appropriate for me to direct the Utilities Board on what they should or shouldn't do with that application. If the member doesn't understand that, then I will find the parts of the act that reference how this works. It is in front of the Yukon Utilities Board. That is where this will be considered.

MLA Tredger: For months now, Yukoners have known that ATCO is earning millions of dollars in excess profits. In that time, we have heard a resounding silence from both the Yukon Liberals and the Yukon Party. It's clear that neither of these two parties will stand up for Yukoners against corporate greed.

If the Liberals are unwilling to do anything to stop the rate hikes and want to leave this fight to the Yukon NDP, they could at least ask ATCO to give Yukoners back the millions they have earned in excess profits since the last rate review.

Will the minister officially ask ATCO to give Yukoners their money back?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand. I just stood up and I just said that I had actually written to ATCO about our concern that there were over-earnings on the expected rate of return and requesting that they give that money back to Yukoners through some form of relief. I have tabled that letter here in the Assembly. It's not months; it has been over a year since this has been an issue. I will find that letter and share it with the member opposite.

We have acted within the scope. This is a private sector company, and I, as the government, am not going to tell them what to do to set rates. I have actually been working with them. I want say, in working with them, they have been working constructively with us as a government. If the NDP were in government, from what I understand the member opposite to say, they would tell ATCO what to do for rates. Forget the Utilities Board; forget the private sector; they would just tell them what to do. No, that's not how it works.

I will share the letter, but I take concern that if I am tabling letters here — the member opposite is referencing that nothing is happening — how are they not seeing those letters that I have tabled?

Question re: *Our Clean Future* implementation

Ms. McLeod: Last week, we learned that the Yukon government has already missed their deadline from the *Our Clean Future* strategy to complete emergency management plans for all Yukon communities by the end of 2022.

Another commitment made in that strategy was to develop a territorial disaster financial assistance policy by 2022.

Can the minister tell us why the Liberal government was unable to meet their own deadlines to develop this policy?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to once again talk about how our territory is preparing for emergencies and has been for quite a while.

The members opposite, I will say off the top, are conveniently forgetting the fact that we had a global pandemic between the years of 2020 and 2022, but I will say that the Yukon Emergency Measures Organization works with their emergency management partners in municipalities and First Nations to develop emergency management capacity and build emergency-resilient Yukon communities. We appreciate the efforts of municipal and First Nation governments to plan for emergencies and the leadership of these governments in managing the challenges that recent emergency situations have presented. Preparing for emergencies includes personal preparedness, and we encourage all Yukoners to prepare themselves. I have spoken about that extensively here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. We are working with our municipal partners to ensure that they are prepared for emergencies. I have said that, as I have said before, it is a municipal responsibility, because they know their municipalities better than anybody. We are there to support municipalities as they develop these plans and that work is ongoing.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, this past summer, the Association of Yukon Communities passed a resolution that was championed by the Village of Teslin calling on the Yukon government to create a disaster financial assistance program that included support for long-term mitigation projects that would help ensure that communities are better prepared to face the impacts of natural disasters.

Will the minister commit that any disaster financial assistance policy will include support for long-term mitigation projects?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have expressed my praise for the municipality of Teslin and to the mayor for their work on dealing with emergencies as they have over the last several years that I have been in this role and I will say it again. Many municipal leaders here are doing amazing work when it comes to not only preparing for emergencies but actually dealing with them when they affect their municipalities.

Mr. Speaker, I am working with my federal, provincial, and territorial partners across the country, and this is a live conversation in the nation about how we actually prepare our communities for the changing climate that the members opposite refuse to try to curb through a carbon-pricing mechanism, which was talked about earlier today. Their plan still is not in focus; our plan is clear: We are going to put a price on pollution and we are going to work with our municipalities to ensure that we are preparing for the changing climate that is upon us now as we have seen across the country this past summer.

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, communities have been clear that they are looking to the Yukon government for leadership and support to help ensure that they are ready to respond to natural disasters. Several communities have expressed interest in long-term projects that will help them prevent damage from floods, fires, or other natural disasters. They are looking for assurances from the minister that the Government of Yukon will support them to develop a disaster financial assistance program that will help them with these long-term mitigation projects.

Can the minister assure communities that whenever the new program comes into effect, long-term mitigation projects that were contemplated in the Association of Yukon Communities resolution this summer will be eligible?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I am really a bit surprised by the position taken by the Official Opposition this afternoon. We heard them not more than 10 minutes ago criticizing our government for putting a price on pollution which is being rebated in full to Yukoners to help them deal with inflation.

Not only that, but we are putting a price on carbon so that we actually have a way to cut our carbon emissions. The members opposite do not support this. They want to build an LNG plant; they want to pander to the oil industry — the carbon producers, and we're saying no.

We are working with our municipalities because we are in the midst of global climate change right now. We're seeing it every summer: floods, fires, avalanches, climactic rivers. We're seeing it all in real time, and the members opposite have no plan. We have a plan: *Our Clean Future*, a nation-leading climate change action plan. We are working on that; we are working with our municipalities to plan for emergencies. I'm working with the mayors across the territory and I am happy to do that work. We are there to help our municipalities deal with the emerging climate events that we're seeing every single year.

Question re: Housing support programs

Ms. Clarke: Just yesterday, in recognition of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, the Premier and the Minister

of Health and Social Services congratulated themselves for their work on housing, but just last week, the Premier was unable to adequately justify his decision to cut \$6 million from the housing budget in the midst of a housing crisis. That is \$6 million that the Premier has decided not to put toward housing this year, and we need all kinds of housing in the Yukon.

Can the Premier tell us why he did not direct this money to other projects that could get going this year?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, first of all, working with Yukon Housing Corporation, we are consistently checking in with our partners who are looking at a number of projects, understanding where they are within their project planning and, of course, looking for ways to maximize financial resources into housing stock.

Of course, there are a number of things that we are looking at, some of it being lot development and ensuring that there is partnership, some of those projects, of course, that we have been highlighting this summer, like the new lot development with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the Chu Níikwän — something very innovative. But when it comes to actual building, we are always looking to ensure that we can get our funds into projects that are ready to be built now.

In response to that discussion, previously I stated that we would be moving the money forward so that the partners who are looking to build will have the money when they need it. In some cases, they have wanted to do more planning. They have wanted to de-risk their projects. We know that most capital projects are coming in at higher costs, so we see many of our partners going back and wanting to do another analysis of their build costs to ensure that they are getting the best value for money.

We will do that; we will do the due diligence. If we didn't, I would be criticized that it wasn't happening, but we are going to get dollars out the door as quickly as our partners can use those dollars with projects that are ready to build.

Ms. Clarke: We learned last week that part of the Premier's cut to housing funding is in the developer-building loan program. Just last spring, the Premier said that the \$5 million they had budgeted for this program would support community development partnerships that increase housing supply in the territory, but just last week, he said that the program is undersubscribed, so the prudent thing to do is to move funds to where they should be prioritized.

Can the Premier tell us: How many applications did the Housing Corporation receive for the program and how many were approved?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: There are a few things there. Yes, we did put funds into the developer-build program. Yes, it was undersubscribed and so we have again reallocated funds. The member opposite has been keen on this file, has been a strong critic in debate, and has gone through the supplementary budget, so if I have missed something where the member opposite feels that money should go, I am open. Let's see where the funds should go and which program in the current budget that would be oversubscribed where the money could be used.

Right now, we are looking at trying to move that money forward so that the partners who are using it have access to that capital at the appropriate time. We are making sure as well that even some of our loan programs are undersubscribed at this time. We want to make sure that we're going back out and having conversations about that. There is a reverse trade show later this fall when we are going to go out and make sure that some of the builders out there do know how to access some of this money so that it gets used by these individuals.

I look forward to maybe some ideas from across the floor.

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the reason the Premier refuses to answer is because he knows that the number of obligations versus the number of approvals is embarrassing. There were 40 applications made on the program and there was only one project approved. Given the urgency to get more housing built in the Yukon, perhaps the Premier should be better supporting Yukoners building homes.

Would it not be better to change the program criteria to better suit applicants and get housing built? Why did the Premier choose to cut millions in capital from the housing budget instead of looking at changes to help Yukoners build more houses this year?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: It makes for great political fodder, but the reality is that I think the member opposite is saying that she wants me in the political role to step in and change these particular criteria for risk. She wants to increase the risk that has been put out. I guess that is what it is: Increase the risk of the program. So, we'll go back and have that discussion with the folks at Yukon Housing Corporation; we will let them know. They will, of course, over the next year, be coming in here. We will let them know that there is a lack of confidence in their ability and that their tolerance of risk is not appropriate.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 34: *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 34, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Silver.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 34, entitled *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Finance that Bill No. 34, entitled *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise this afternoon to begin debate on the *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*.

Bill No. 34 introduces a range of changes to three separate Yukon statutes. These are the *Income Tax Act*, the *Yukon Government Carbon Price Rebate Act*, and the *Financial*

Administration Act. These amendments are technical in nature and they are meant to update outdated wording or address gaps that have been discovered since the legislation was last updated.

I will speak to the specifics in Committee of the Whole, but I will give an overview of the proposed changes in the order of amendments that affect the public most.

First, we are making a number of amendments to the *Income Tax Act*. Out of all of the Yukon government legislation, this is the one that gets the most frequent updates, since we need to align our tax rolls with the federal *Income Tax Act*. Clarity here is especially important. We don't want to create contradictory rules for people filing their taxes. Not addressing changes could potentially lead to inconsistencies with federal legislation. As a result, the Canada Revenue Agency administers and enforces the Yukon *Income Tax Act*, meaning that harmony is extremely important here. That being said, these proposed changes are largely administrative in nature. The most significant change is to line up legislation with the Canada Revenue Agency's current practice of providing full tax credits for a caregiver of an infirm child, employment amounts, and children's arts amounts to Yukon residents who file taxes in more than one jurisdiction. Correcting this oversight will ensure that people who reside in the Yukon at the end of the year will have access to these tax credits and is in line with how the Yukon has treated other credits for people in this situation. The change will apply retroactively to when the credits become available as well.

We are also bringing the act in line with federal rules for people who are not Yukon residents at the end of the year. This includes individuals who file taxes in multiple jurisdictions and pay more than 90 percent of their taxes to Yukon. This would allow them to claim pension and adoption credits without worrying about reductions.

There were some changes to federal Bill C-32 in 2022 that we still have to address in the Yukon *Income Tax Act* specifically ensuring certain sections applied to trusts and estates, as well as individuals. We will be adding references to this in this act. We are adding a reference to the federal legislation about notices of determination made under the general anti-avoidance rule. We are also making minor improvements in the French translation of the act.

Finally, we are making two changes to the act that speak to the consequences of Bill No. 21 which this Legislature passed last fall. Bill No. 21 covered carbon rebate amendments and included provisions to prevent businesses from claiming both general and mining business rebates. It was determined that these provisions could reduce the carbon rebate for some mining businesses, so it was important to clean that up. We propose adjusting the *Income Tax Act* to change the definitions and formulas for Yukon mining assets to make sure that this doesn't happen.

We are not aware of any company that could claim both a general business rate and the mining business rate; however, we want to make sure that the act precisely addresses any situation in the future where one company is entitled to both credits. Bill No. 21 also affects the *Yukon Government Carbon Price*

Rebate Act, so we are proposing a similar change to account for the same issue with the same effective date.

This brings us to the *Financial Administration Act*. We are proposing a number of amendments to bring the act up to date with current practices in the Government of Yukon and removing references to legislation that no longer exists. Central Stores kept inventories of office supplies and other items for distribution to government offices and program areas. Central Stores stopped keeping these inventories in 2019. At the same time, the wide range of printing services offered by the King's Printer narrowed to printing just sensitive material in-house. All confidential printing is sourced through the private sector.

The Government of Yukon made changes to these services to increase opportunities for local businesses and to save taxpayers money. The amendments will repeal the revolving funds for Central Stores and the King's Printer to reflect this reality.

In the same vein, a fund for wildland fire suppression was last used in the 2019-20 fiscal year because these costs are now part of the operation and maintenance estimate for the Department of Community Services, so we will dissolve this fund as well.

There is also a mention of the federal-territorial financial agreement in the *Financial Administration Act*. The agreement under that name ended decades ago and we will update the language to cover the current arrangements and agreements that stand in its place.

Mr. Speaker, that pretty much wraps up the changes that we are proposing for the *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*. While Bill No. 34 has many amendments to legislation, none have a financial impact for the government or for taxpayers. I can provide more details on these amendments during Committee of the Whole. I look forward to discussing them during general debate.

Mr. Cathers: We will have questions regarding this when it gets to Committee. We will support it going forward to Committee but will determine at that stage, after asking our questions, the next steps. I would note that we do, of course, support adjustments to conform with changes to the federal *Income Tax Act* that are intended to avoid Yukoners unnecessarily paying additional amounts or simply not being in compliance with the federal structure. That is something that has happened under governments of all stripes here in the territory. We do, as always, have concerns with any reference to the government's carbon-pricing scheme.

I do have to point out, because of the Minister of Finance's comments as well as those of one of his colleagues during Question Period — I do have to remind the Liberal government that they seem to be living in a world that they have built for themselves where the carbon prices are not having a negative impact on Yukoners through driving up inflation and the cost of everything. As two of my colleagues noted during Question Period earlier today, those costs are —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We seem to be straying from second reading on this act. Mr. Speaker, I would just ask if you could check in as to whether this is still talking to the *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)*.

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

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I am talking to the legislation in front of us. It is, in fact, very relevant to that legislation.

Also, the Government House Leader should know by now that when he calls a point of order, he is supposed to cite a Standing Order, not imagine that there might be a Standing Order.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: This is a dispute between members. There is no point of order.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This legislation in front of us deals with a number of areas. According to the explanatory note, one of the issues that it deals with directly is the Yukon government's *Carbon Price Rebate Amendments Act (2022)*, which is, Mr. Speaker, as you know, very directly tied to the carbon tax and the manner in which it operates.

As two of my colleagues noted earlier today, we have seen a situation now where even Liberal premiers and Members of Parliament are standing up to the federal government and calling on the Prime Minister to reverse increases to the carbon tax because of the impact that it is having. The Atlantic premiers, as well, wrote to the Prime Minister regarding changes to the clean fuel standard, which is effectively a second carbon tax, and noted — and I quote, as my colleague did earlier: "... we are increasingly concerned that federal measures with a known disproportionate impact on Atlantic Canada are proceeding and will take effect on July 1, 2023, resulting in significant price increases for gasoline and diesel." But in fact, as my colleague noted, the impact on the north is higher.

Again, the Parliamentary Budget Officer of Canada as well has noted that the impact of the carbon tax is disproportionately higher in rural areas. I would note as well that earlier this year, the Parliamentary Budget Officer's report regarding the carbon tax undermined —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Minister of Finance, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, the same point of order. The reference to the carbon pricing in this bill has to do very specifically with an overlap between a business rate and a mining rate. It has nothing to do with other premiers and other jurisdictions.

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

Mr. Cathers: On the point of order, like the Government House Leader, the former Premier should know to actually cite a Standing Order when he is calling a point of order.

And the legislation that he tabled deals directly with legislation pertaining to carbon pricing, so I believe that my comments are very relevant to this legislation and to debate at second reading.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: On the point of order, it's a dispute among members.

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to the carbon tax, as I noted, the Parliamentary Budget Officer himself federally has noted that, in fact, contrary to the rhetoric that comes from this Liberal government and the federal Liberal government, most Canadians actually pay more, according to the Parliamentary Budget Officer, in carbon tax than they receive back in a rebate.

This Liberal government also likes to claim — the Finance minister himself said earlier today in Question Period — and if I have missed a word, I will certainly be corrected by the Blues, but I believe his words were — quote: "... all of the money that is being spent in the Yukon is returned to Yukoners..." — in reference to carbon tax. But, Mr. Speaker, in fact, while the Liberal government has consistently and relentlessly claimed that Yukoners get more money back from the carbon tax than they pay, the Public Accounts say otherwise; the government's own budgets say otherwise.

When they have millions of dollars — upwards of \$10 million, with the numbers having been \$12 million to \$16 million — in money sitting in the restricted account that was collected from Yukoners in carbon tax that has not been paid back to them, it's pretty rich for the government to claim that most Yukoners are getting back more money than they pay in carbon tax when the budgets that they table and the Public Accounts that they table prove the exact opposite of that Liberal spin. Most Yukoners are paying substantially more in carbon tax than they are receiving back in revenue, not to mention that this policy increases inflation and is making the cost of everything, including food and other essentials, increase for Yukoners.

With that, I did feel that it was important to correct some of the government's misstatements on this. I would remind the Minister of Finance that, earlier today, he claimed that we had — I'll say that his memory was selective with regard to the carbon-pricing legislation adjustments that were dealt with recently — I believe it was last fall — and remind the government that the reason we supported that is because the government and officials had indicated that if a change were not to be made promptly, businesses that had paid a carbon tax would not get anything back.

Mr. Speaker, I have reminded the Minister of Finance of this in a previous Sitting, but his memory seems to be failing him.

We don't support the carbon tax, but when the tax is being collected, we certainly support money being given back to businesses and to individuals who have paid into it. The better approach would be to not collect the tax in the first place.

Having made those corrections, as I noted, we will be asking more questions during the Committee stage. We will support this moving forward to Committee, but I do have some questions about the legislation itself as well as about the comments that the Finance minister made when he indicated that this legislation is to eliminate funds related to Central Stores and to what used to be the Queen's Printer and is now the King's Printer. Those questions include how much costs have increased to taxpayers as a result of those two decisions by the Liberal government. We know that the elimination of Central Stores has resulted in more people in more departments having to spend time directly involved in purchasing goods, both large and small, and that there has been a loss of efficiency as a result. We also know that the decision to get rid of the Queen's Printer has also had negative consequences, and we would appreciate the government providing us with an accounting of how those two decisions, which they made several years ago, have — if there has been any reduction in costs and if they can also demonstrate where costs have actually increased as a result of those decisions that the Liberal government made.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will wrap up my comments on this for the time being and look forward to receiving that information before the government calls this legislation back for Committee of the Whole.

Ms. White: It pains me to think that in speaking to amendments to the *Financial Administration Act* or the *Income Tax Act* — and I believe there is one more. I will start with those two.

I am actually going to reference the Public Accounts, mostly just to say that the comptroller explained very clearly that businesses hadn't applied for the money but the Yukon government was holding it until they could, in perpetuity.

It is a weird thing to have to talk about here, but I disagree, although I am curious — when we were assured by the Minister of Highways and Public Works at the time that getting rid of both the then-Queen's Printer and government stores would save money — it would be so interesting to know. I think I will save that question for the Minister of Highways and Public Works.

As per always, the discussion and the briefings from Finance when we talk about income tax amendment acts has one of the most passionate-about-taxation-law humans ever to come in and give the briefings. He walks us through complicated ideas in less complicated ways and I do appreciate that. Again, for the amendments that we are talking about today, it's really just to make sure that people are actually able to access the income tax returns that they are entitled to and that people are not able to double-dip if they live, for example, out

of Yukon and earn money in Yukon. It's that they can't actually apply for income tax that they are not qualified for — but making sure that they are able to apply for the pots of money that they are qualified for.

I am not sure how exciting the debate will be when we get into Committee of the Whole, but it sounds like it could be spicy, so I guess I will hold off until then.

I didn't realize that we would be talking about Public Accounts or veering into those things here, but I will just say that the Department of Finance — the comptroller, the deputy minister, and that entire team — work very hard to make sure that Yukoners are looked after, so I do take that a little bit to heart. I just want to make sure that they know that we respect the work they do and understand the amount of effort that goes into trying to get that money back to folks.

We will be voting for this in second reading and we will be voting for this when we get through Committee of the Whole. I guess I look forward to that debate, which is weird, because we are talking about income tax law. I will wait until Committee of the Whole.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Thanks to the Leader of the Third Party for her comments about an extremely dedicated public servant. I would mention his name, but I don't want to embarrass the person as he works very diligently behind the scenes. Really, this is the benefit of being a minister and working with the public servants who do the lion's share of the work before we get to talk about the accolades of the department — the sweat equity that goes into us trying to figure out how to maintain our exemptions and our rebates for the carbon-pricing mechanism — the federal bill. I hold my hands up to the department and to the tax professionals who are in these departments — the person who the Leader of the Third Party is talking about specifically — because we can do our level best to hold our own in conversations about the necessity for specifics in the Yukon that make sense while maintaining a price signal for carbon pricing, because it is extremely important that we do have a price on carbon and that we do pivot, as the world economy is pivoting, to polluter pay and the responsibility therein while trying to make sure that taxpayers aren't responsible for things like emergency preparedness like we talked about today. That's extremely important.

The Yukon Party seems to want to have it both ways. They want us to spend money on emergency preparedness but they also don't want to see the polluter pay. They want to see the taxpayer pay, which is an interesting narrative from the Yukon Party.

There has been a lot of interesting narrative from the Yukon Party today, including the statement: "We don't support a carbon tax", yet, as anyone who has been paying attention to the Legislative Assembly over the years knows, the Vancouver Declaration was signed by the Yukon Party, which commits the Yukon Territory to a carbon-pricing mechanism, yet the

members will sit here and say, "We don't support carbon tax", yet they were the ones who signed us on to begin with.

Again, if it's that they don't support the current one, okay, then tell us what your carbon pricing or your carbon tax would be; otherwise, it's just not worth the debate anymore.

Also, the narrative of correcting the record by saying that we are holding back all of this money for the carbon-pricing rebate is simply not accurate. As the member opposite knows, when you book in Public Accounts, you have to book the money that is spent in that fiscal year, and if it's not spent in that fiscal year, you have to make an account of that. Do we want to hold onto the money that is supposed to be rebated that we worked so tirelessly for to make sure that this money would go back to Yukoners? No, we do not. We absolutely do not. People like the Leader of the Third Party spoke about and that person's team work extremely hard with the Office of Auditor General and with the mining community to make sure we are informing companies that there is money to be had. We are making sure that we get the due diligence out there so we can make sure that this revolving fund decreases every year, but the member opposite is not going to mention that. He's not going to mention that the financial officials have reaffirmed that the applications for 2022-23 carbon rebates are on target and that the surplus in the fund is expected to decline every year — continue to decline. It is going to decline by \$12 million due to a higher business uptake.

Do you know why there is a higher business uptake, Mr. Speaker? It's because of the dedication of the people in the Department of Finance who make sure that this money gets out the door, yet the member opposite would have you believe that we are hoarding that money like they hoarded affordable housing money for years. That is not what we are doing. We are trying our best to get that money out the door, despite what the member opposite says.

Now, back to the bill, which is why we are here today. It is extremely important that we continue to reflect and to work with the federal government to make sure that our legislation is up to date. I will continue to do that, and this is exactly what this *Technical Amendments (Finance) Act (2023)* is attempting to do.

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.

Ms. Clarke: 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.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 34 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 28: *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, we would like to introduce to the Assembly — to my left, Bryna Cable from the Department of Environment and, to my right, Bhreagh Dabbs, who was one of the drafters from the Department of Justice, here to assist me today.

I am pleased to speak today in Committee on Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*. On October 12, I presented a second-reading speech about the *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, which will enable the implementation of a fully modern extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon. I thank the members opposite for their comments and questions raised in the House

during the second reading relating to extended producer responsibility in Bill No. 28. I would like to take a few moments to address them. The questions and concerns raised are details that will fall within an extended producer responsibility regulation. This government appreciates that the minor amendments to the *Environment Act* raise questions about extended producer responsibility more generally.

Last week, the Leader of the Official Opposition remarked that the Retail Council of Canada "... expressed significant surprise to us that a jurisdiction of our size, with our population size, and the size of our economy would consider establishing an EPR model all on our own as a stand-alone model."

I, too, have had a conversation with the Retail Council of Canada at the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment annual meeting in July 2023. I raised an important question to the Retail Council of Canada as well as the two prominent producer responsibility organizations in Canada. I asked about the support of national brand owners for our local franchisees given our small size and remote location. While all industry groups noted the need for more harmonization across jurisdictions, they assured me that national brands would support their regional franchisees.

Yukon government staff who are developing the extended producer responsibility regulations have worked closely with regulators, industry, and producer organizations in both British Columbia and Alberta to find ways to align our system with the well-established systems in southern jurisdictions. In doing so, we hope to make the Yukon system more efficient and draw upon the established administrative and operational systems already developed for extended producer responsibility. From this, we know the national producers are ready to serve the Yukon.

Extended producer responsibility has become the number one way to manage and fund recycling and waste management responsibly in all provinces. We are proud to say that Yukon will become the first territory in Canada to join this well-established system. We understand, as well, that the Northwest Territories is currently amending their *Waste Reduction and Recovery Act* to enable extended producer responsibility.

The Leader of the Official Opposition also expressed some concerns about the costs of extended producer responsibility, indicating — quote: "The idea that local, small businesses just won't be impacted by the cost and that the big companies will simply fork over all this money and pay for the whole system, I think, is naïve and I think it is something that the government needs to be very careful about..."

Extended producer responsibility programs for printed paper and packaging these materials are not expected to increase the costs of groceries and other consumer goods in the Yukon that generate such waste material. This is because extended producer responsibility fees charged in other jurisdictions are already represented in the cost of many of these goods available in the Yukon. These fees are not removed from the cost of these items as it is simply not worth the administrative effort to remove them. The fees placed on these items vary by product or packaging type and can be as low as a fraction of a cent, but, as we heard in second reading debate,

altogether these fees do amount to Yukoners paying an estimated \$1.3 million to \$2.9 million a year in these extended producer responsibility programs that we do not receive services for. As soon as we have extended producer responsibility regulations, that \$1.3 million to \$2.9 million a year that is already being charged on everyday products can be directed to proper collection and diversion services.

Also, the amendments to the *Environment Act* in this Bill No. 28 make provisions for exemptions for classes of steward, including small businesses. While the exact cost of each business cannot be provided at this stage, we want to assure the members opposite that there is a robust consultation phase between the producer responsibility organizations and local business before any costs are determined. This is where business works with business to negotiate and determine the most cost-effective manner to manage recycling. I have met with local businesses and assured them that the Yukon government will be part of this consultation and implementation phase to ensure that local businesses' interests will be heard.

The members opposite have also raised concerns about small business exemptions and how that will work. When it comes to small businesses, the department is proposing to align the Yukon's exemption provisions with other jurisdictions where small producers of printed paper and packaging are exempt from the extended producer responsibility obligations.

Small businesses that import or supply the Yukon with less than one tonne of packaging and paper products or had a gross revenue of less than \$1 million annually are defined as "small stewards" and will be exempt from the extended producer responsibility program. Additionally, registered charities will also be exempt from the program. In addition to the exemption from the obligations of the program, small businesses that generate household-like waste will benefit from reasonable and free access to collection facilities or services provided by the producer responsibility organization. This is a new and unique benefit to our small business community.

Lastly, the Leader of the Official Opposition requested that we make regulations public before they come into effect so that businesses can know exactly what they are dealing with, and that is exactly what is coming. The Department of Environment has been drafting the regulation with care and thought to ensure that the concerns heard through the public engagement period are taken seriously and obviously taken into account. The results of the engagement show that a sustainable recycling system is important to Yukoners. The feedback generated from the public and stakeholder engagement is being incorporated into the draft regulation to include small business exemptions, placing ownership on Canadian brand owners and ensuring that waste is responsibly managed in accordance with the waste management hierarchy system.

The regulation will be available publicly once it has been approved by Cabinet, but again, I want to assure members opposite that a workable extended producer responsibility program will continue to be developed in collaboration with our valued business community, the producer responsibility organizations, and the Yukon government.

The Member for Whitehorse Centre expressed interest in how the extended producer responsibility program will — and I quote: "... make sure that the recycled materials make it all the way back to re-manufacturing and don't just leave the Yukon, where they are out of mind and out of sight..." — or in the reverse order — "... but nothing consequential happens."

Extended producer responsibility regulations are outcome-based regulations. Government establishes and enforces the targets and outcomes needed, and business works with business to find the best way to make that happen.

Producer responsibility organizations are required to consult, develop, and deliver on a stewardship plan that sets out how they will manage the supply and collection of designated materials based on the waste management hierarchy. Far from out of sight or mind, stewardship plans act as a permit to producers before they can even sell their products into the territory. The *Environment Act* contains provisions for compliance and enforcement of the plan. This could include audits, extra reporting, new service requirements, and notices of non-compliance to the public in order to attain compliance with government-established outcomes.

Again, I would like to thank the members opposite for their concerns raised in the House and their support at second reading of this important legislation.

Madam Chair, as we are here today to discuss Bill No. 28, amendments to the *Environment Act* — just a quick summary. The amendments would allow for the establishment of a comprehensive producer hierarchy and ensure that producers conducting transactions outside of the Yukon are captured under the regulation and enable the Yukon government to exempt a broader range of small producers from the extended producer responsibility regime and to resolve an administrative issue to ensure that the regulation is as simple and streamlined as possible.

Yukoners have come to appreciate and expect a modern and comprehensive waste management system, but our current model does not provide the long-term stability and financial certainty that businesses, municipalities, waste management processors, and the Yukon public require. Extended producer responsibility aims to fix that. By legally assigning responsibility for the collection and recovery of materials to the businesses and groups that are most responsible for introducing that material into the Yukon, we will ensure a stable framework for the Yukon's waste management system as it continues to expand to meet the growing needs of our territory.

Extended producer responsibility will also reduce the need for diversion credits, a costly approach to funding our current system where recycling processors are paid credits based on the volume of material that they ship out of the Yukon. This will result in savings for the Yukon government and, by extension, the Yukon taxpayer.

Amending the *Environment Act* this fall will enable the adoption of an extended producer regulation later this winter. Once the regulation is in place, staff at the Department of Environment will begin working with stewards who have been assigned responsibility to start implementing extended producer responsibility programs throughout the Yukon.

Madam Chair, as I mentioned during the second reading speech, stakeholders have had an opportunity to help shape extended producer responsibility and the Yukon government is committed to continuing to work with them to ensure a smooth transition to this new waste management approach.

I will briefly highlight the five areas of the amendment that are proposed. Clause 2 — section 105(a) is proposed to be amended and expands on the definition of “producer” to ensure that persons supplying designated materials into the Yukon are captured under the regulation, regardless of where the supply of material occurred. This section is necessary to ensure that producers are captured under the regulation even if the financial transaction occurs outside of the Yukon. This amendment would ensure that online retailers, such as Amazon, are captured under the regulation — and others, of course.

Clause 2 — section 105(b) is proposed to be amended, which expands the definition of “steward” to ensure that the Yukon is able to assign producer responsibility to groups involved in the design, marketing, manufacture, importation, or supply of a designated material inside and outside of the Yukon.

The existing definition of “steward” is too narrow and would not allow the Yukon government to assign responsibility to brand owners or product designers or franchisors who do not directly supply a designated material to a person in the Yukon. The definition provides a high-level definition of persons who may be captured as stewards under the act and allows Yukon government to further define a steward in the regulation.

Clause 3 — section 109.01 is proposed to be repealed. This section was made redundant with the expansion of the definition of “steward” in section 105.

Clause 4 — proposed to be amended is section 109.02, which will be replaced, and it broadens the Commissioner in Executive Council’s ability to exempt specific classes of stewards from some or all of the requirements of the regulations. While the current list of exemptions in the act may appear exhaustive, there is the potential for future small producers to not be captured by the groups currently listed in the act. This amendment also intends to clarify that the Commissioner in Executive Council can assign responsibility to a class of stewards rather than individual stewards, avoiding the scenario where the Yukon government must list each steward individually in the regulation.

Finally, Madam Chair, clause 5 — section 144 is proposed to be amended and this is intended to ensure that producer responsibility can be assigned to a class of stewards rather than to individual stewards, avoiding a scenario where the Yukon government must list each steward in the regulation.

Those are my preliminary comments at Committee of the Whole. I look forward to debate and answering questions from the members opposite.

MLA Tredger: I will start by thanking the officials for the really great briefing I had, and thank you to the minister for his comments. I have a number of questions. Some of these I did ask during the briefing, but I’m going to ask again, partly

to get them on the record and partly so that I can just confirm that I have understood correctly.

My understanding of the definition of “steward” is that the intent is that the responsibility belongs to the body closest to the manufacturer. For example, for packaging, the person or organization with the most influence over what those packaging choices are so that those decisions can be made by the people who actually have the power to change them — that they can actually change the packaging so that we use less packaging rather than just having to deal with the end result.

I’m wondering if the minister could walk me through sort of an example of how this is going to work. I’m imagining that if I’m a grocery store owner and I sell, among other things, Kraft Dinner, how does this work? How does it end up back with — sorry, I’m going to try to rally my thoughts here. I’m wondering if the minister can walk me through the steps of the process so that I understand how that responsibility gets assigned, how that organization gets informed that they have this responsibility or how they know that they have this responsibility, and how they then end up paying into this — I assume, to the PRO.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The *Environment Act* will allow for a wide range of compliance and enforcement tools. Examples of these tools include audits, investigations, fines, and a public registry of non-compliance. Similar tools are already in use to enforce designated material regulations that obligate non-Yukon companies as well.

The public registry of non-compliance has been a particularly effective tool in other jurisdictions, as the publicly listed infractions are reported to business shareholders. Additionally, producer responsibility organizations are motivated to identify free riders and bring them into compliance in order to ensure that their producer members pay their fair share of costs and not more.

As I said in my preliminary comments, extended producer responsibility programs for printed paper and packaging materials are not expected to increase the cost of groceries and other consumer goods in the Yukon that generate such waste materials. Most large producers in the Yukon are national companies that have already incorporated some of the collection and diversion costs into their product cost, because many southern jurisdictions already have extended producer responsibility in place, which I indicated in my comments as well. Sometimes, obviously, it’s a fraction of a cent for a hypothetical yogurt container.

As well, Madam Chair, the EPR regulations will obligate the highest person on the producer hierarchy first. Usually, these organizations will keep track of their regulatory obligations in each jurisdiction. Producer responsibility organizations also do a lot of the work to inform companies of their responsibilities. If the producer responsibility organizations are not able to work with stewards to bring them into compliance, they will pass on the files to Yukon government for further compliance and enforcement, and the general hierarchy is going to be the national brand owner, and after that, if there is an importer, like an international importer, that would be the next level down on enforcement. If neither

one of those applies, then it would be the retailer, but generally, producers or producer responsibility organizations, on their own behalf, will develop a stewardship plan. The development of the plan will require engagement with stakeholders. The plan will be submitted to the regulator for review and approval. The plan will outline waste-diversion metrics and associated targets — targets for accessibility and service levels of the collection network — and plans for public awareness efforts. The plan will provide financial and operational details, including how the proposed targets will be met and how collected products will be managed at end-of-life, in accordance with the pollution prevention hierarchy. The plans will be reviewed every five years and more ambitious targets may be proposed.

As I also indicated in my preliminary comments, there either are fully operational extended producer responsibility programs in all of the 10 provinces or they are on the cusp of being actualized or operationalized. We are going through the process of additional consultation and creating the stewardship program for the end of 2023 into 2024 and then hopefully wrapping up the process of operationalizing a made-in-Yukon extended producer responsibility program in 2025. There already are and will be great precedents to follow with respect to producer responsibility organizations and how they have — we will be looking pretty closely, as I have said all along, at British Columbia and Alberta.

MLA Tredger: There is lots of interesting information that I would like to follow up on, but first, I would like to go back to this example where I'm trying to understand the steps about what happens. So, if I own a grocery store and I put in an order — say, I want to buy X amount of Kraft Dinner, because that's the example we were talking about in the briefing, what are the next steps after that? Does the grocery store track how much they bought with the cardboard, or is that up to Kraft Canada, in this example, to track how much they have sent to the Yukon? How do they then decide on the fees that they are responsible for, and how does the producer responsibility organization also have that information so that they can follow up with whoever needs to be followed up with?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The short answer to the Member for Whitehorse Centre's question is, yes, it would be Kraft Canada, but the slightly longer answer is that the producer — in this case, Kraft Canada — will be tracking the amounts of materials. The producer responsibility organization — which is well-established, as I have indicated, in the southern provinces — is already working with those companies in the provinces but will be working in the Yukon with stewards to come up with transparent and defensible methodologies for tracking material volumes. It is certainly not up to some of our grocers to — obviously not — it would be mischievous for me to suggest this, but they are not dealing with it on a box-by-box basis. They will be working with the national brand and with the established producer responsibility organizations.

MLA Tredger: I am just going to keep going with this example. The local grocery store which is buying all their products from Canadian chains, assuming they are not importing any, do they have any responsibilities? Are there any administrative or financial responsibilities for them?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will just provide an answer for that question. I anticipate that the Member for Whitehorse Centre will likely have a follow-up, but in the hypothetical that has been provided — and obviously, it is not the case at our local grocers, but generally speaking, a lot of what is sold is a national brand — but hypothetically, if all of their products are captured by national brands, they would not have stewardship responsibility for those items.

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister for that answer. That's helpful.

Is he aware if there are any businesses in the Yukon that will be captured — which are not under the limit for weight or, I believe it was, revenue — that aren't associated with a national brand? I can imagine our local Canadian Tire will have responsibilities, along with the national Canadian Tire brand, but are there any independent local businesses in the Yukon that are going to be captured under this and have either administrative or financial obligations?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes, there would likely be some medium-sized Yukon companies that would be captured under the regulations, but once again, the foreign producer responsibility organization will be part of determining what a fair share of the — what the costs would be. We have certainly heard and are mindful of concerns of there being costs and the proposal is that it's either one tonne of materials or \$1 million of gross sales, which would have to be established, as well, to determine who was eligible for the exemption.

Of course, as I discussed in my preliminary comments, there will be the regulation development process, and at that point, it will be clear who will be in and who will be out. The overarching principle, as I indicated before, is that we would like to identify in that hierarchy as many national brand owners as possible.

Just to be clear, these act amendments will allow for a more stable and robust waste-diversion system to be established in the Yukon, in line with other Canadian jurisdictions. This means that Yukoners will be able to continue to have access to the recycling and hazardous waste collection services that they have come to expect.

For Yukon businesses, these changes will ensure that the regulation will assign responsibility for waste management, as I indicated, to the highest available producer in the supply chain, thus reducing the impact on smaller Yukon businesses.

As I have also indicated, there are baked-in expenses of somewhere between \$1.3 million to \$2.9 million to Yukon taxpayers right now, an inefficient but quite long-standing diversion credit process or scheme that will, at some point, be phased out.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for those answers.

What categories of materials will be covered under the regulations?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The answer to the question is that printed paper and packaging — that would be everything that is currently permissible in the blue box collection system — and then hazardous and special waste, which would include but is not limited to antifreeze, diesel exhaust fluid, lubricating oil,

oil filters, flammable products, toxic products that are defined, corrosive products, domestic pesticide, paints, animal deterrents like bear spray, batteries, lamp products, and other products. So, yes, the answer is that printed paper and packaging, which, of course, includes all of the plastics and would include the soft plastics that have just recently been discontinued and then a fairly exhaustive list of hazardous and special waste. Yes, that would include the soft plastics, which Raven ReCentre has just indicated they are now unable to accept.

MLA Tredger: I was just taking a quick look at the blue bin list of the products they accept. Notably, it doesn't include non-refundable glass or Styrofoam. Would those be captured under these regulations?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Generally, at a high level — and Yukoners will know this, but a potential interruption in recycling services for Whitehorse residents is a symptom of a fragile waste-diversion system in the Yukon that will be stabilized and strengthened through adoption of extended producer responsibility. The act amendments will enable the swift passing a robust extended producer responsibility regulation. This will allow the implementation period to begin, we hope, by the end of 2023 and, in turn, lead to producer-led waste-diversion programs in operation by the end of 2025.

The implementation period will involve the development and approval of detailed program plans and setting up service contracts with the local waste industry. Implementation of extended producer responsibility will ensure that soft plastics, glass, and other hard-to-handle materials — which, I am advised, could include Styrofoam — are recycled or managed properly. In the meantime, the Department of Environment is supporting the City of Whitehorse and the Department of Community Services in charting a path for recycling services over 2024 and into 2025 that will contribute to a smooth transition to extended producer responsibility.

So, the answer, Madam Chair, is that, yes, subject to additional discussions, consultation, and development of the proposed regulations, glass and Styrofoam are contemplated.

MLA Tredger: Does “contemplated” mean that they will be included or that there is the possibility of them being included?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The way we manage and fund our recycling is in a period of transition. The government is working toward creating an extended producer responsibility program to stabilize recycling in the Yukon, but it is important to note that our recycling and waste management decisions are also impacted by external forces. These external pressures influence the day-to-day operations of what can be recycled and how it can be recycled. Our recyclable waste is connected to international markets, which directly influence local waste management operations and decisions.

As Yukoners and members opposite well know, with respect to the last five to 10 years in the recycling market, the global recycling market has certainly been challenging. The extended producer responsibility program places the onus on producers to ensure that the materials they supply to the Yukon are recycled or managed to the highest acceptable waste

management tool within the waste management hierarchy. We recognize that those two materials identified, glass and Styrofoam, are expensive to manage in the Yukon. We anticipate that separate recovery targets may be applied to these materials.

With respect to glass, I am certainly not an expert in this category, but I certainly receive advice from people who are indicating that, although it would certainly be preferable if glass could be recycled — on the hierarchy of concerns, I have been advised that we would like to be able to recycle glass, but it is of limited concern in the landfill, except that, of course, it occupies a fair bit of space.

MLA Tredger: I am on board with the principles of EPR and I am on board with what is trying to be achieved here, so I am hoping that we can have sort of a quick back-and-forth, because what I am really interested in are the details.

I am still not sure — will non-refundable glass and Styrofoam be included in these regulations? I am still not clear.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you to the Member for Whitehorse Centre for the question on this matter. I understand that they do wish to have a definitive answer. Our intention is to include glass and Styrofoam, and it would be in line with the list of materials that BC currently collects.

My only reason for, I suppose, equivocating is that it's certainly recognized that Styrofoam, and certainly glass — there are challenges. But as it stands right now in the proposed draft regulations, Styrofoam and glass are included.

MLA Tredger: I really appreciate the direct answer and I'm glad to hear it. I think that's a great decision.

I am wondering about the percentage of recovery targets for each category. I have a few questions. One is if they will be set in the regulation. Will they be for the entire category of printed paper and packaging, or will they be separated for different materials such as paper, plastics, or soft plastics?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised that they will not be set in the regulations — the targets — but they will be set in the stewardship plan, which will be worked on with Yukon businesses, national businesses, and the PROs — the product responsibility organizations — and they will be, at that point, split into more detailed categories. These categories will be determined during implementation, and we know right now — I'll surely be corrected by my officials — but the diversion rate now is in the range of 30 percent. Yes, the overall diversion rate in the Yukon is approximately 30 percent. We certainly would like that to be higher, and we are cautiously optimistic that this program nationally will incent innovation, and in my discussions with national vice presidents at the CCME — at the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment — they are very much all over the incenting innovation in packaging, because there is a profit motive to be better. There is a push that is already occurring nationally, and we will be part of the innovation — so, less, lighter, more innovative packaging, and ultimately, certainly a higher diversion rate is among the objectives of extended producer responsibility.

MLA Tredger: My understanding is that most other jurisdictions have set in their regulations their recovery targets.

Can the minister comment on why the decision was made to leave that up to the PRO and their stewardship plan?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The proposed changes will enable Yukon to draft regulations that assign producer responsibility in a manner similar to the most modern extended producer responsibility regulations across Canada, like those in Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia.

National industry groups have been calling for greater consistency between jurisdictions, and these act amendments will allow Yukon to align with provinces. In turn, this will contribute to more efficient and cost-effective programs in the Yukon and may allow for greater interjurisdictional collaboration and harmonization. Given the extended producer responsibility programs in southern jurisdictions, the Yukon has an opportunity to work with the developed programs to contribute to an efficient and cost-effective program that allows for interjurisdictional collaboration. Aligning with other jurisdictions can provide benefits such as cost savings, improved outcomes, reduced administrative burden, and increased opportunities for product innovation.

I am advised that only some jurisdictions have actually set targets in the regulations. These approaches then do not include a stewardship plan. In this instance, given that we are the first territory and acknowledging the concerns raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition with respect to the size of our territory and some unique challenges that may exist, I am sure that the officials at the departments of Environment and Community Services are well aware of those somewhat unique challenges.

A stewardship plan approach provides flexibility that the Yukon needs to balance the financial burden on local businesses, service levels, and environmental outcomes; therefore, we are proceeding with the stewardship plan approach that will allow us to obtain robust data for the territory before committing to targets.

So, that is the answer, and as I indicated, I'm advised that only some jurisdictions have actually set targets in regulations, but I can certainly provide a cross-jurisdictional scan of which jurisdictions have regulations and which jurisdictions went with a preferred option of a stewardship plan.

MLA Tredger: With discussion of the stewardship plan, my understanding is that it will be approved by the Yukon government rather than an external body as in some other places. Will that stewardship plan be published publicly, and will the annual reports on it be published publicly?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As it stands right now, I'm advised that the stewardship plan does not need to be — will not be required to be published, but there will have to be an annual report. So, briefly, the regulator will consider the engagement conducted during the plan preparation. The plan is expected to adequately address the stakeholder concerns heard during that engagement. The regulator will consider the effectiveness of each proposed element of the stewardship plan in order to deliver programs to all Yukoners. If necessary, the regulator will seek advice from established, or ad hoc, advisory groups.

Producers, or PROs, on their behalf, will submit an annual report to describe the operational and financial performance of

the extended producer responsibility program, including program performance against approved targets, amounts of material supplied to the Yukon, amounts of collected material, how collected material was managed at end-of-life, and audited financial statements.

To the question about whether there will be annual reports, the answer is yes. It seems like it is proposed that it will have a fair bit of absolutely relevant data and success matrices as to how the extended producer responsibility program is operating in the territory.

MLA Tredger: Will the annual reports be published publicly?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yes.

MLA Tredger: I am glad to hear it. I am a little concerned about, as people read those annual reports, how they will be able to tell the progress if they haven't seen the original stewardship plan.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Just to slightly repeat myself and to provide perhaps some additional information — but I think that the Member for Whitehorse Centre is asking about performance matrices, and I think that I answered it, but I certainly apologize if I haven't, and I can receive more information on the topic.

Producers, or PROs, on their behalf, will submit an annual report to describe the operational and financial performance of the extended producer responsibility program, including program performance against approved targets, amounts of material supplied to the Yukon, amounts of collected material, how collected material was managed at end-of-life, and audited financial statements. I am advised that the annual report will include reference to the targets that have been committed to in the stewardship plans. It appears that there are a lot of matrices or a lot of indicators here as to the objective success or lack of success or effectiveness of the program that hopefully will be captured in the regulations.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for the clarification.

I am still a little bit confused about why the stewardship plan wouldn't be published if the reports that talk about the progress toward that plan are published, but I will leave it there for now for that.

Will there be expectations that the PRO provides recycling collection services in communities outside of Whitehorse? I ask that because Whitehorse has a really high percentage of the Yukon's population, a lot of consumption and sales happen within Whitehorse, and I think that it is quite possible that a PRO could meet their responsibilities, in terms of percent collection, only by providing services in Whitehorse, and that, of course, would leave the burden of all services for the rest of the communities on the Yukon government and the people in those communities, which is something that we are trying to avoid with this regulation.

So, I am wondering if there will be expectations for the PRO to provide recycling collection outside of Whitehorse?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will keep this brief, because I think there's a lot of good work that will be done at the end of this year and into next year, but our goal is for service levels to remain the same or perhaps even improve over time. That will

also be part of the process of developing the stewardship plan. We are certainly cognizant of the fact that communities outside of Whitehorse shall receive appropriate services in their goals to reduce waste, improve waste diversion, and have recycling programs that are appropriate for their communities.

As indicated, our goal is for service levels to remain essentially the same and to work on the stewardship plan with the communities that are outside of greater Whitehorse.

MLA Tredger: On the waste hierarchy, above recycling are reduction and reuse. Will there be goals in the plan for reduction and reuse as well as for recycling?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The extended producer responsibility regime incorporates several accountability measures. Producers must report on program performance every year. As part of the report, producers describe how collected materials were managed in accordance with the reduce-reuse-recycle waste management hierarchy. In addition, there are several federal initiatives underway that will further support the use of recycled resins across Canada, such as rules for recyclability, labelling rules, requirements for minimum recycled content, and the development of a plastics registry.

As I indicated in a previous response, by having this producer hierarchy in place, there is an incentive for the companies that are producing the packaging — and ultimately the waste that will result from the packaging — to be more innovative to make their packaging as effective as possible but as lightweight as possible and as little as possible because, of course, there is an expense and/or profit motive. The early indicators from the provinces are that this is exactly what occurs with respect to incentivizing innovation in packaging.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*.

Is there any further general debate?

MLA Tredger: I would like to ask now about enforcement of the stewardship plan once it's approved by the government. The minister touched on this a little bit briefly earlier, but I am wondering if he can walk me through what happens. I am imagining a scenario where the stewardship plan says that there is supposed to be X-percent recovery in a certain category and the report comes back the next year and says that it is actually not that — that they haven't achieved that target. What are the next steps?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Once you have a stewardship plan in place, then the *Environment Act* provisions for compliance and enforcement of the plan will include — and I think that I have discussed this before — audits, extra reporting, new service requirements, and notices of non-compliance to the public in order to obtain compliance with the government outcomes.

Additionally, the extended producer responsibility regime would incorporate several accountability measures, which I have talked about, but in any event, just to be clear, producers would report on program performance every year as part of the report. Producers describe how collected materials are managed with the most environmentally responsible waste management practices available within the waste management hierarchy, and this hierarchy would prioritize reducing and recycling waste generation to avoid unnecessary additions to the landfill.

There are tools that are already in use to enforce, as I indicated before, *Designated Materials Regulation*, which obligates non-Yukon companies as well. Public registry of non-compliances has been particularly effective in other jurisdictions, as the publicly listed infractions are reported to business stakeholders.

Additionally, producer responsibility organizations are motivated, as I indicated as well, to identify free riders and to bring them into compliance to ensure that their producer members pay their fair share of costs and not more.

As I indicated, I believe, in my preliminary comments, there are 15 months or 18 months of developing a stewardship program, but obviously, the devil will be in the details. As I have indicated previously as well, there is an operationalized extended producer responsibility regime that is in place in British Columbia and Alberta, and, of course, we will take guidance from them but will develop a stewardship plan that is made in Yukon and is cognizant or is always aware of particularities or the unique nature of our territory. Also, taking into account that we are the first territory to embark on this extended producer responsibility regime with a relatively small population and a very large territory, there will be logistical challenges as well.

MLA Tredger: I think what has me concerned right now is that there is a huge amount of power in this process being given to the PRO in terms of defining the targets, setting the targets, and setting the categories and how categories are going to be divided, and especially when we are talking about large companies here — we are talking about national-scale companies — I do believe that companies can have social responsibility as a goal, but ultimately, they are responsible to their shareholders for profits and that is not always compatible with the best possible recycling system. I am really concerned about the amount of power being given to them. I really want to make sure that I understand what happens if they are given that power and they don't live up to it. What will the Yukon government do? I understand that they could do an audit. I understand that they could ask for increasing targets, which doesn't seem like it would fix the problem of not having met the first set of targets. I understand that they could be kind of publicly shamed through telling the public that they haven't met those targets.

Are there any other actions that the Yukon government could take? Could the minister walk me through the escalating steps that would happen in this scenario?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Yukon government will have the ability to review and approve stewardship plans and all of their elements. The minister is intended to have the ability to amend

or revoke the plan, if necessary; however, the Yukon government is planning a more collaborative approach.

The *Environment Act* already allows for a wide range of compliance and enforcement tools. Examples of these tools include audits, investigations, fines, and a public registry of non-compliance. Similar tools are already in use to enforce *Designated Materials Regulation*, which I have talked about and which obligates non-Yukon companies as well. The public registry of non-compliance has been a particularly effective tool in other jurisdictions as well. Additionally, producer responsibility organizations are motivated to identify free riders and bring them into compliance to ensure that their producer members pay their fair share in costs and not more.

So, just to summarize, government approves the stewardship plans; the PROs or the companies are the how.

Just as far as the hierarchy of ultimate enforcement, there are a number of enforcement tools that may be available, depending on the facts. This would likely be the preliminary tool, a request for voluntary compliance under section 158 of the act, moving up to a contravention of the act, regulation, or term or condition of the plan that would constitute an offence so a charge could be laid. Then there could be an environmental protection order, and the biggest hammer, Madam Chair, would be to cancel or suspend a permit. My understanding is that this would be a cancellation or a suspension of a permit to import the goods that they are permitted to import.

I'm also advised that fines under the *Environment Act* range up to \$200,000. It's unlikely that this fine has ever been imposed, but, in any event, I can be corrected on that. The bottom line is that there are significant fining powers under the *Environment Act*.

Just to loop back, Madam Chair — just to be clear, the Yukon government will have the ability to review and approve stewardship plans and all other elements. The minister is intended to have the ability to amend or revoke the plan, if necessary. Once again, just for persons perhaps listening at home, the Yukon government is planning a more collaborative approach when and where at all possible.

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister for that outline. This is my last question, so I will start it by thanking the officials for being here and for answering my many questions, or helping the minister to answer my many questions, and for all the work it takes to get it to this stage. I appreciate that a lot.

Will there be additional capacity required in the Department of Environment in order to review and make decisions about this stewardship plan? Is there a plan to add FTEs, or is it just something that comes up once every five years that needs extra work? Perhaps the minister can comment on that.

Thank you to the minister and his officials.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you to the Member for Whitehorse Centre for her questions and interest this afternoon.

This can be a brief response. Under the *Our Clean Future* funding envelope, I am advised that the Department of Environment has one full-time-equivalent person to oversee the implementation of the stewardship plan. As it stands right now, pursuant to *Our Clean Future* funding from prior years, the

Department of Environment has one full-time-equivalent person to assist and operationalize the stewardship plan.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to thank the staff for coming in today and for their thorough briefing earlier.

I only have a couple of questions, and I guess I will get right into it here. Has the government conducted a thorough cost-benefit analysis and a strategic economic impact assessment of the proposed EPR regulations?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Extended producer responsibility is a waste management framework that provides a long-lasting solution to the underlying structural issues facing the Yukon's recycling system and is intended to reduce the costs of recycling to the Yukon taxpayer. We have all noticed the impact to recycling services over the last year. Most recently, processors announced that they will no longer be accepting soft plastics. Under an extended producer responsibility system, the government can obligate producers to collect products like soft plastics, glass, and other hard-to-recycle materials to ensure that they are designed out of the system, reused, or recycled.

While we have heard widespread support for an extended producer responsibility system during our public engagement period, respondents raised concerns about potential cost impacts to residents and Yukon businesses. Because extended producer responsibility systems are already in place across Canada, as I have indicated — and my friend the Minister of Community Services has indicated — the national chains have already incorporated the cost of funding these systems into their prices.

A recent economic analysis estimated that, collectively, Yukoners are already paying an estimated \$1.3 million to \$2.9 million annually for extended producer responsibility services that the territory is not receiving. In order to ensure that concerned Yukon businesses and recycling stakeholders have the certainty that they need, the Yukon government has maintained an ongoing dialogue in order to address concerns and inform the development and implementation of our system. We are committed to continuing this dialogue up to and beyond the implementation of an extended producer responsibility system in the Yukon.

Extended producer responsibility programs for printed paper and packaging materials are not expected to increase costs of groceries and other consumer goods in the Yukon that generate such waste materials. Most large producers in the Yukon are national companies that have already incorporated some collection and diversion costs into their product costs because many southern jurisdictions already have extended producer responsibility programs in place.

For other materials, costs may be passed down to consumers by fees charged at point of sale or incorporated into the product costs. This supports user pay and user responsibility principles of waste management.

We recognize, however, to the member opposite's question, that inflation has impacted Yukoners, particularly in the last year. In many cases, we already pay higher costs for some paper products and packaging because of the extended producer responsibility systems in other jurisdictions, which I indicated cannot be removed from the system as groceries and

other products get to the Yukon. This is because extended producer responsibility fees are common in other provinces, and large producers do not adjust the price down — often just a fraction of a cent per product. That means that, in many cases, the Yukon is paying for recycling and not getting the corresponding recycling service.

For other types of items captured under the EPR regulations — for instance, the various types of hazardous waste — there may be a new cost attached to the sale of the product, but fees for disposal — for instance, tipping fees of that product — will be removed. The additional cost of new product packaging is directly related to the level of collection service that the Yukon government will require from industry, either in regulation or in stewardship fees.

I am advised that there is a report commissioned by the Department of Environment that can be found online. It is titled *Economic/Financial Analysis of Development and Implementation of EPR in Yukon*.

Just to briefly repeat myself, Yukoners produce approximately 450 kilograms of waste per person per year. I am sure we are right up there globally, but we're certainly right up there on a Canadian basis as well. Among other hopefully intended consequences of this, on a per capita basis, Yukoners will be producing less waste, and the big companies that we all know — the big national Canadian companies — will continue their innovation and make packaging lighter. There will be less packaging because there is a cost associated with it. So, that's it. There is a report entitled *Economic/Financial Analysis of Development and Implementation of EPR in Yukon*.

Mr. Istchenko: Great, there is a report online; I'll have a look at it; thank you.

The minister said that the regs will be available to the public after they are approved by Cabinet. So, can he confirm that there will be a period after Cabinet approves the regs but before they come into force for the industry and the public to review them?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The member opposite is likely well aware that the Department of Environment has been drafting the regulations with care and thought to ensure that the concerns heard through the public engagement period are taken seriously. The results of the engagement show that a sustainable recycling system is important to Yukoners. The feedback generated from the public and stakeholder engagement is being incorporated into the draft regulations to include small business exemptions, placing the ownership on Canadian brand owners and ensuring waste is responsibly managed in accordance with the waste management hierarchy system.

The regulation will be available publicly once it has been approved by Cabinet, but, again, I want to assure members opposite that a workable extended producer responsibility program will continue to be developed in collaboration with our valued business community, producer responsibility organizations, and the Yukon government.

There is a long period of time for this stewardship plan to be finalized and operationalized in the Yukon. I know that the Member for Kluane is usually interested in consultation, which is great, but I can advise that there is a significant consultation

record that has already occurred, between November 1, 2022, and into the end of February 2023, and there is certainly a commitment to continue with that.

If the member opposite is interested, I can provide detail. There were a number of meetings with the extended producer responsibility advisory committee with the Association of Yukon Communities, with the Yukon Recycling Summit participants, Food Producers of Canada, the Retail Council of Canada, the Association of Yukon Communities administrators, First Nation governments, *What's Up Yukon*, Call2Recycle, the Klondike Placer Miners' Association, the Yukon Chamber of Mines, the Canadian Consumer Specialty Products Association, the Village of Teslin, the BC Used Oil Management Association, First Nations, once again, extended producer responsibility advisory committee again, Yukon Chamber of Commerce, meeting with me and various stakeholders, and then during the engagement period, in-person meetings with 18 that probably account for among the biggest Yukon retailers.

I can provide additional detail on that. I guess that's just to say, in answering the member opposite's question, that the engagement — significant engagement and consultation has occurred as well, and it will continue, and it will take a while before the stewardship plan is operationalized. We certainly do not anticipate — there is an intention that there be no surprises.

Mr. Istchenko: That concludes my questioning for today, so thank you. Thanks to the staff who came.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*?

Seeing none, we will now proceed to clause-by-clause.

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the title of Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and the title of Bill No. 28 read and agreed to

Chair: The Member for Copperbelt South has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the title of Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clauses 1 to 5 deemed read and agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, without amendment.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Riverdale North that the Chair report Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Public Service Commission

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would like to begin by welcoming to the gallery today representatives from the Public Service Commission. I have Sherri Young, the Public Service Commissioner, and I also have Ash Kayseas, the Director of Communications, Policy and Change Initiatives, which is a new role for Ash. Great to see him here.

As mentioned previously, the Public Service Commission — the department responsible for the public service — includes a range of government-wide human resource programs and services. I have some notes, but I am going to basically just cede the floor to get to some questions.

We do know that *Supplementary Estimates No. 3* and *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* will provide that extra spending authority that is necessary for the Public Service Commission to fulfill retroactive payments and pay increases for employees of the Public Service Commission for compensation that they earned, or will earn, from April 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024. That amount is \$845,000.

Ms. Clarke: I just have a few questions. I just want to thank the officials who are here today. Thank you very much for coming. I just have a few questions for the minister responsible on the relocation and expense directive.

What is the current relocation and expense directive?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Our government may offer reimbursements of interview and relocation expenses for job candidates — newly hired employees who are moving to the territory from another jurisdiction.

Ms. Clarke: How is it determined who is eligible, and who approves?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I believe that it is set out in the *Interview and Relocation Expense Directive*, and we can get a copy of that for the member opposite.

Ms. Clarke: Do they have a breakdown of the last two years? I am also wondering which departments have used it.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Just so the members opposite know as well, there is a review of the directive that will consider more flexible options moving forward to ensure that we balance the

fiscal responsibility with the ability to attract the right people to meet the operational and strategic needs.

For the 2022-23 fiscal year, interview and relocation expenses totalled \$894,407.27. Now, over the past six fiscal years, the total interview and relocation expenses across the Yukon government averaged about \$8,000 per year and the number does fluctuate year to year. I do have numbers government-wide that I can provide to the member opposite for those years right back to 2017-18. I don't have the breakdown per department, but we could endeavour to get that.

I mentioned the 2022-23 number. The 2021-22 number is \$555,904.68. The 2020-21 fiscal year total expenses were \$827,196.30, the 2019-20 amount is \$1,061,729.06, the 2018-19 amount is just under \$900,000, and the 2017-18 amount is \$639,929.32.

Ms. Clarke: I just have one more question and then I am going to give the floor to my colleague. How does one access this from the Public Service Commission?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, can I ask the member opposite to expand upon what she means by "this"?

Ms. Clarke: I am talking about the relocation and expense directive. How does one access it from PSC?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Each of the departments would be responsible for the dollar values or for the program, but we administer the program — the policy — and the departments specifically will be the ones that do the actual day-to-day allocation of those funds.

Ms. White: Welcome to the officials, of course, and I am pleased to be here to talk about the Public Service Commission.

In the last two to three years with COVID, there were challenges, of course, with folks who were choosing not to be vaccinated. Can the minister share with us how many people were unable to attend work and how many have returned to work since the policy ended for vaccination requirements?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I believe that this was a question that was also asked during the updates for the members opposite. I don't have an update past that, but, at that time, we did let the opposition parties know that no staff were laid off due to vaccine mandates. Employees who did not meet vaccination requirements were placed on leave without pay for the time that the requirements were in place. As of April 2022, the vaccination requirement for most public servants was lifted and most affected employees returned to work. As of July of the same year, 2022, the remaining vaccination requirements of Yukon government employees in high-risk settings were lifted, and any remaining employees on leave without pay were able to return to work as well.

While the data on the number of employees who returned to work is not available, there were 92 full-time employees on leave without pay due to the vaccination requirements as of March 2022 before the requirements were lifted.

Ms. White: I do appreciate that. I'm sure the question has been asked before, but I did not remember the answer. Of those 92, did all return to the Yukon government?

Hon. Mr. Silver: We don't have that number here. All were able to return to work. I don't have the final number of

those who did, but I can endeavour to get that back to the member opposite.

Ms. White: I would appreciate that information. It was a challenging time for everybody across all spectrums.

One of the things I have had conversations about — and people have approached me — are their dealings with respectful workplaces and trying to navigate hard situations, for example, in the workplace, whether it is a disagreement among colleagues or challenges with supervision.

Can the minister walk me through what, for example, an intake into Respectful Workplace looks like or how a person accesses that and what the steps look like? So, what steps are taken with the employee who approaches Respectful Workplace, and what kind of resolutions can we hope to find there?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I will start with GAM policy 3.47 for respectful workplace policy, which was drafted in consultation with both the Yukon Employees' Union and the Yukon Association of Education Professionals to replace the former workplace harassment prevention and resolution policy. The new policy came into force in 2013, introducing appropriate dispute resolution — “ADR”, as we call it — to the process of addressing disrespectful conduct in the workplace.

Since the policy was changed, or introduced, in 2013, it is interesting to know that the RWO has received almost 3,000 requests for service. Many complaint requests are in the form of harassment or bullying — those types of things. Following the assessment of RWO, most were found to be interpersonal conflict, not to say that they all were.

The RWO serves two main service functions for conflict support: One is the promotion, awareness, and increased conflict management skills in the workplace through the educational and supportive efforts; and the other is to implement appropriate workplace interventions in response to complaints or requests. Education and support efforts involve conducting training courses, presentations, and also workshops for employees and managers.

As far as alternative dispute resolution consultation, an initial informal and confidential exploration of an employee's situation and options would be the first step. Conflict coaching is a structured process consisting of private and confidential sessions that allow an employee to proactively develop their own skills to manage an actual or potential conflict. Then the RWO also works through facilitation — a neutral third party facilitates a dialogue between two employees or within a work team. Facilitation is like mediation but less structured. It allows for conversations to be allowed without producing formal agreements, I guess. Mediation is that process where a neutral third party helps parties to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution. Then there is a group process, as well, as far as accessing these services, which is any collaborative process involving multiple parties, including group or tailored initiatives or interventions that help to reveal underlying conflict issues through workplace engagement, followed by the appropriate dispute resolution process from that.

The how is more complicated than just one approach. There are several. It is also worth noting that the Respectful

Workplace Office launched a new online sexual harassment training for employees in the spring of 2023.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

In this job market, it makes sense that we are trying to recruit as actively as possible across different things, and one of the things under — that Yukon government touts — is the flexible work and leave options. One of those things talks about “share a full-time job”. I have had conversations with nurses in rural communities — nurses in charge, actually, in rural communities — who have asked to job share, and they have been denied, and they have actually just left the positions. So, underneath “Share a full-time job”, it says: “Share a full-time job with a colleague or simply reduce your own working hours. You may find these options to be useful when a full-time salary is not a key priority, or when planning a phasing-out of work prior to retirement. Flexible work options are subject to operational needs and would need to be approved by your supervisor.”

In the example that I am using, actually, two nurses had approached about sharing a full-time job, because of the requirements of being out of town and other things, and they were denied. In the end, we lost both nurses.

How do we ensure that one of these things that is supposed to be something that we use for recruitment or retention — for example, sharing a full-time job — is actually given the time or the look-into and it is not just denied? So, instead of having two full-time nurses in a rural community sharing a position, we have no full-time nurses in that community sharing a position, and now, they are being backfilled with agency nurses, which — I mean, I am glad that there are nurses there, but they are certainly not the two who were happy to do the job ahead of time.

So, how do we make sure that, when people are applying for things like flexible work hours, that their requests are taken seriously and viewed with importance, case-by-case, as required?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Madam Chair, I appreciate the question from the member opposite, especially being a rural MLA and especially understanding, in my time as Premier, the Canada health transfer and the *Health Act* in Canada, of equal access to health care services across the nation, let alone into rural communities in the Yukon.

I know that the member opposite does recognize, as well, that it is sometimes extremely hard to recruit for some rural positions in some of the rural communities, but that being said, it is extremely important, as we face these challenges that every government in Canada is facing right now as far as shortages of human resources, to make sure that we do all that we can to staff all positions whether they are challenging or not, such as health care professionals, teachers, because there are extreme labour-market shortages everywhere.

Without knowing the details of this specific case, as I would assume that would be through Health and Social Services, I can talk about when individual departments lead recruitment planning and strategies for their own specific workplaces, the Public Service Commission can support those departments with initiatives to address recruitment and

retention challenges that are specific to all different departments of government but also other challenges of the physical jurisdiction of where these jobs are and the challenges that those departments have.

Some of the initiatives that we would be working on would include streamlining the hiring practices and trying to get through this through process improvements and conducting research to understand the barriers, for example, that Indigenous employees and members of other marginalized groups may experience throughout the recruitment process. As the Public Service Commission, we also can help to focus on psychological health and safety initiatives to help to ensure that our workplaces are welcoming to everyone. We continuously work to ensure that the Yukon government public service is recognized as an employer of choice, as it is, and that the talent of people is attracted locally but also nationally and internationally to meet the operational and strategic needs that we have today and also as we plan for tomorrow.

I will give a plug to yukoncareerpaths.ca. That was recently launched this spring, and the site offers a variety of resources and information for any potential job seekers, including details about benefits and career development that make the Yukon government one of Canada's top 100 employers. The site provides information about living in the territory, including profiles from each of the communities and more information about recreation, about First Nation culture, and it's a great tool that helps us, as the departments seek to fill the positions that are so desperately needed right across all of the communities in the Yukon.

Ms. White: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the minister for that.

The challenge I guess is that the Yukon government touts flexible work and leave options, but I have had conversations with people who have applied for these things and been turned down in what feels to be a very arbitrary way, especially if both people are government employees and both are able to do the work. So, it wouldn't have been a shortage; it would have just been a reorganization of time, but they were denied. Does the Public Service Commission get any kind of information — for example, do departments report back about how many people have requested different leave options or different scheduling options? Is there anywhere within government that is all collected?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would say that the Public Service Commission doesn't have the analytics that would be necessary for that type of data research and work. Those HR concerns would be more specific to each of the departments, which would be a good opportunity, as well, for the members opposite, as the departments appear here, to talk about those analytics per department. You will come to recognize the differences per department in those pursuits.

Again, as the Public Service Commission is a small but mighty team — that's for sure — we work on the policy. For example, there is the *People Plan*. We are engaging to ensure that the public service itself is strong and engaged and able to effectively deliver programs and services to Yukoners. That's our policy. The *People Plan* is a collaboratively developed

human resources strategy that intends to support our ongoing efforts to develop inclusivity, engagement, and also effective public servants, but the feedback loop coming back and the analytics being done after the fact in the Public Service Commission would be a big effort, and we do not have the human resources to do that right now, but we do set the priorities and the policies through these overarching plans. *Breaking Trail Together* is another great example of the work that the department does to encourage Indigenous representation in our government.

With the *People Plan*, there are several priority projects that are underway that we're putting into action, including improving recruitment practices, streamlining the human resource process, and identifying the projects and initiatives that begin to address the issues of everything from cumulative stress to sexual harassment and burnout. Again, we are the policy shop that sets those parameters.

I will also say that, based upon engagement with our other departments in the government, multiple projects were identified and are currently being implemented under the *People Plan*. The current *People Plan* does expire at the end of 2023, and plans are underway to report on the current plan in the spring of 2024. We are designing for a new plan launch for 2024. I am sitting with two people who are extremely excited about the work that's being done on that endeavour. It is a lot of work, but it is work that is relished by the public servants and the Public Service Commission.

Ms. White: The Yukon Employees' Union, in their newsletter on September 15 — the title is "Public Service Commission orders files destroyed, violating the ATIPP Act". Then there is a follow-up on September 18 entitled "Ensuring Transparency and Compliance: YEU Addresses ATIPP Concerns". Then there is one on September 27 that actually has the ATIPP documents. I mean, it has questions about how ATIPP was used.

Has the minister looked into the allegations by the YEU about mishandling ATIPP requests and the situation that happened that they shared in September?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes, to answer the member opposite's question. I will start by saying that all records, including personnel assessments, are retained and disposed of in accordance with the Public Service Commission's records retention and disposition schedules that are governed by the *Yukon Archives Act*. We work according to that act. The disposal of working files, including drafts and duplicates, is authorized under the transitory records schedule. It's important to recognize that we are working inside of the act. We are fully committed to complying with all laws and regulations regarding access to information and the protection of privacy requests.

The information within the YEU newsletter contains some inaccuracies — inaccurate information. However, it would be a violation of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* to get into the specifics of the requests referred to in the newsletter. The commission inadvertently provided a copy of a personnel assessment to their designated access officer — their DAO — in response to an ATIPP request. Now,

personnel assessments must not be disclosed in response to an ATIPP, as per schedule 71 of the ATIPP act, so the Public Service Commission requested that their DAO shred the copy of the personnel assessment to protect its confidentiality — rightfully so and consistent with the ATIPP act. The DAO agreed and removed the copy in their files, given that the Respectful Workplace Office was the custodian of the master personnel assessment. The Respectful Workplace Office retains the original master personnel assessment according to the required retention schedule, so that was not destroyed. There is no active investigation of the Public Service Commission from the Information and Privacy Commissioner with respect to inappropriate disposals of any records.

Ms. White: In the response — probably similar to what the minister has just shared — the YEU does go on to challenge the claim there about that inaccuracy, and they do go into talking about the ATIPP legislation and specifics around requests. So, has there been a conversation with the PSC and the YEU since this happened in September?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Again, I'm not going to share too much more information as it would be a violation of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, but suffice to say, there are ongoing conversations with all union representatives and the Public Service Commission still to date.

Ms. White: I appreciate that. One of the important things when we talk about union representation and we talk about the employer is that there needs to be a relationship of trust. What is the Public Service Commission doing to make sure that this relationship is either rebuilt or continues on?

Hon. Mr. Silver: It has been my privilege to be the minister of this department for a short period of time so far, with a huge responsibility as we were going through collective bargaining and as we prepare for other collective bargaining. The meetings that I have with the Public Service Commissioner and her team exemplify professionalism and the desire to continue respectful dialogue in very, very hard conversations — in very tough conversations — where everybody, at the end of the day, just wants what is best for the public servants. I have never witnessed, in my time, anything other than an effort and a willingness to maintain and continue to maintain those respective dialogues with all of the union representatives. My observations would be that the Public Service Commission and team recognize the tough job that the union representatives have as well.

Ms. White: One of the things that we had discussed previously this year was whether or not the American Sign Language program had been reviewed, especially with those people who were accessing it. I can't remember if, at the point in the spring when we talked about it, it was under review or was going to be reviewed. Can the minister please just refresh my memory on the American Sign Language interpreter and that service?

Hon. Mr. Silver: That is part of our diversity region of the Public Service Commission. It is a permanently funded program and it is not currently under review.

Ms. White: I must have asked for the review. One of the reasons for it was that, in the beginning when that program was

unveiled, people within the deaf community found it really helpful because they could book an interpreter for different times of the day. The interpreter had flexible hours, and if they had meetings, for example, or they were attending events with people, their hours could reflect that.

Does the flexibility for the interpreter still exist for them to work outside of government office hours?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Yes.

Ms. White: That's excellent to hear. I would suggest, though, that, at some point in time, there be a conversation with community members who access that service as I have heard that, at times, there are limitations. I think that if we are trying to build the really inclusive society that I hope we are, we want to make sure that we address any of those barriers and are able to address any of those barriers.

I realize that I could continue asking questions for a while, but it is 5:25 p.m. and I do have an interest in clearing the lines, so I will close the computer and ask the Clerk for the sheet so we can try to get this done before we report progress.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 10?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

***On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$845,000 agreed to
On Capital Expenditures
Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to
to
Total Expenditures in the amount of \$845,000 agreed to
Public Service Commission agreed to***

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Chair, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment. Committee of the Whole has also considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

Written notice was given of the following motion respecting committee reports October 17, 2023:

Motion Respecting Committee Reports No. 6

Concurrence in the *Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges* (Cathers)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 143

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, October 18, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 18, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker absent

Clerk: It is my duty, pursuant to the provisions of section 24 of the *Legislative Assembly Act*, to inform the Legislative Assembly of the absence of the Speaker.

Deputy Speaker takes the Chair

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): I will now call the House to order.

We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would like to welcome, from the band Major Funk, which is here today for our tribute to the Western Canadian Music Awards: Selina Heyligers-Hare and Adrian Burrill.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: There are a number of guests here today. First of all, from the Yukon Energy Corporation, we have Rod Savoie, vice-chair of the Yukon Energy Corporation Board of Directors, and Joseph Fred, a director from Yukon Energy Corporation. We also have the president and CEO of the Yukon Development Corporation, Dennis Berry, and Sara French, the vice-president of the Yukon Development Corporation.

From the Department of Tourism and Culture, we have Eduardo Lafforgue, Akriti, Sarah Marsh, Robin Anderson, and Avery Bramadat.

For the 50th anniversary of TIAY, we have the president, Neil Hartling, and executive director, Dylan Soo.

For the 30th anniversary of the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon, we have Sandy Legge, and bienvenue à JP Laroude.

Applause

Deputy Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Major Funk

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise today to pay tribute to the Yukon band Major Funk. Major Funk has carved a unique and memorable niche in the Yukon's music scene, inspiring a dedicated local fan base with unforgettable live music — live shows of music that they describe as “familiar but fresh, epic but accessible, and dangerously infectious.”

These local treasures have been enjoying a noteworthy year. They inspired crowds to dance around Canada on their first post-pandemic tour. They released their second album, *The In Between*, where they use music to explore what they call the “meaningful moments that are often sandwiched between significant life events.”

They were nominated for R&B Artist of the Year at the Western Canadian Music Awards. This recognition is a testament to the countless hours of hard work, creativity, and collaboration that Major Funk has poured into their craft. Their nomination rewarded their talent, but I would also like to acknowledge their dedication, passion, and unwavering commitment to the art of music.

I recognize and appreciate their belief in the power of music to connect, inspire, and uplift. I would also like to thank them for using their stage to support other Yukon artists through their albums, art, and music videos.

To Major Funk, we say thank you for sharing your exceptional talent with us and for representing the Yukon's vibrant music scene on a larger scale.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to congratulate Major Funk on their nomination for R&B Artist of the Year in this year's Western Canadian Music Awards. The band consists of six members, each bringing a wealth of talent and experience to the stage. The members are: Selina Heyligers-Hare, vocals and keys; Étienne Girard, bass; Adrian Burrill, vocals and trumpet; Brent Gallant, guitar; Toby Moisey, saxophone and flute; and Anders Grasholm, drums.

Major Funk is no stranger to the music scene, having played festivals and shows across the country since 2015. This is the band's second nomination for R&B Artist of the Year, after being nominated for the award in 2021. It is always wonderful to see Yukon artists recognized for their talents on the national stage and there is no shortage of talent in the group. My son, Sean Clarke, and Selina went to high school together. I have watched her perform at school events. I am just amazed at how Selina blossomed into the beautiful artist that she is. A few years ago, a group of my girlfriends would come to her show and dance the night away.

I would like to close with a quote by Major Funk co-founder Étienne Girard: “Music is one way that we find love in the spaces in between, and we make music that makes people want to move.”

Congratulations again on your new album, *The In Between*, and on your nomination. We are all looking forward to seeing your hard work pay off and to celebrating your successes.

Salamat po.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to join in congratulating Yukon's very own Major Funk. There is a lot of great things to say about Major Funk. They are on their second Western Canadian Music Award nomination.

We could talk about their second album that came out in the spring, full of thoughtful lyrics and irresistible beats. Then there is their commitment to collaborating with other Yukoners, from the local producers of their albums to the local filmmakers on their music videos to the album art made by local tattoo artist Kirsty Wells. There are a lot of great things to say about Major Funk. But mostly, I want to say that they throw the best dance party in town.

I say “in town”, but this award nomination shows that wherever they go, people will be grooving to their tunes. Congratulations to Étienne, Adrian, Selina, Brent, Toby, and Anders. You make us proud and, even more importantly, you make us dance.

Applause

In recognition of Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon's 30th anniversary and Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon's 50th anniversary

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to two remarkable milestones — the 30th anniversary of the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon, WTAY, and the 50th anniversary of the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, TIAY. For a combined 80 years, these two organizations have been the voice of the territory's tourism sector, sharing their passions, triumphs, and tribulations.

Founded in 1993, WTAY has acted as an advocate for the Yukon's natural wilderness and the tourism operators who showcase it. The early work of the WTAY led to board members blazing trail at Canada's national tourism organizations. Other highlights include: the Yukon Wild program; WTAY's integral role in the establishment of the Yukon *Wilderness Tourism Licensing Act* in 1999; championing wilderness travel ethics; and, overall, the Yukon becoming renowned as a leading wilderness tourism destination.

I should also acknowledge WTAY's extraordinary work in support of COVID-19 relief and recovery efforts. WTAY, thank you for promoting authentic and responsible backcountry access, keeping our wilderness wild.

Now I would like to speak a bit about TIAY. In 1973, the Yukon Visitors Association was formed. By the 1980s, they had morphed into the TIAY we know today. With over 100 membership organizations from a dozen Yukon communities, TIAY represents the tourism spectrum: accommodations, arts, events, food, beverages, tours, attractions, transportation, and the kitchen sink. TIAY fosters tourism leadership, capacity, and innovation.

Working collaboratively with tourism association partners — WTAY, the Klondike Visitors Association, the Convention Bureau, the Yukon First Nations Culture and Tourism Association, the Yukon Historical and Museums Association, and outfitters — TIAY has ensured that resources and expertise are shared to provide the best support possible to the Yukon's tourism industry.

Highlights include: founding the Klondike Road Relay, which celebrated its 40th anniversary last month; the 2001 Yukon Tourism Marketing Partnership; the annual Yukon

Tourism Gathering; the Yukon tourism training fund; the Yukon Culinary Festival; Meet Your Maker; and more recently, the Yukon recruitment and retention task force to support Yukon tourism businesses and the wider business community in hiring and retaining key staff.

I also want to shout out TIAY and WTAY's work as partners — and architects, really — in our *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy* and, again, for their tireless advocacy through the pandemic. Both have been champions for sustainable tourism. By the way, Yukoners, please take part in TIAY's celebrations at the Old Fire Hall this Friday.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I ask the members of this House to join me in congratulating TIAY and WTAY members, past and present, on their incredible milestones. Thanks to the efforts of both of these organizations, tourism remains a strong, vibrant, and sustainable industry across the Yukon, poised to rebound, grow, and prosper. Thank you to TIAY and WTAY for your unwavering dedication to our extraordinary territory.

Applause

Ms. Van Bibber: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to two organizations that are celebrating noteworthy anniversaries: the 50th anniversary of the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, or TIA Yukon, and the 30th anniversary of the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon, or WTAY.

If one is involved with the tourism industry, I, for one, believe in joining forces with other businesses. The best avenue to connect with like minds is through a structured organization, such as TIAY or WTAY. Since the stampede and the Alaska Highway connected us to southern Canada, we have welcomed visitors. The early years brought the truly adventurous and risk-takers. The Alaska Highway and other smaller roads were not for the timid. Move ahead many decades, and Yukon progressed to chipseal, wider roads, bridges, and so many more conveniences for the travelling public.

Growing up in a small destination like Dawson City, it was earlier than 50 years ago that the locals realized that people needed a bit more care when they came to visit. We dressed in costumes to greet the planes; we refurbished old buildings to replicate the originals and even hosted a Broadway play.

The Klondike Visitors Association was a groundbreaking group and wanted to create a revenue source for their crumbling town, but territory-wide, there was more interest as our visitor numbers grew and, in 1973, TIAY was born to be a voice for various concerns. Today, they provide industry updates, programs, forums to grow and inform, as well as attend trade shows and much more.

WTAY formed in 1993 to encourage best practices for wilderness and guiding businesses that took guests out for adventures in our natural, beautiful wilderness. They encouraged their members to provide the highest quality product and best environmental practices to share while protecting the land.

A few years ago, I was on the board for TIA Yukon — a few years — and enjoyed the time there with the movers and shakers of the day: Goody Sparling, Barry Bellchambers,

Giovanni Castellarin, and so many more that helped blaze the way. I will say that it was the best learning experience for new a new business owner, so I encourage everyone to get involved if tourism is your passion.

We wish you both a happy anniversary and best wishes as you continue to advocate for businesses involved in this important segment of Yukon's economy.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to celebrate two monumental anniversaries within Yukon tourism: the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon's 50th anniversary and the Wilderness Tourism Association of the Yukon's 30th anniversary. For a generation and more, these two industry-led advocacy groups have been the voice for tourism operators and businesses across the territory. They have often worked hand in hand to build a common voice for their members, knowing that the tourism industry's voices are stronger together. We have seen incredible adaptability and innovation from these two groups as they supported their members through the pandemic, and although we aren't up to 2019 numbers yet, with their leadership and advocacy, we are well on our way. So, congratulations to staff and board members both past and present. Thank you for elevating the tourism industry to be front and centre where it belongs.

Applause

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

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have for tabling the *Yukon Development Corporation 2022 Annual Report*, which is tabled pursuant to section 22(3) of the *Yukon Development Corporation Act*.

I also have for tabling the 2022 Yukon Energy Corporation annual report.

Deputy 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

Mr. Istchenko: I rise in the House today to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to reverse its most recent increase to the carbon tax and pause all future increases.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates long-time Yukon artist Jim Robb on his 90th birthday.

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to:

- (1) call for a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine;
- (2) demand and allow for life-saving humanitarian assistance for Gazans;
- (3) advocate for the release of all hostages; and
- (4) condemn all acts of anti-Semitism and anti-Palestine hate.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to:

- (a) share what traffic and safety analyses have been done on Range Road and the new demands for an additional school will place on it; and
- (b) share the results of those analyses.

Deputy Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ strategy

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is my honour to share an update regarding the second annual accountability forum for the Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ strategy.

The forum that took place this week in Whitehorse provided an opportunity for the strategy's partners and contributors to share updates, actions, and progress on both the strategy and the implementation plan. It was also an opportunity for partners, families, and survivors to further contribute to these living documents.

Our government is proud to provide funding for the event, as well as logistical and administrative support. The first two days were open to families, survivors, partners, leaders, and contributors. Both days at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre were incredibly moving, bringing us together to reflect, learn, and strengthen our path forward. The final day, today, is exclusively for families and survivors. Led by the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, today provides an opportunity to connect, debrief, and offer mutual care and support.

The fact that we are holding the second accountability forum highlights the progress that our government is making in partnership with numerous Yukon and national organizations that also care deeply about this issue.

I was so proud to release the Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy in December 2020 with my co-chairs, Doris Bill and Ann Maje Raider, and the many passionate people on our Yukon advisory committee. I was equally proud to release the implementation plan for the strategy this past June.

This accountability forum was our first since the release of that implementation plan. It provided an opportunity for signatories to further explore the work they can support, discover areas where we can raise each other up, and learn about best practices related to the strategy's milestones. This sets out the groundwork for our collaborative efforts throughout the 15-year duration of this implementation plan. The accountability forum included: Indigenous journalist Angela

Sterritt presenting on her award-winning investigative work, including her own book, *Unbroken*; Jennifer Moore Rattray, the federal government's ministerial special representative on the work to create an Indigenous and human rights Ombudsperson; and Diane Strand, executive director for Shāwthān Nāzhì, who presented on land-based healing. There were also panel discussions on healing on the land and the role of media in the context of the strategy and Indigenous representation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we all have a role to play. Accountability is a key action item under path 4 of the Yukon strategy, and hosting an annual forum is an integral way for us to support this action and remain accountable. This forum is about holding our commitment to each other and to our friends, family, and community members. It is about reaffirming our agreement to do this work in a good way, and I know that it will bring us a step closer toward our ultimate vision, which is violence-free communities where Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus people are safe and respected.

Ms. Clarke: First, I need to thank everyone who was involved in the planning and organizing of the second annual accountability forum for the Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ people strategy. As the minister mentioned, it was held over three days this week at the Kwanlin Dūn Cultural Centre and featured important discussions and updates regarding the Yukon's MMIWG2S+ strategy.

I attended part of the forum and heard powerful remarks from Yukon First Nation leaders about charting a path forward — not only for Indigenous but also for non-Indigenous Yukoners. We heard that there are a lot of stories left untold. We need people to tell those stories. We all need to come together to hear those untold stories.

I certainly agree with the minister that we all have a role to play. We need to highlight the work put into this important strategy and follow and support the implementation plan. We certainly support the work of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, which brought this important issue to the forefront.

This implementation strategy guides this work today and into the future. We certainly support the implementation strategy and the work ahead.

In closing, I would like to thank the co-chairs of the Yukon Advisory Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-spirit People for their work not only with the forum but with the strategy and implementation plan.

Salamat.

Ms. White: We thank the minister for her statement and her leadership on this file. More than that, we thank the community, who continues to show up with open hearts and a desire to see real change implemented in the territory with their continued participation in events like this accountability forum.

Sharing oneself deeply and honestly isn't easy, but this is what we continue to see from survivors, families, and community partners who hold the intent and the goals of the

Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ strategy in their hearts.

We are grateful to see spaces where families and survivors are included in a respectful and kind way. These spaces are an essential part of the discussion and the decision-making process. Events like this forum bring women and community members together from all walks of life, various organizations, and communities to network, build relationships, create and expand their support network, and empower each other. This is a beautiful and powerful thing to witness.

Thank you to all of those who supported the important work that has been done this week, and a big thank you to those who continue to show up, even when it isn't easy.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank my colleagues for their comments and support today. Ending the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and two-spirit-plus people requires long-term commitment, collaboration, and resources from governments, organizations, and society as a whole. It also requires urgency.

The MMIWG2S+ strategy is in every mandate letter, as we recognize the vital role that our government plays both in implementing the plan and supporting others engaged in similar efforts. The accountability forum serves as a powerful reminder that we all hold a responsibility to care for each other and our communities.

Today, I was invited to hear the families, as they debriefed and provided feedback to us. It is very difficult to hear the level of trauma and the struggles that we are seeing in all of our communities.

Within the implementation plan, the Yukon Advisory Committee on MMIWG2S+ proposed that the Yukon government lead or co-lead 108 of the milestones. To highlight a few that were spoken about in the forum, under path 1 — which is strengthening connections and supports — work is underway toward developing an inter-agency system to support affected families. So far, we have had really positive discussions with BC and the Northwest Territories, aimed at strengthening our efforts to provide these services to those in need. This will be done by way of an MOU. We also have interest in having discussions with folks in Alaska to form a similar approach to develop an MOU.

Path 2 speaks to community safety and justice. Under this path, several departments have begun conversations around increasing safe, accessible, and affordable transportation. Also, under this path, work to advance the sexualized assault response team is underway, and communities have been engaged.

Another highlight is that the Department of Justice has been working with community safety planning with First Nation governments, including delivering funding through the community safety planning program of up to \$200,000 for each Yukon First Nation to advance community safety planning and implementation.

Under path 3, which speaks to economic independence and education, the Indigenous microgrant program, facilitated by

Tourism and Culture, has provided support to Indigenous arts and culture industries by distributing over 40 microgrants.

Significant efforts are underway in the field of education, including the establishment of the First Nation School Board and the development of 14 nation-to-nation agreements under the joint action plan.

Finally, within path 4, which underscores community action and accountability, we acknowledge the importance of increased representation of Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus people in media, something that we know is needed in effective and respectful storytelling.

I would like to emphasize that it is not only the Government of Yukon that is accountable to families, who are delivering the implementation plan. We know that many other governments and organizations are accountable as well, including the federal government, Yukon First Nations, municipalities, business communities, and NGOs.

I thank you for the opportunity to deliver this ministerial statement today.

Deputy Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Rent control

Ms. Clarke: We are now more than two and a half years into the Liberal government's experiment with rent control. The results do not paint a pretty picture for the Liberals. Data from Statistics Yukon show that none of the results that were promised have come true.

Let's start with affordability. From 2021, when the Liberal rent control policy began, to this year, median rents for all units in Whitehorse are up over 15 percent. That is significantly higher than the rate of inflation over the same period.

Does the housing minister recognize that his failed rent control policy has made renting less affordable for Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In the run-up to the last election and certainly afterward, we recognized that we need to work on the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act*, and that's exactly what we're doing. Stakeholder and First Nation government engagement is continuing. We have already started this work. We launched it in June 2023. The goal is to make sure that we have legislation in the territory that addresses the concerns of both the landlords and the tenants in the territory and makes the system much more fair. Stakeholder and First Nation government engagement will continue throughout the fall, and public engagement will begin early in the new year.

Our aim is to be in a position to table updated residential tenancy legislation in the spring of 2025 that will address the concerns that we are seeing in the rental market.

Ms. Clarke: Let's take a look at the availability of rentals. Last month, local economist Keith Halliday examined the impact of the Liberals' rent control policy. Here was his conclusion of the impact on the availability of rental units — quote: "So, the rental supply Yukon-wide grew slightly slower than population growth. The rent control experiment has not delivered improved supply."

Does the Minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation recognize that his failed rent control policy has made rental units less available for Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think, based on the first and second questions, what I would first point out is we have supported over 470 new housing completions over the last number of years. Also, what we were trying to do is to protect long-term renters. So, when you take the average, what you are also considering are all of the new builds, and all those new builds will bring those units onto market at probably a higher than market rate. At the same time, long-term renters are the folks who have been locked into that relationship with a landlord, and that is where those five-percent rent caps.

I think it is important that we consider that when we take in the information. I think it is a disservice to present those numbers the way the member opposite did. I think anybody listening today can understand that, yes, part of that average would be all of those new units that we have seen — actually more units over the last five years than we have seen over the decade before — so massive growth and lots of support from Yukon Housing.

Of course, we came from a point of recession under the last government to a point where we have seen growth — actually leading growth in the country — so, of course, that has also continued to put more pressure here on our housing stock.

Ms. Clarke: In his article about the Liberal government's rent control policies, Mr. Halliday's analysis shows two important things. First, it shows that rent control has not delivered on improved affordability. Second, it has not delivered improved availability. Rents are up significantly, and the number of rental units is smaller than the rate of population growth. What is worse is his ultimate conclusion — and I quote: "... this suggests the availability problem may get worse in the next few years, especially if the surge in new condo rental slows down."

Will the Liberals agree to stop the failed experiment before it gets any worse?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First of all, I guess I would ask the housing critic: If this is such a failed policy, why did the leader who is sitting next to you commit to doing the exact same thing, and why did he support that, and why are you now flip-flopping and taking one article from the news?

Again, the statistics — playing fast and loose — we have lots of new builds. Yesterday, we saw complete confusion in the line of questioning. Yesterday, I was told that I should be embarrassed, that we should change programs, and the members opposite — at least three in the front bench — had no idea what they were talking about, because they were confused about the program that they were actually criticizing. So, today, yes, you can pick a couple of items from the article. I appreciate the comments, but again, lots of new builds. What we are doing is trying to ensure that those folks — fixed income, long-term relationship with the landlord — have some security in place. We are hearing from them that they appreciate this, and it has given them some safety of not losing their place to live, and I support that decision.

Question re: Rent control

Mr. Dixon: In the last election, the only party that campaigned for rent control was the NDP. The result of that election was that they received the fewest seats and the least votes. When the Liberals announced the imposition of new rent control policies, the Minister of Community Services admitted that the Liberal Party did not support rent caps, but in his words, a deal is a deal.

Now it seems that things have changed. Last week, the Premier told the Legislature that his mind had changed. He said — quote: "... first, we're supporting renters, and my belief in the rent cap has become even stronger..." This is despite all of the evidence that we have seen over the past two years: Rents are up massively; the supply of rental units is tightening — the experiment has demonstrably failed.

So, what is it about these results that has changed the Premier's mind to now support rent control?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Deputy Speaker, again, let's point out that the Leader of the Official Opposition clearly stated to all Yukoners that he would support the CASA agreement if the NDP would put the agreement in place — so, fully support rent caps. Today — a different story — a flip-flop again.

So, here we are doubling down after yesterday. Yesterday, the Leader of the Official Opposition — off-mic, telling me that we needed to change the policies, not even understanding what program that he was speaking about, and now, today, we are here — one thing that was said to the public — to Yukoners — I will support this. We all heard that. Today — coming and criticizing it. I think we see across the country right now massive pressure being put on individuals. We always said that good ideas can come from any corner of this Legislative Assembly, and I will stand up and say that I think — while we are rebuilding the legislation for the *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* over the next 24 months — that this particular item is something that is providing good security for renters. I do stand by that. I think that people would be in a position right now of major vulnerability if it was not in place for long-term renters.

Mr. Dixon: It is clear that the Premier's position has changed since the last election.

The Premier's new-found support of this failed policy is certainly surprising, but now, not only is the Premier supporting a policy that has so clearly failed, he is now doubling down on that policy with a new subsidy program for landlords.

On one hand, he is limiting the amount that landlords can charge, and with the other hand, he is giving them a taxpayer-funded handout. This is inconsistent; it's ironic, but worst of all, it is just plain bad policy.

How can the Premier justify this new taxpayer-funded subsidy that is only necessary because of the very rent control policy that he himself has imposed?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Look, I think that taking any advice on housing from the members opposite would be a failure. I remember — and I think the member opposite, the Leader of the Official Opposition, will remember — what it was like to walk from his vehicle into the Legislative Assembly through

the tent city that was out there after the people of Yukon revolted against what was happening.

Also, I am hearing the chuckles from the Member for Lake Laberge after having Yukoners in outrage, based on the mismanagement of funds that were allocated to the Yukon.

What we have seen is a massive catch-up that has to be undertaken, and we are also seeing a piece of legislation that the Leader of the Official Opposition oversaw as Minister of Community Services that was archaic and has to be modernized. Yes, over the next two years, we will do that work. We will work with Yukoners. We will do the consultation that is appropriate. We will support those individuals who could be in a vulnerable position because of what we saw happening with rent increases. We will continue to look at supporting the increase of supply to keep up with the demand that's here in the market. I also will support a focus on ensuring that, while the legislation is being modernized, our landlords are also supported.

Mr. Dixon: Last week, the Premier made it clear in Committee of the Whole what this policy was about. He said that landlords have made considerable investments in their rental units and that, because of the rent cap, there is now a gap between what they can charge and their rising costs due to inflation. So, in order to make them whole, he is creating a new funding program to subsidize landlords.

The irony is that the only reason they need to be subsidized is because of the very policies that the Premier himself has imposed on them. If the Premier is so concerned about the abilities of landlords to make enough money to keep their units in the rental market, why doesn't he just get rid of rent control? Why is he holding landlords back with one hand and pushing them forward with the other?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Deputy Speaker, until we see significant investment continue into the rental market — where there is enough supply — I don't want to see people lose their homes. That is why.

Question re: Teacher staff housing

Ms. White: The teacher shortage in the territory affects everyone, directly or indirectly. Teachers in rural Yukon lead after-school programs; they become safe adults for students; they volunteer for community boards and events and even in services like EMS. They are an essential part of every community, but too often, teachers in rural communities have no choice but to leave it all behind, because right now, as per government policy, teachers can only be assigned housing for up to three years. That is when they are lucky enough to get a place via the government. In some communities, there are simply no places available for rent. So, after three years, their only option is to leave their position and leave the community that they have come to call home.

Where there are no other options for places to live, why is this government evicting teachers in communities that need them?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The Government of Yukon recognizes that staff housing has a significant role in supporting the recruitment and retention of teachers in Yukon

communities. We are continuing to work within available resources to assist staff in rural communities to meet their housing needs. This is challenging and complex work, as housing supply is limited, especially in rural communities.

Currently, there are 53 Yukon Housing Corporation units in the communities leased to teachers. An additional three units are leased by the department and sublet to teachers in a rural community. As well, three additional units are leased by the department from Yukon Housing Corporation for short-term accommodation needs in Pelly, Ross River, and Old Crow. All other staff have private housing, which they either rent or have purchased themselves.

Teachers' ability to receive extensions on staff housing gives them security and confidence. The Department of Education, Yukon Housing Corporation, and the Public Service Commission created a solution in alignment with this policy where the department will recommend extensions annually on behalf of any teachers subject to renewal.

Ms. White: We can't afford to lose dedicated teachers because of policies that just don't reflect the unique needs of each community. The Liberals have set up a system where teachers in communities are likely to have to leave every three years because renting a place is just not possible everywhere. We have heard from a Carmacks teacher who was facing eviction last May before the school year even ended. She tried to find housing all summer long without luck, so she obtained a grace period, but that doesn't solve the problem. If she cannot manage to find a place, she will have to resign and leave the community.

On top of being a teacher, she is a superintendent for Emergency Medical Services in Carmacks and volunteers with several other community programs. She is already a part of this community and all she wants is to be able to stay. We know that she is not the only one in this situation.

So, will the government review its three-year policy to allow teachers to stay in communities that need them for longer than the grace period that she has mentioned?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, Government of Yukon recognizes that staff housing has a huge role in supporting recruitment and retention of teachers. I have gone through the allocations today already. Teachers' ability to receive extensions on staff housing gives them security and confidence. The Department of Education, Yukon Housing, and the Public Service Commission created a solution in alignment with the policy where the department will recommend extensions annually on behalf of any teacher subject to renewal. This solution ensures that teachers will not receive notices of term end and supports the department's recruitment and retention strategy.

Again, we are working very closely with the Yukon Housing Corporation and the Public Service Commission to ensure that we are meeting the needs of staff. We absolutely know, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, that housing is a very important aspect of retaining and recruiting teachers. We will continue to work as well with our partners and with the First Nation School Board, who are overseeing many of these schools.

Ms. White: The minister likes to blame the lack of teachers on national circumstances, but the reality here in the Yukon is that we are looking at self-inflicted teacher shortages because this government's policies just don't reflect the needs of the communities. The government says that it is trying to recruit new teachers, yet teachers outside of the territory are starting to avoid the Yukon because of the uncertainties in housing.

Teachers in communities don't have guaranteed housing in their contracts. The three-year policy makes no sense for communities that are already critically short of teachers, and an annual extension is not a permanent solution. The Yukon needs a plan in place to keep teachers at their schools and in their communities. A community cannot exist without a school and a school is nothing without teachers.

When will this government provide guaranteed housing for educators in rural communities?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Deputy Speaker, the member opposite is making it seem quite simplistic; it is not. First of all, the reason that there have been three-year terms in place, with the opportunity to extend, is because we have seen teachers in many communities who have stayed in subsidized housing for a long portion of their actual professional career.

I can remember sitting in Watson Lake over the last year and having individuals from the community talk about how one teacher was in a four-bedroom house, I believe, and there were people in that community who needed an opportunity to get that access to housing, sitting there with young children who were underhoused, and they met the criteria.

So, what we're trying to do is ensure that those teachers, after a period of time, commit to that community and that they become part of the fabric of that community.

Concerning Carmacks, after we finished last night, I drove to Carmacks and I sat with mayor and council last night until about 10:00 p.m. We talked about the challenges and also the opportunities in Carmacks. We talked about the lots that have just been let and some of the building that's going to happen, but also, part of the commitment that I made on behalf of Yukon Housing was to ensure that private sector developers who may want to build a duplex or a fourplex — that we can de-risk that by ensuring that we do long-term rent on some of those units so that new teachers have a place to live and that the asset is owned by the private sector — by somebody who is an entrepreneur in that community.

So, we will continue to work on this complex challenge, but we want people to stay and be part of those communities.

Question re: City of Whitehorse drinking water

Ms. McLeod: Many folks in the municipal world, and even staff in the Department of Community Services itself, have been raising an eyebrow about the Minister of Community Services' recent letter to the City of Whitehorse about their drinking water.

The letter has been described as bizarre, and it clearly was intended to antagonize the municipal government, but the letter also seems to include some inaccurate information. For instance, the minister referenced giardia parasite husks being

found in the aquifer; however, earlier this week, city officials clarified this wasn't accurate.

"... I don't think that's language that appeared in any of our reports," said the city manager. Our drinking water is not contaminated, he clarified.

Why did the minister share inaccurate information in his letter to the city?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Madam Deputy Speaker, we are concerned about ensuring that residents of Whitehorse continue to have access to safe drinking water. We are aware of a draft report to the City of Whitehorse that states that Whitehorse's seven drinking-water wells are showing signs of groundwater influence and that giardia parasite husks have been found in samples taken from the aquifer.

This is an emergent health and safety issue facing the City of Whitehorse. Water treatment facilities and utilities are Whitehorse's responsibility under the Yukon *Municipal Act*. The integrity of the city's water system is central to municipal affairs. We look forward to the City of Whitehorse addressing this issue in a timely and responsible manner.

Ms. McLeod: The minister's controversial letter to the City of Whitehorse also made a number of references to boil water advisories. He said that he was — quote: "... concerned that council's lack of support for investment in this area could mean a prolonged boil-water advisory for citizens of Whitehorse."

In response to that, city officials declared that the minister was wrong. The city manager made it clear that Whitehorse was not facing the prospect of a boil water advisory. Yet again, the minister seemed to be sharing exaggerated and inaccurate information.

So, why did the minister share this inaccurate information?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, I just want to reiterate — and I think it's an important statement to make that, right now, the city's water system is safe and we should all be using it with no fear. However, there are concerns that have come before the City of Whitehorse that suggest that it is under the influence — groundwater is under the influence of surface water and that information leads to other things, such as better treatment of our city's water supply.

We provide funding to municipalities for projects that they identify as priorities. When we became aware of the draft report provided by the City of Whitehorse regarding groundwater influence, we looked into their funding requests. The City of Whitehorse identified their infrastructure needs, listing the project for the Selkirk PH second barrier treatment, estimated at a cost of \$56 million, as the 20th of 20 identified priorities. We are concerned about ensuring that the residents of Whitehorse continue to have access to safe drinking water. It is currently safe, but investments have to be made to continue that world — it's one of the best drinking water systems we have in the world. We want to make sure that continues.

For this reason, I wrote a private letter to the Mayor of Whitehorse — which we spoke about publicly on the floor of the House. In it, I raised concerns that, on April 11, the majority of Whitehorse city councillors voted to refer this issue back to

administration due to the substantial estimated cost of the project. We want that project to proceed.

Ms. McLeod: After criticizing city council for what he called second guessing the technical experts, the minister characterized the issue as an emergency. He said — quote: "I am heartened to learn the city has roughly \$70 million in reserved funds for just such an emergency."

In response to that, the city's director of corporate services corrected the minister, saying — quote: "We do not have any particular fund with \$70 million in it waiting to be spent on a project."

So, once again, the minister was inaccurate on top of being bizarre and combative. This letter from the minister is also full of inaccurate information. So, my question is simple: Why did the minister send this combative and inaccurate letter?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will disagree with the preamble that the member opposite is putting before the House. We have seen them, over the last week or so, once and again putting erroneous information before the Yukon public.

We are concerned about ensuring residents of Whitehorse continue to have access to safe drinking water — full stop. For this reason, I wrote a private letter to the Mayor of Whitehorse, which she spoke about publicly on the floor of the House and said that it was a public letter; it was not. I sent a letter to the Mayor of Whitehorse. We communicate on a regular basis. We write letters to one another. We talk on a weekly basis, and I continued that good relationship with a letter to the Mayor of Whitehorse expressing my concerns about the April 11 meeting of the Whitehorse council, where they voted to refer this issue back to administration due to the substantial estimated costs of the project.

The city has had \$3 million set aside to address this issue, starting in the spring of 2022, before the council decision. This funding, earmarked for design of a solution to this issue, had not been spent. We look forward to the City of Whitehorse addressing this issue in a timely and responsible manner with the funds they have available to them.

Question re: Better Buildings program

Mr. Istchenko: So, the Liberal government's Better Buildings program has faced considerable challenges right from the start. First, the minister tabled legislation to create the program without consulting properly with municipalities, as required by the *Municipal Act*. It wasn't until the Yukon Party and the NDP threatened to defeat the bill that the minister agreed to actually go back and consult.

After that, the minister had to amend the legislation on the floor of the House. Now we see the budget for this program being cut by two-thirds. Why is the government cutting the budget for the Better Buildings program?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The amendments to the *Assessment and Taxation Act* and regulations for the Better Buildings program were proclaimed on October 20, 2022. The Better Buildings program offers new low-cost funding to eligible property owners to complete energy-efficient retrofits. This means more property owners will have the means to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint. The

funding is repayable by a local improvement charge attached to the property.

We have worked closely with municipal governments, as partners in this program, and have developed administrative processes to ensure its successful delivery. All municipalities have signed agreements indicating their participation in the program.

The member opposite did reference the to-and-fro between the opposition parties and this government to actually get the program in place. The sad reality is that to-and-fro actually lost a season in which the interest rates were a lot lower, and it has actually impacted the uptake of the program, because interest rates have now gone up.

Even though they are still a good deal, they are certainly not as good a deal as they were. I wish it had come into existence sooner, but we are going to deal with it and make this program great for citizens in that they will save money on their houses and keep the energy use down.

Mr. Istchenko: Well, you can't make a program great by cutting the budget for it.

The most recent budget cut to the program is just the latest in a long history of missteps by the minister that he has made on this file. When he tabled the legislation in the fall of 2021, there was an uproar from municipalities about it. The Association of Yukon Communities, Teslin, Mayo, and Watson Lake all sent letters raising concerns. When the program finally got off the ground, several municipalities wondered if it would even work in their communities. Now we know that the program is undersubscribed, and the minister has had to cut the budget by \$1 million.

The minister said that the goal of this program was to retrofit 2,000 buildings by 2030. How will the minister meet that target if the program is being cut by two-thirds?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: When Yukoners go to apply for this program, they go through the Energy branch across the street at the Energy Solutions Centre. We just have not had a lot of uptake so far. I think that it has to do with interest rates and how busy the building market is right now. I think I announced this in one of the supplementary budget speeches, but we have just had a half a dozen projects so far come through. I have seen the first one that was being worked on in our communities — I think it was the community of Haines Junction — so, it's on its way.

Just because the uptake has been slow, we have just reallocated that money out. It's not that we're not going to do it; we are promoting it, but when people haven't been coming through the door yet, we just adjusted the budget for it — that's all. We are happy to work with Yukoners to retrofit their homes. We think that this is a very good program. We think that there is a great opportunity for Yukoners to reduce their reliance on home heating fuels, for example, and just reduce their energy needs, period.

So, the program hasn't gotten off to as fast a start as we want, but we are ready, willing, and able to work with Yukoners.

Mr. Istchenko: We know that this program has had a long and difficult path and that it has been plagued by

mismanagement by the minister. He failed to consult on the legislation and had to take the rare step of deferring it, then amending it on the floor of the Legislature.

Since the program was created, we have heard skepticism from rural communities about how this program would work in communities other than Whitehorse. We know that the program is undersubscribed and, as a result, the Liberals are cutting the budget to it.

So, can the minister tell us: Since the program was created, how many successful applicants have accessed the program, and how many of those were from rural Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I think that I just said that. I think that there has been roughly a half-dozen projects that are processed and through. The first one that I have seen in our rural communities is now in processing. The first one, I believe, that is there is Haines Junction.

We want this program to go; we welcome Yukoners. Please come on down to the Energy Solutions Centre and talk to the folks there. See what the possibility is. I started engaging on this program — I don't know — three or four years ago when *Our Clean Future* first came out; that is when I began talking to the Association of Yukon Communities and all of our municipalities. If there are folks out there who are concerned about working with the Energy branch, please let me know. It is a great group of public servants who are over there. They really know their stuff, and they want to help Yukoners through this program. So, we welcome Yukoners through the Better Buildings program; it is good for all Yukoners.

Deputy Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 28: Act to amend the Environment Act (2023) — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 28, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Clarke.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I move that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Environment that Bill No. 28, entitled *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Deputy Speaker, I sincerely appreciate the comments and questions from the members of the Official Opposition and the Third Party regarding producer responsibility yesterday in Committee of the Whole. Yesterday, we discussed extended producer responsibility as a framework and what it could look like in the Yukon. So, today, I would just like to take a few minutes to highlight the bill and its context. Extended producer responsibility is a framework that will provide the financial and regulatory certainty to allow the Yukon's waste diversion system to flourish in the long term. It

will reduce costs for Yukon government and Yukon taxpayers and contribute to a greener, healthier future by reducing waste and its related greenhouse gas emissions.

As I mentioned at second reading and discussed during Committee of the Whole debate, we are amending the *Environment Act* to enable the implementation of a robust and modern extended producer responsibility regulation. Without these changes, there is the potential for certain large producers to not be captured under the act and regulations, which could unfairly place the burden of these programs on Yukon businesses and groups that are not the ones who are most responsible for the introduction of materials and waste into the Yukon.

Yesterday, we addressed a lot of components of an extended producer responsibility framework that will be finalized in the regulation and stewardship plans. I want to clarify that the intent of extended producer responsibility is to set up a framework to allow the private sector to take over the collection and recovery of waste. As a result, many of the details of the system will be determined by producers at the stewardship plan development stage. Right now, the regulation drafting is proceeding and will incorporate the input received through the engagement process.

It is expected that the regulation will be in place by this winter. Upon adoption of the regulation, an implementation period of approximately two years will commence. The implementation period will start with stewardship plan development and approval and, in 2025, with the producer-led waste-diversion programs in operation.

The target materials of the extended producer responsibility framework include paper products and packaging and hazardous and special products. These categories include materials you would typically place in a blue bin or would bring to Household Hazardous Waste Day.

As I said yesterday, it is currently our intention to include glass and Styrofoam in our extended producer responsibility system. Producers of these materials, or producer responsibility organizations on their behalf, will be responsible for developing a stewardship plan. The development of the plan will require engagement with stakeholders. This is another opportunity for Yukon businesses to shape extended producer responsibility in the territory in order to ensure that it meets their needs and the needs of all Yukoners.

The plan will outline waste-diversion metrics and associated targets, targets for accessibility and service levels of the collection network, and plans for public awareness efforts. The plan will provide financial and operational details, including how the proposed targets will be met and how collected products will be managed at end-of-life in accordance with the waste management hierarchy where top priority is placed on waste prevention, followed by reuse, recycling, recovery, and finally disposal.

The plan will be submitted to the Department of Environment for review and approval. The review and approval stage allows the Minister of Environment to ensure that stewardship plans align with service level expectations and with our waste diversion objectives. The plans will be reviewed

every five years, and more ambitious targets may be proposed. Once the plans are operational, producers will report annually on their program performance, and these reports are expected to be available publicly.

The passage of this bill will allow the Yukon government to continue to work with the business community, municipalities, recycling and waste management processors, and the Yukon public toward the implementation of an extended producer responsibility system. We are on track to be the first territory to adopt extended producer responsibility and to meet the *Our Clean Future* commitment to have a functioning extended producer responsibility system in place by 2025.

Once again, I thank all members for their contributions to debate at second reading and in Committee of the Whole, and I look forward to the passage of this bill.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to rise at third reading of this bill. We have indicated some concerns that we have around the prospective system that the government is developing. However, we will be supporting the bill today. There is nothing in the bill that we find objectionable; however, as I have said in both my second reading speech and since, we do have concerns about what the government is proposing in the regulations that are not public yet. So, I have, over the course of debate, urged the minister to ensure that future consultation is conducted with the benefit of full visibility of the regulations, once they are approved, before they come into force. I think it's important that both the industry and municipalities and the public have a good sense of what this system is going to look like.

Without seeing the details, it's difficult to comment on, but I remain skeptical that this proposed program won't increase the cost of living for Yukoners, that it won't increase the cost of many goods. I think that any costs that are imposed on producers will be passed down to consumers eventually, and that's a concern that has been raised by a number of other businesses with the government as well.

I note that, in Committee of the Whole, the minister discussed meeting with the Retail Council of Canada during this time and the CCME. He seemed to indicate that the Retail Council of Canada didn't have any concerns or that their concerns have been addressed, but nothing that the minister said during Committee of the Whole, I think, addressed the real concerns that have been raised by the Retail Council of Canada in their submission to the Yukon government on the public consultation. I will quote from that now. This is a letter from the Retail Council of Canada to the Yukon government on February 17, 2023. The quote is: "RCC's primary concern is about the cost per capita of an EPR system in Yukon. Our concern is that it will be high because of low population, low material volumes and significant distances for collection and transportation. In addition, the creation of thresholds for low volume/revenue producers will be extremely complex because an exemption that excludes a small business would likely also exclude many national producers because those producers sell a relatively small volume to Yukon consumers. This means that

customers patronizing a small number of businesses will shoulder the cost disproportionately. Our view remains that one of the best ways of solving the cost and threshold dilemmas is to merge Yukon's obligation and program entirely with either British Columbia or Alberta."

Madam Deputy Speaker, I share the concerns raised by the Retail Council of Canada. I do have questions about what the system will ultimately look like, but again, as I have said, it is difficult to raise those concerns without the benefit of seeing the regulations. So, as I've said, we will vote in favour of the bill today. We generally support what's in the bill that is before us today, but we do maintain concerns with the regulations, and we hope that the government will consult early on those before they come into force.

MLA Tredger: I will start by saying that the Yukon NDP will be supporting this bill today. The Yukon NDP have been advocating for extended producer responsibility for years. We have a really strange recycling system in the Yukon right now, where most of it is done by non-profit organizations. We don't have a mechanism for an obligated funder of producers, so the Yukon government, municipalities, and non-profits seem to work this out between them, which has done really remarkable things for a long time, but it is high time that we moved to a more sensible system. It is really high time that producers started taking financial responsibility for the products that they create.

What is unusual and a bit strange about us discussing this bill today is that most of what will actually determine what the EPR system looks like will be in the regulations, which we aren't voting on today. However, I have learned quite a bit about what the government's intentions for these regulations are over the course of debating this bill. What I have learned is mostly very concerning, so I am going to take this opportunity to encourage them to reconsider a number of the choices they intend to make around the regulations for extended producer responsibility.

I am deeply concerned about the amount of power that is being given to the producers. As we have heard, the plan is that the PRO will submit a plan and propose things like targets. That's quite unusual. A lot of jurisdictions have actually legislated targets. I feel very concerned about leaving the power to submit this plan in the hands of businesses — we are talking national-level businesses here — whose ultimate goal is to make profits, not to protect the environment.

It is this government's responsibility to make sure that we have goals, targets, and metrics that do achieve these responsibilities, but they are being left in the hands of the PROs. I know that the government can approve or not approve them, but at this point, we haven't even heard what the government's targets might be — what they think an acceptable level is.

They are planning to leave the definitions of the categories to the PRO. Yesterday, I talked about how, if you lump all packaging products together in one category, that's a big concern. Paper, for example, weighs a great deal; plastic weighs very little. If you were to set a target that was about recovery of

those materials based on weight alone, you could easily achieve it by only recycling paper and ignoring plastic completely. So, unless those categories are subdivided, they are somewhat meaningless, and that decision is being left in the hands of the producer responsibility organizations.

Furthermore, the stewardship plan — once they propose it and the government agrees to it — is not even going to be made public. The public will not have a chance to see or weigh in on whether they think those targets are appropriate.

I have asked whether producers will have to provide recycling services outside of Whitehorse. The answer is a little bit vague, but it did reference matching current service levels. I think that's a missed opportunity. I have been to many communities outside of Whitehorse in the Yukon where there is little to no recycling available. This is a chance to improve that, but this government doesn't appear to have the intention of making that an expectation.

We have heard a lot about consultation on the stewardship plan, with references yesterday to the stewardship plan being developed in consultation with local and national businesses. What about environmental organizations? What about Raven ReCentre, which has been doing this work for decades? Their mandate is to reduce waste; businesses' mandate is to make money. So, I really worry about whose voices will be included in that consultation and whose voices will make it into the final plan, which will be approved by this government without ever going to the public.

I finally want to bring up — I have heard many times that we are referencing these regulations in British Columbia, and I am concerned about that. British Columbia was the first jurisdiction in Canada to have extended producer responsibility, and kudos to them for paving the way for the rest of us, but being the first means that you are figuring things out for the first time and that there are going to be opportunities to improve. Other jurisdictions — for example, Ontario and Québec — have set much more ambitious targets, and they have more carefully thought-out and progressive regulations. I think that we would be better to look to those other jurisdictions, as we decide how to move forward with this.

So, as you can see, there are significant concerns about the way that this project is progressing. As I mentioned, none of these are in the act that we are debating today. The pieces that are in the act that we are debating today are fine, and so, we will be supporting those changes, but unfortunately, most of what will determine the success of this program will not be debated or overseen by the Legislature or even the public, so I have taken the opportunity today to raise those concerns. I hope that the minister will take those very seriously, as they move forward with the regulation.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the comments from the Leader of the Official Opposition and from the Member for Whitehorse Centre. I certainly take their comments — and I

have heard their comments, which are substantially similar to comments that I have heard at second reading, but of course, the devil will be in the details with respect to the drafting of regulations and the implementation of a stewardship plan, so I won't go into a lot of detail with respect to debate that did occur yesterday.

Just briefly, the producer responsibility organizations are required to consult, develop, and deliver on a stewardship plan that sets out how they will manage the supply and collection of designated materials based on the waste management hierarchy. Far from out of sight or out of mind, the stewardship plans act as a permit to producers before they can even sell their products into the territory. The *Environment Act* contains provisions for compliance and enforcement of the plan. This could include audits, extra reporting, new service requirements, and notices of non-compliance to the public in order to obtain compliance with the government's established outcomes.

I've heard the Member for Whitehorse Centre loud and clear on this topic, and I certainly commend them for their attention, interest, and passion with respect to this file. I am certainly — as well as our Cabinet team and the Member for Whitehorse West, the Minister of Community Services — very interested in moving this file forward in a positive manner. Certainly, we are not necessarily bound by everything that British Columbia has done. There will be somewhere between 18 and 24 months to continue consulting on best practices. If there are better, or objectively better, practices out of Québec or Ontario, I'm sure that the relevant officials and stakeholders will be looking at those as well.

Just briefly for the record, just to conclude, with respect to the five amendments that are taking place today, clause 2 — section 105(a) will be amended to expand on the definition of “producer” to ensure that persons supplying designated materials into the Yukon are captured under the regulation, regardless of where the supply of the material occurred. This section is necessary to ensure that producers are captured under the regulation even if the financial transaction occurs outside of the territory. This amendment will ensure that online retailers, such as Amazon and others, are captured under the regulation.

The next amendment is section 105(b), which will also be amended to expand the definition of “steward” to ensure that the Yukon is able to assign producer responsibility to groups involved in the design, marketing, manufacturing, importation, or supply of a designated material inside and outside of the Yukon. The existing definition of “steward” is currently too narrow and will not allow the Yukon government to assign responsibility to brand owners, product designers, or franchisers who do not directly supply a designated material to a person in the Yukon. The definition provides a high-level definition of persons who may be captured as stewards under the act and allows the Yukon government to further define “steward” in regulations.

Next is clause 3, which is section 109.01 and is proposed to be repealed. This section was made redundant with the expansion of the definition of “steward” in section 105.

Clause 4 is section 109.02, which is replaced, and it broadens the Commissioner in Executive Council's ability to

exempt specific classes of stewards from some or all of the requirements of the regulations. While the current list of exemptions in the act may appear exhaustive, there is a potential for future small producers not to be captured by the groups currently listed in the act.

This amendment also intends to clarify that the Commissioner in Executive Council can assign responsibility to a class of stewards rather than individual stewards, avoiding a scenario where the Yukon government must list each steward individually in the regulation.

Finally, clause 5 — section 144 will be amended. It is intended to ensure that producer responsibility can be assigned to a class of stewards rather than to individual stewards, avoiding a scenario where the Yukon government must list each steward individually in the regulation.

Once again, I would like to sincerely thank members of the House for their time and valuable contributions to the discussions of this bill. This is an exciting step forward in order for the Yukon to have our own extended producer responsibility regime in place in 2025. I look forward to moving this file forward and to reducing waste, reducing consumption, and incentivizing innovation in the packaging of materials.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to a vote on this matter.

Deputy Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Deputy Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Deputy 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. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Madam Deputy Speaker, the results are 16 yeas, nil nays.

Deputy Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 28 agreed to

Deputy Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 28 has passed this House.

Bill No. 33: Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023) — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 33, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Mostyn.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I move that Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Deputy Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It is my privilege to introduce Bill No. 33, which amends the *Registered Nurses Profession Act*. We know how important nurses are to our territory's health care system and the well-being of Yukoners. These incredible, highly trained civil servants are the vanguard of caregiving in our territory, and we need them. We are growing fast, and there is a shortage of health care workers in Canada, which makes it challenging to recruit the nurses we need to provide Yukoners with the health services that they have grown accustomed to.

All Yukon communities — especially rural communities with limited access to health care — require a robust health care system to support them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Registered Nurses Association regulates registered nurses and nurse practitioners in the territory under the *Registered Nurses Profession Act*. The Yukon's regulatory framework for nurses is out of date. It does not reflect current practices in professional regulation, contemporary nurse practitioner practice, and national trends for licensing and labour mobility. The Yukon Registered Nurses Association has asked us to do better. They requested amendments allowing entry for graduate nurses and nurse practitioners as well as internationally educated nurses.

We have listened. These amendments will improve labour mobility and will allow Yukon to attract health professionals under a more flexible system. By amending the *Registered Nurses Profession Act*, we can implement these changes to the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation*. Bill No. 33 will simplify and speed the registration and licensing process for nurses and nurse practitioners in the Yukon and provide much needed support to our health care system.

We have experienced cancellations and rescheduling of surgeries and longer wait times for all services at our hospitals due to staffing shortages. Community health centres have had to close temporarily due to staff shortages and vacant positions and to give nurses some needed time to recharge.

We have outstanding nursing staff but simply not enough to keep up with what is required. Nurses burn out without sufficient rest or support. They retire or simply move elsewhere to pursue other options. There are many improvements needed to support our wonderful nurses throughout the territory. Legislative amendments are part of the solution. This will help attract and retain qualified health care professionals, utilize the

health human resources that we do have to the full scope of practice, remove barriers for health professionals, and protect the public.

The amendments follow through on the Yukon Registered Nurses Association's request to establish four new membership classes to allow registered nurses and nurse practitioners from other jurisdictions, newly graduated students, internationally educated nurses, and student nurses to practise in the Yukon.

I will now take a few moments to talk about the proposed four new membership classes that will provide paths for licensed nurses to work here in the territory.

We begin with an interim class, allowing newly graduated nurses, nurse practitioners, and internationally educated nurses to register directly in the Yukon. Also, applicants waiting for other documents can apply under this class. This reduces red tape and allows internationally trained nurses already working here in other roles to apply. Today, some health care services are limited in the territory, and Yukoners often need to leave for tertiary medical care.

So, we are creating a virtual class. Registered nurses and nurse practitioners from other jurisdictions will be able to provide care for a specified purpose via virtual means, such as telehealth. This will mean less travelling for patients who otherwise would not go out for care. It will also help keep Yukoners in their homes and communities, rather than having to travel for treatment.

We are also creating a courtesy class for licences limited to a specific purpose and time. This allows specialists who practise in the Yukon for a limited time to bring their own specially trained nurses with them — or someone who provides training or workshops.

The student class of licence will allow student nurses to be registered to work here for, say, a practicum. They will practise under supervision and support the health care system. Even during their short practicum time, they will contribute to caring for patients, for Yukoners.

Our government is publicly committed to multi-jurisdictional licensing to reduce barriers and increase access to health care professionals. There are currently national discussions regarding multi-jurisdictional registration that will simplify and speed up licensing and registration for registered nurses and nurse practitioners.

While no model has yet been selected as the national model, the Yukon's legislation must be modern enough to allow us to participate in a national agreement. This will significantly speed licensing of health care providers who are registered and hold a full licence in either the Yukon or any other participating jurisdiction. This is also consistent with the *Canadian Free Trade Agreement*.

To support the new classes and increase mobility, we are removing reference to an annual licence throughout the act and regulation to allow the registrar to issue licences for less than 12 months. Providing more licence paths will help to recruit registered nurses and nurse practitioners in the Yukon. These changes are consistent with my mandate letter, as well as that of the Minister of Health and Social Services. They support the recommendations and overall goals of the *Putting People First*

initiative to remove barriers and improve access to health services.

Registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses rank as the second of eight of the most in-demand professionals for skilled foreign workers in Canada, according to immigration.ca, using data from the federal Job Bank. Specialized health professionals who come to the Yukon for a limited time or provide virtual care to Yukoners will be able to work in the Yukon. Student nurses will also be able to gain their practical experience in the Yukon and potentially come back to stay.

By working with other jurisdictions, we can develop cooperative models of care that address gaps in our health care system and improve health outcomes for Yukoners. This is a national problem and staffing shortages in the health care system are triggering provinces to make multi-jurisdictional mobility agreements, reduce processing time from months to weeks, and introduce aggressive bonuses and hiring programs to attract and retain nurses, nurse practitioners, and internationally educated health professionals, which will improve the overall access to health care in their areas.

Provinces are developing multi-jurisdictional licensing, specifically the Atlantic provinces. They introduced a model for physician licences on May 1. This gives these provinces an advantage in their ability to shift resources in support of each other. In this fast-changing environment, we must be nimble and forward-thinking or we will lose out. For instance, in Alberta, the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta introduced a new streamlined registration process on April 4 for internationally trained nurses. As of May 10, they had already registered 1,413 internationally trained nurses, more than two and a half times the number processed in the last four years combined. Once registered, these nurses began working immediately.

In British Columbia, they received more than 3,200 applications since their new nursing community assessment service was launched at the end of January. On May 1 of this year, Nova Scotia's nursing regulator launched its new licensing system. It received 1,490 applications from internationally trained nurses in the first two days. The new system allows them to become eligible to be licensed in a few weeks, instead of waiting for more than a year as they did previously.

In Ontario, legislation was introduced to allow health care workers licensed in other jurisdictions to work in the province without having to register in their respective health regulatory colleges in Ontario. That's the competition we are up against here in the Yukon. It is critical to make our legislation as flexible as possible as quickly as possible to attract more nurses to work in the territory.

Recent incentives introduced by the Yukon government last winter are good, but we must address all the barriers that nurses face in coming to work here.

The Government of Yukon is acting on its commitment to protect the public and improve the regulation of health care professionals. Once proclaimed, this bill will help the Yukon compete in the increasingly tight market for nursing

professionals. It will also provide the support needed to attract health professionals to the territory.

I want to thank the Yukon Registered Nurses Association for many things but most of all today for their patience as we work to make these amendments. With the association's advice and support, we are amending this legislation to meet the needs of Yukoners, as well as the needs of nurses who are already here or who want to make Yukon their home.

I also want to thank the officials in my department for their incredible work in preparing this bill in such a short period of time. I know how much work went into this, and I really do appreciate all the work they have done in paving the way for better health care for Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I would note, in speaking to this, that we will be supporting this legislation. We recognize that changes were asked for by the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and we will support those being put forward into law.

However, we do have some concerns with this — particularly what is not in the bill, which includes other changes that the Yukon Registered Nurses Association asked for that government chose not to act on.

As well, it's interesting; in the minister's remarks at second reading, he spoke about internationally trained nurses, but in this legislation and in the explanatory note for the legislation, there is no reference to internationally trained nurses falling under the category of student nurses, as his remarks at second reading indicated. Based on the information that was shared with us by officials at the briefing, it was our understanding that this was not being facilitated in the way the minister's remarks would suggest. It seems that either the minister may need to get a briefing to better understand the legislation he tabled, rather than relying on his speaking notes, or perhaps he could explain in detail which clauses of this legislation will actually do anything in relation to internationally trained nurses and how that will occur.

A third and very concerning point that I need to address, and also draw to the attention of media and others listening, is the fact that we were told that the draft legislation was not shared with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and the government does not intend to share the draft regulations with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association. There are two points regarding that which I want to address. One is that there is nothing preventing government from choosing to share the fine print of proposed legislation or regulation with stakeholders who will be directly affected by it. My colleagues and I believe that this is just good practice.

Secondly, in this particular case, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association is not just a stakeholder; they are actually the regulator that will have to be responsible for implementing any legislation or regulation. So, to not share the fine print with them is bad practice, incredibly secretive, and is not in the public interest. I hope the government will reconsider that plan and actually share the draft regulations with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and allow them to share it with their members so that it can be improved by that consultation

with them, as both regulator and stakeholder, before it is enacted.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in this particular area, as I have addressed in the past, we have been critical of the Liberal government for years for their lack of action on the issue of training, recruiting, and retaining health care professionals, and that includes a particular focus in questions that we have asked in the past on both doctors and nurses. Of course, there are many other professions and specialties that the Yukon also needs, but those were where our questions focused in the past in largest part.

Despite the fact that the Yukon Party Official Opposition, as well as health care professionals, have been calling for more action on this area for years and we have specifically and repeatedly called for the development of a new health human resources strategy, it was not until the vacancies in rural nursing hit, by the government's own admission, almost 50 percent before the government realized that they were overseeing a health care crisis that was especially impacting rural nursing and that they finally agreed to develop a new health human resources strategy. We are pleased that they have finally and belatedly recognized this need for action, but it does not excuse being asleep at the switch for six years on this very important issue.

I would also note, as I mentioned — contrary to the minister's assertion — that there's nothing in the explanatory note of the legislation that makes any reference to internationally trained nurses. We do recognize — one thing I do agree with the minister on are his remarks about other jurisdictions that have taken steps to speed up the licensing of internationally trained nurses.

We know that the Province of Alberta and the Province of Nova Scotia, as well as Ontario, have all taken action to speed up the recruitment of internationally trained nurses. In the case of Nova Scotia — which you'll recall, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we have previously identified in an earlier Sitting the steps that they were taking in this area to fast-track the licensing of nurses from a short list of seven countries — as a result, they have had thousands of applicants coming in through that process.

However, what we've seen in the Yukon is no indication, to date, that the government is changing the regulatory structure to speed up the ability for foreign-trained nurses to practise in the territory, other than the Premier's trip to Nova Scotia for a memorandum of understanding and a photo opportunity with the Premier that could have easily been replaced with a phone call to the Premier, which would have achieved the same outcome, that being that Yukon officials would have the opportunity to talk to health officials in the Province of Nova Scotia and seek their advice on how to deal with the issue of expediting the licensing of foreign-trained health professionals.

So, we've seen a lot of show here to date from the government, but what we have not seen is the action that is required in this area.

Additionally, I have to point out that there is the odd situation this fall of the Premier's Asia trip. His trip to India was supposedly to recruit health care professionals, in large

part. The Premier himself confirmed that during debate with my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition on October 16, when my colleague asked — and this is from Hansard, page 3991. My colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition asked the question: "... who picked India? Who decided that Yukon should send a delegation to India?" The Premier replied — and again, I quote from Hansard: "Well, part of what we were doing is focusing on health care attraction. What we're seeing right now is that it is a primary destination to look for health care attraction."

However, the problem at hand is that, if the government hasn't taken the steps to actually allow foreign-trained nurses from India or other countries to move forward in getting licensed to practise in the territory more quickly than the current structure, even if the Premier had been successful in convincing nurses from India to move here to the Yukon, the government is in a situation where they wouldn't be able to allow them to practise anytime soon, so it begs the question: What was the point of the Premier's India trip? Even before the embarrassing situation of the federal government — the Prime Minister — calling out the Indian government and provoking the largest diplomatic dispute between those two countries in history — even before that occurred, it raises the question: If the Premier had been successful in convincing nurses that the Yukon was a good place to move, what would then happen once they came to the territory and found out they were going to have to wait a long time before they would actually be allowed to practise?

In summary, we are looking for more clarity from the government on what steps, if any, they are actually taking to address the issue of expediting the licensing of foreign-trained nurses. If they are taking the approach — as some provinces have — and we have suggested that they consider this in consultation with the YRNA — of developing a shortlist of countries with similar standards in health care education where we are confident, from a government perspective and a regulator's perspective, that they can be allowed to practise in the Yukon and provide the high-quality, reliable health care services that Yukoners need — several provinces have taken that approach — we believe that it is a model worth looking at. But it does importantly require consultation with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and with nurses generally as well to understand how that can be done, potentially, in a responsible way while ensuring the high-quality standards of health care that Yukoners quite rightfully expect here in the territory.

On the issue of health care recruitment and addressing the health care crisis that has grown under the watch of the Liberal government due, in large part, to their lack of action, press releases aren't going to fix the problem.

We need to see action; we need to see details, and it is important that those details and the specific actions taken by government are actually shared with the YRNA and other stakeholders in advance of the government taking those steps so that it is not a situation of the government acting unilaterally in isolation but is, in fact, true collaboration with Yukon health care professionals, particularly in the case of the Yukon

Registered Nurses Association. Since they are actually a self-regulating profession, it is very important that they be involved in developing the details of the legislation and regulation which they are required to administer. It is important that not just staff of the YRNA but also the board and other members have the ability to see what is being considered.

I want to emphasize that we do believe that action is required to address our health care needs quickly, but “quickly” does not mean that government should act unilaterally. It is important that they actually consult with our health care professionals who are affected by it, particularly, in this case, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association.

I look forward to additional information during Committee of the Whole, and we will have a number of questions.

Ms. White: I did reach out to the Yukon Registered Nurses Association when the *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)* was tabled last week. I also asked them if they had a chance to see it prior to tabling, and they said that they were involved and that there was consultation ahead of time, but they didn’t get a chance to see it. So, they had a chance to read it and then we talked again. They said that most of what they had asked for is seen in the amendments before us, and that is a good thing. At the centre of all their work, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association upholds patient safety, cultural safety, and protection of the public. By expanding the definition of who can be registered, we are expanding the number of nurses who will also uphold patient safety, cultural safety, and public protection.

But I do have concerns about what we won’t have a chance to look at, and that is what possible regulations for future things could look at. There was an e-mail sent from an employee at the Department of Community Services that stated that the minister’s intent is to repeal all health professions legislation and replace it with a single act. So, I want to know if the *Registered Nurses Profession Act* will be repealed as part of that process.

The 2021 mandate letter, July 5 — the Premier’s mandate letter to the Minister of Community Services included direction to begin work to revise the *Health Professions Act* to improve how we regulate health service professionals, which brings me to this report, which is called *An Assessment of Yukon’s Framework for Regulating Health Professionals*.

The YRNA was asked to participate in a review process when this report was being done — with other health professionals. When they were going through this process, they believed that if government was going to a separate act that was going to have an arm’s-length regulatory process — away from government — that they were in support of that. So, based on their understanding and their participation in this assessment — the review that was done for this report, *An Assessment of Yukon’s Framework for Regulating Health Professionals* — they passed a motion to dissolve the Yukon Registered Nurses Association in favour of a new arm’s-length-from-government regulatory body for all health professionals.

But it seems that the government has chosen not to do what the YRNA and others had asked for, nor what was

recommended in the report regarding the regulation of health care professionals in the Yukon, and so I do have questions about that.

Is the government planning on becoming the regulator of nurses in the territory as well as other health professionals in the future? Does the minister see a conflict of interest with the Yukon government being both the service provider, the employer, and the regulator all at once? And does the minister think that his department fits the definition of “arm’s length from government”? Again, it is really important to note that the core principles of the Yukon Registered Nurses Association are that of upholding public safety, cultural safety, and public protection. When they participated in the review process, they really believed that those would be core principles that would be held in any path forward.

So, knowing that an e-mail has been sent from the Department of Community Services that said that it is the intent of the minister to repeal all health professions legislation and replace it with one single act, the question begs: Is this act that we are amending right now one of those acts that is going to be removed? If what the YRNA had thought the top recommendation was hasn’t been accepted by Cabinet, what does the path forward look like? How will that work?

We will have questions around that on a go-forward basis. We do look forward to the debate, because we have questions that we would like the minister to answer. But, really, I think that there is a question for all of us in this room, which is: Do we believe that government can be the employer, the service provider, and the regulator all at one time? Because when we look to other jurisdictions, the answer there is no.

So, I look forward to the debate.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As always, it is very interesting to hear the remarks from the Official Opposition on such matters. I noted that the Member for Lake Laberge is again pandemic-washing, trying to strike the two and a half lost years from the record and not give it any credit whatsoever in this House. Of course, I look forward to the discussion we are going to have in Committee in the next little while where we can get into these issues a little bit more robustly.

To the Leader of the Third Party, I appreciate her comments and the fact that she helped correct the record — the incorrect information put forward by the Member for Lake Laberge that there was very little work done on this thing with the nurses. Of course, we worked very closely with the nurses, as did my colleague the Minister of Health and Social Services, who met with the nurses on this and many other issues over the last several months.

Of course, as far as the professional licensing is concerned, yes, we are working on a much more robust, bigger piece of legislation that is going to require a lot more work. This is sort of the first phase of some of that work and, of course, we will get into it in more detail when the Committee comes together.

As far as the Leader of the Third Party's remarks are concerned, we are working with the nurses on some of the concerns that she has raised this afternoon and we will continue to work with them to address them and come to a suitable resolution of those concerns. We will have these much more robust conversations in Committee. I look forward to that discussion.

With that, I am going to take my seat and get on to the vote, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Deputy Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Deputy 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.

Ms. Clarke: Agree.

Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Ms. Van Bibber: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

MLA Tredger: Agree.

Clerk: Madam Deputy Speaker, the results are 17 yeas, nil nays.

Deputy Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 33 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Deputy Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the committee is general debate on Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Women and Gender Equity Directorate

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Chair, I would like to start our debate today by first welcoming our officials from the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, Deputy Minister Sierra van der Meer and the acting director of women and gender equity, Clare Daitch. Thank you very much for being here to assist with the debate today.

I am very pleased to rise today to present first supplementary estimates for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate for the 2023-24 fiscal year. This supplementary funding speaks to the tremendous work that the directorate is doing to support equity for women and gender-equity-seeking organizations in the territory. Like all the work currently underway at the directorate, it has the potential to create real systemic change for Yukoners.

These supplementary estimates reflect the directorate's priority focus on preventing and reducing gender-based violence. We were pleased to announce our bilateral agreement and Yukon's implementation plan under the federal government's *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* on October 11, only a few days ago. I will likely be referring to this as the "NAPGBV" throughout my comments.

Gender-based violence is a significant and complex issue that affects the Yukon at rates three to four times higher than the national average. We were pleased to jointly announce with our federal counterparts that the Government of Canada will be investing close to \$16.4 million over four years to support the implementation of the NAPGBV plan.

I am proud of the work we did with the departments of Justice and Health and Social Services to leverage federal funding to make a positive difference and implement concrete actions in the territory for Yukoners. The plan is focused on three priority areas: increasing prevention efforts, reaching underserved and at-risk populations, and stabilizing the gender-based violence prevention sector.

The four-year implementation plan includes many new programs that will reach underserved and most at-risk populations. In order to meet our commitment under this agreement, we requested an additional \$1.895 million in funding for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, all of

which is fully recoverable under the agreement with the Government of Canada.

We will use \$251,000 of this funding to support two full-time term positions to support the work under the NAPGBV. These positions will help play an integral role in supporting the Government of Yukon's role under the agreement. They will help coordinate, communicate, track, and report on the agreement.

We will use another \$220,000 to conduct a program review and stakeholder engagement on gender-based violence. This program review is necessary to work with the gender-equity sector. It will allow us to do an internal scan to understand what is and isn't working within the sector. We will then use the information that we have gathered with the sector to inform future initiatives under our implementation plan. This will ensure that we are both stabilizing the sector and ensuring our investments are effective at preventing and reducing gender-based violence.

Finally, we are asking for approval to use \$1,424,000 in transfer payment agreements to support new initiatives or to enhance existing initiatives related to victim supports and prevention programming. This amount includes \$60,000 to support the work of the Yukon Women's Coalition, and the remainder will be used for two new funding programs that will be managed by the directorate: victim support and other prevention programs. This exceeds the funding request made by the Yukon Women's Coalition on behalf of the sector.

We are requesting approval for \$175,000 in transfer payment agreements for the fiscal year 2023-24. This will support our work with Canada under the crisis hotline agreement. Again, just like the supplementary funds in the NAPGBV, this money is fully recoverable from the Government of Canada. The funding will support increased call volumes and will also increase capacity under this program. This will go a long way to supporting existing crisis hotlines in the Yukon that are responding to gender-based violence. We had this agreement in place with the Government of Canada since 2022-23, and this will continue until 2025-26.

Our last item is for increases under the collective agreement. We are requesting approval for \$95,000. This is to cover collective agreement commitments.

The tangible actions that the Government of Yukon is taking are important in the fight against gender-based violence in Canada and the territory. We look forward to seeing the positive impact that these initiatives will have. I am happy to now take questions from the opposition parties.

Ms. Clarke: I would like to thank the officials from the Women and Gender Equity Directorate for joining us here today and also for the briefing provided to opposition members.

My first question is under the gender-based violence national action plan, which is NAPGBV. There is \$220,000 in the budget allocated to conducting a program review and stakeholder engagement on gender-based violence. We were informed that this will be contracted out.

Can the minister provide some more information about this contract? Has it been contracted out and to whom? What is the timeline for this review?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Madam Chair, I'm happy to answer the questions about this important new program and initiative that we have underway for the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. We have just, in the last couple of weeks, concluded our discussions with the equality sector to determine what their thoughts and needs are. We have concluded those discussions and are now working toward finalizing the details for such a contract. So, we have not awarded any contract as of yet. We'll be making announcements when those contracts become available to the public.

Ms. Clarke: The eight organizations that make up the Yukon Women's Coalition wrote the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate in response to a meeting with the minister focused on the implementation of the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*.

In this letter, they explained that, in order to participate in a coordinated approach to end gender-based violence, these groups need proper core funding. To quote from the letter: "Core funding for women's sector non-profit organizations is at the heart of achieving the goals of the NAP..."

My question is: Why did the government choose to limit the use of the available funding for these organizations strictly to project funding?

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are doing project funding, as we have identified a need to work with all stakeholders on a program review to understand gaps and strategic investments for the future. While we recognize that there are core funding needs for women and gender-equity-seeking organizations, this will be addressed in the short term through the project funds for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 years. Long-term investments will be considered following program review and engagement.

Our commitment has always been to work with our gender-equity-seeking organizations and to ensure that this sector is stabilized while we go through this review, and we believe that the amounts that will be received exceed the request from the Yukon Women's Coalition.

Ms. Clarke: These women's organizations have also requested a formal working relationship with the Yukon government on the rollout of the national action plan funding from the federal government. In particular, they requested an MOU that would demonstrate their inclusion as decision-makers on prioritizing how the funding should roll out.

My question is: Will this project funding allow these organizations to complete and collaborate on the national action plan, as requested?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I want to, of course, reassure the House that we are working directly with the equality-seeking organizations through the program review and engagement process. We worked closely with them throughout, and the equality seeking organizations really worked closely at the national level to inform the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. I think that the other point is that these negotiations happened across Canada, and they are bilateral agreements between each jurisdiction and Canada.

Again, one of the goals is to stabilize the sector. We are doing that over these first two years. As a result of the program

review and engagement process, we will determine years 3 and 4 in terms of spending, so we are working directly with the organizations through this entire process.

The other part of this is the consideration of other government responsibilities in terms of our relationship and work that we will be doing with this national action plan with Yukon First Nations as well. We just wrapped up the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus accountability forum. I can assure this House that there are a lot of needs throughout the territory, and we need to make the best use of these funds in order to get to the really vulnerable populations who are in immediate need.

Ms. Clarke: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks for that answer. I am going to continue on with the MOU. Has the Yukon government developed such an MOU with the Yukon Women's Coalition? If not, will this be taking place? When does the minister anticipate that being completed?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I believe that the request was for an MOU to be involved in the negotiations for the bilateral agreement. Again, I have to emphasize that this is a bilateral agreement between Yukon and Canada. We chose the approach that we are taking to work closely with the sector to get resources out to them as quickly as possible as they had urgently requested. This is an agreement, as I have described. Throughout Canada, each jurisdiction has an agreement with Canada and those are all bilateral in nature. I think that Yukon is in a really great position to be able to work directly with our equality-seeking groups along with our other partners to ensure that we are meeting the needs in terms of ending gender-based violence in our territory.

Ms. Clarke: Madam Chair, can I just get a clarification? I heard that there is a bilateral agreement and that this negotiation is between Yukon and Canada. So, is it the Canadian and the Yukon governments, or is it Canada and the eight organizations?

Hon. Ms. McLean: It is a bilateral agreement between Canada and Yukon.

Ms. Clarke: I will move on to another question.

The \$1.424-million transfer payment agreement for the project funding for these organizations works out to \$62,000 to support new initiatives and \$62,000 to enhance existing initiatives within these organizations. This totals \$124,000 for each organization if they subscribe to both funding streams.

I have three questions. Which organizations are eligible for this funding? Does each organization have to apply for each of the two streams of funding? Has the minister considered streamlining this funding to avoid administrative burden on these organizations?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Organizations currently funded on an ongoing basis by the Women and Gender Equity Directorate can apply for funding related to projects that provide supports to victims and survivors of gender-based violence as well as their families. I will name these organizations: the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council, the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society, the Yukon Status of Women Council, les Essentielles, the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, Yukon Women in Trades and

Technology, Queer Yukon Society, Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, and the Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition. What is available — I believe that there was a correction made within the briefing. It is actually \$69,000 per organization per stream. These organizations are eligible for \$138,000. This is over and above their existing funding.

We have certainly streamlined the application process, because we are already funding these organizations. We already have a lot of the base information, so there has been a simplified funding application process that has been developed that will allow folks to access these funds rather quickly and without a lot of administrative burden. Those are the three questions.

Ms. Clarke: In the briefing, we heard that if these eligible organizations do not use the whole \$1.424 million available, any leftover money will be offered to other NGOs. I am wondering if the minister could elaborate on how that might happen. How do you determine which NGOs would be able to apply? What is the deadline for the current eligible groups to apply? When and how will the other NGOs be notified if they are eligible to apply?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The streams of funding will be open until mid-November. We will know by the end of the calendar year if the funds are used completely by the organizations that are initially eligible. The second intake for NGOs and First Nation governments will be in January. Again, we will determine whether that is needed at that time for this particular part of the fund.

The purpose of the fund is to support two-year projects from 2023-24 and 2024-25 that fulfill one or more of the objectives that we have set out to enhance existing gender-based violence initiatives that support victims, survivors, and their families. Projects that have started and are ongoing are eligible. For example, a program that is being offered two days a week could be offered more frequently, creating new gender-based violence initiatives that support victims, survivors, and their families. This may include, but is certainly not limited to, healing circles, retreats, support and advocacy services, training programs, and professional development. Not eligible for funding are: any organizations not listed above for the initial round; organizations with overdue reporting and financial obligations to Government of Yukon; and any profit-making ventures, fundraising events, and proposals for projects that have been concluded already.

As you can see, we are really working to make this as easy as we possibly can and to really and truly bridge our equality-seeking groups as we go through this review process, which is part of the funding that we are asking for today — for that process to happen.

Ms. Clarke: I just have to repeat one question, because I don't think I heard the answer. I might be wrong.

How will the other NGOs be notified when they are eligible to apply? I heard that the second intake for NGOs would be January 2024, so my question is: How will the other NGOs be notified when they are eligible to apply?

Hon. Ms. McLean: That will be done through a public call for proposals.

Ms. Clarke: I have a few questions about the Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity, formerly the "Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues" or "YACWI".

Can the minister please provide more information on this council's mandate and what work they are doing or have done in the last few years?

Hon. Ms. McLean: What was formerly the "Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues" is now the "Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity". This advisory council has been in place since 1992. So much changed over the last 30 years, including scope and capacity of the directorate — the emergence of equality-seeking community organizations and our understanding of gender really overall.

In recognition of this, we modernized the legislation during the 2023 Spring Sitting. The name of the council was updated to the "Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity". The mandate and membership were also updated to improve effectiveness and better align with the name and mandate. The updated council structure changed, as well, to include two subcommittees.

These changes were developed after years of work with the council members to review the function and focus of the former advisory council. There was extensive work that went into this.

The gist, I think, of the Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity is to advise me, along with all other ministers, on issues affecting women and gender-diverse folks in the Yukon. That is a significant change in terms of being inclusive of the 2SLGBTQIA+ people and communities.

The subcommittee on gender equity will have a focus on equity for women — and the subcommittee on gender equity with a focus on gender diversity and equity for individuals who may face discrimination because of sexual orientation. I will stop there.

Ms. Clarke: As of this spring, there were four vacancies out of eight on the council. Are there currently any vacancies on this council? When will these be filled? What have you done for recruitment to fill these since the spring?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Yes, there are vacancies on the Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity. We are in the process of recruiting new members for the council and its subcommittees. This process has been underway. I am looking forward, of course, to working with the council to ensure that gender equity is fully considered across government. Filling these vacancies is extremely important. There are currently three members who were on the previous Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues who are considered to have been appointed to the Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity and would be eligible for appointment to subcommittees with a focus on equity for women.

Currently, there are eight vacancies on the council. The act requires a minimum of four members and two members on each subcommittee.

The advertising — we have worked with the council. I had a chance to meet with them at their last meeting to discuss all of the changes that have happened. The Women and Gender

Equity Directorate has worked closely with them as well. Those postings will be starting next week.

Ms. Clarke: This will be my last question, Madam Chair, and then I am going to give the floor to my colleague here.

As we have heard, this council will now contain two subcommittees — gender equity for women and gender diversity for individuals who may face discrimination on gender identity and equity.

My questions are: When will these subcommittees be formed, and who comprises them? How many members? Will these committees meet together or separately?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, I have stated that there are eight vacancies on the council. The act requires a minimum of four members and two members on each subcommittee. Also, what the act says is that it will come into force once the members are recruited and appointed to both subcommittees. So, once that occurs, then the act also states that the council and the subcommittees will determine how they interact with each other. We will work closely with them to support them in this regard.

MLA Tredger: I will start by thanking the minister for their answers so far and thanking the officials for the briefing and for being here today. I particularly appreciated getting copies of documents related to the national action plan — the year 1 actions — and there are a bunch of things in that pile of documents that we got which have been really helpful, so I appreciate that.

I am really excited to be here, because there have been two really big things that have happened since the last time we were discussing this department between the NAP and the implementation plan for the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls strategy, so I am really excited that we can discuss both of those today.

I want to start with a connection between the two of them. In the document that is called "National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence — Year 1 Actions," I am looking under "Pillar 4" and it says that the Government of Yukon "... will develop a plan in order to identify items that require YG participation."

I will actually start at the beginning of the item. It says: "Yukon's MMIWG2S+ Strategy includes actions to prevent and address gender-based violence perpetuated against Indigenous women, girls and Two-spirit plus people in the Yukon. Government of Yukon (YG) will develop a plan in order to identify items that require YG participation as well as related work that is underway or planned in response to the Yukon Advisory Committee on MMIWGS2+ Implementation Plan for Yukon's MMIWGS2+ Strategy."

I am excited to hear that, because there is a lot in that implementation plan that does require YG's participation. I am wondering if the minister can tell me a bit more about that plan. It says that it's going to start this year and take multiple years, so I am wondering who is leading that plan, how long it is expected to take, and any more details that she can provide.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, yes, pillar 4, "Implementing Indigenous-led Approaches" — I believe that Yukon has taken

a tremendous lead in the country in terms of how we've developed the strategy for MMIWG2S+. When we were working toward the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*, pillar 4 was really taking in all of the work that we've done, and MMIWG informed that particular pillar. As shared at the accountability forum — and as I shared this morning in the ministerial statement — a lot of work is already underway. This document that was shared is a tool for tracking the progress and also looks at the intersectionality of the strategies, and that is incredibly important.

We felt that when we were advising and the Indigenous groups were advising on the national action plan, it wasn't something that we had to recreate, because we really had done the groundwork through many years of working with families, working with Yukoners, working through the national inquiry, and then working through assessing all of that information and determining what items and what actions should be in our strategy.

We landed on 31 action items under those four areas — four pathways — and then further determined the implementation plan, which includes 180 milestones. As I shared today, 108 of them — the Yukon Advisory Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-spirit People identified Yukon government as either a lead or a co-lead to those 108 items. It's very important that we track and keep track.

It seems complex, but in our world, we've been working on it so intensely for, really, seven years, since the inquiry started, to get to where we are today.

In the last couple of years, the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* — over the last four years, because it would have been a different minister when I started the work at the national level and then bridged it through until now when we took the declaration to end gender-based violence in Canada, and it has resulted in this national action plan. We felt that it was very important and advised at the national level to ensure that we're not having to recreate approaches, especially in jurisdictions that have already defined what those Indigenous-led approaches should be.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that. I understand that a tremendous amount of work has gone into getting us to this point of having this action plan. My questions really are about making sure that we have next steps and that this gets carried forward.

I am wondering about who is going to track all of these 108 actions that are happening across YG. Who keeps track and who plans and makes sure that they are all happening? I know that there are two positions to do that for the national action plan. Are there similar positions to track the progress on the implementation strategy and for *Changing the Story*?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The accountability for, well, not only the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit+ people strategy — accountability has been a foundational principle throughout the entire development of it and is with the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* as well. They are so connected, to the point where we have really committed, within the accountability forum, to also

having a written annual report to be released at the end of the year every year.

That is written into the strategy. Women and Gender Equity Directorate will be the lead in tracking on behalf of our government and ensuring that we are working in such a way that will — because it is such a cross-government commitment and is in every single one of our mandate letters within government.

As we move forward with the Yukon Advisory Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, we are in the process now of — and I did speak about it a few times during the accountability forum. We are working to now re-vision that Yukon advisory committee to work toward really implementing this strategy. We are working closely with all of our partners. We have committed to working toward having a new structure in place by April 1 that will include the accountability, leadership, and the technical side of implementing this, because there are many, many partners in this. The advisory committee has identified different leads on a number of these initiatives that include a number of milestones. At the technical level is where much of that will be sorted out in terms of who will be leading and how that will be done. There isn't another, I think, strategy in Canada that is like this. We have not been able to identify one, so this is very different in terms of taking a whole-region approach to addressing these deep systemic issues in our territory.

I know that, even at the national level, we had a great presentation from Jennifer Moore Rattray, who is looking at the establishment of an Ombudsperson for Indigenous matters in Canada. It was a call — I think 1.7 — within the inquiry's final report that is to establish this Ombudsperson. In her report to the Yukon this week, she actually made it part of the recommendations to mirror some of the work that we have done in the Yukon around accountability.

It's definitely a work in progress. We have done this through the entire process, and I think that's another thing I would like to speak to quickly. The Yukon Advisory Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has evolved over the whole time and we have redefined our terms of reference from 2015 to 2023. Initially, they were formed to ensure that an inquiry happened, and then we redid our terms of reference to support the inquiry to happen, then we redid our terms of reference again to respond to the inquiry, and now we are at the stage of implementing. It's part of future-proofing the work that needs to be done.

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister for that answer. I am looking forward to seeing how that council evolves and what shape and form they take. I do think it's going to be important that, within the Yukon government, there is someone or some people who are responsible for coordinating all these many actions through all the different departments in the same way that there are positions to do that for the national action plan.

I hope that this can be prioritized, because there are so many pieces to this, so many different departments, and so many different public servants who are going to have to carry it out. I think it's going to be really important that there is that central piece.

What I would like to do now is talk a little bit more about a couple items from the implementation plan. There are many, many there. I have pulled out a few, which is not to say at all that the others aren't important. I want to start by discussing a few of them, and I am going to start with 2.8a, which is about transportation, because this is actually where we left off in the spring when we last debated this.

I had asked about, in particular, taxi safety. The minister said that she could bring back more information about what was happening within the Yukon government regarding taxi safety at that time.

I am wondering what the Yukon government is doing to ensure taxi safety within Whitehorse and then inter-community transit. Specifically, in the taxi safety report, there were a number of recommendations specifically for the Yukon government. One was that the Yukon government reviews the criteria they use to select taxi companies to transport vulnerable individuals.

I will leave it with that one and maybe the minister can comment.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Ensuring safe transportation has been a long-standing issue in Yukon communities but in the City of Whitehorse as well. I certainly appreciate the report that was released in 2022 by the Yukon Women's Coalition, which reinforces that more work needs to be done to ensure that women and all Yukoners can get where they need to safely. We are very pleased to see there have been steps taken by the City of Whitehorse to improve taxi safety. More work is needed in order for women, girls, and two-spirit people to feel safe while they use taxi services.

Within the strategy, you will see it detailed a bit more in the implementation plan. This has been one of our 12 priority areas. We are looking at this from a number of different perspectives — from the sexualized assault response team and that work that we are doing right now to look at the transportation and communication needs around that work as we bridge it into the communities.

I was very happy to hear Mayor Cabott reconfirming her commitment to the strategy for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus people. This is an area that we will be working closely with the City of Whitehorse on around the taxi services. I think we all have a role to play, but I see that as being one of the areas that the City of Whitehorse — in regard to transportation here in the city — can take a lead on, and we will be working closely with them around this. It remains one of the top 12 priorities within the strategy.

When you go through the strategy, you will see that identified at the top of each one. There was a standalone document for this, and now it's embedded into the whole document.

MLA Tredger: Just to really focus on the Yukon — the things that lie within the responsibility of the Yukon government — has the Yukon government reviewed the criteria that they used to select taxi companies to transport vulnerable individuals?

Hon. Ms. McLean: This is part of the actions that are underway now. Each department, especially the public-facing departments, has a different approach. I think I spoke a little bit about this at our last debate. This is part of the work that is still underway.

MLA Tredger: Does the minister know when that review will be completed?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I didn't hear that; I'm sorry.

MLA Tredger: Does the minister know when that review — the review of the criteria that YG uses to select taxi companies to transport vulnerable individuals — does she know when that review will be completed?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I'll just go through some responses that we have provided previously to reassure the member that the work is underway.

Yukon's strategy on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls — as has been identified here today, on 2.8 on transportation and communication to create safe and affordable transportation and communication options to and between Yukon communities — the Yukon advisory committee is actively working on this part of the implementation plan. Again, I have already spoken about those 12 priorities that this remains part of. When you look at the strategy itself and the now full implementation plan, you will see a number of key considerations that will be taken into consideration. Part of that is the Yukon Women's Coalition's *Taxi Safety Report* of 2021, but there are a number of other key considerations in the strategy that we will be considering as this work continues and is underway.

Victim Services adjusts the taxi companies based on feedback from their partners and clients, including information obtained through the taxi survey. The sexualized assault response team weekend accompaniment team, through Victim Services, has developed an operational policy on transportation for workers to transport victims to and from services to avoid the use of taxis for victims. If providing transportation isn't a possibility for the sexualized response team, weekend accompaniment team workers can also offer to follow the taxi in their vehicle to destinations or to accompany the victim in the taxi.

In terms of the Department of Education, they select taxi companies through a competitive tendering process and follow procurement directives and awards based on that. They have developed the terms and conditions with the Student Support Services unit, based on the needs of the student and family who access the program and feedback received regarding the overall operation and level of service. Education also has specific criteria for drivers and the vehicles, including requirements for vulnerable sector checks and first aid, among other performance requirements. The contractor will make every effort to maintain driver assignments to provide a consistent and predictable service for the students. The department has previously cancelled a contract when the company was not meeting the contract performance requirements.

Terms of the Department of Health and Social Services and the Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services provide taxis to support some vulnerable Yukoners. The Mental Wellness

and Substance Use Services offers taxis for clients coming to and from withdrawal management. The Referred Care Clinic may also provide taxi slips to and from appointments, if necessary and appropriate. Income support provides funds for taxis as well as services to support clients in accessing transportation for reasons including accessing medical services, fleeing abusive situations, or other emergent appointments.

Additionally, clients of income support who are eligible for schedule B items are provided with transportation funds to use at their own discretion, which may include accessing taxi services. Income support only provides authorization orders to vendors in good standing. There are a number of areas — this continues to be work that we are focused on, as it relates to a number of key strategic initiatives, such as the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls strategy. It is also a consideration, I believe, under *Putting People First* and the substance use health emergency, and it is also an area under the sexualized assault response team.

There are a number of ways that we are focusing on this — not just in the City of Whitehorse but throughout the entire Yukon.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister. I actually really appreciated that level of detail, and if I can offer a suggestion, I think that there are a lot of people who are still really nervous, for lots of good reasons, about taking taxis, and I think that it would be helpful to them to know about the work that the Yukon government is doing to make sure that the taxis they take are safe.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the counselling services that are described in the implementation plan for *Changing the Story*. In 1.2.a., it talks about dedicated counselling services and supports for family members of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit-plus people. In 1.2.b., it talks about dedicated counselling services and supports for families affected by the unmarked graves.

This might be a slightly different question, but I will mention it now in case it isn't. In 1.6.b., it talks about dedicated family-focused counselling and therapy support services to support family units.

The Yukon government is at least a co-lead on all of those. I am wondering what that is going to look like.

Hon. Ms. McLean: In the areas that have been identified by the member opposite, the Yukon government has been named by the advisory committee as a potential co-lead, and there are a number of other leads within those that we need to work with — one of them being the Yukon advisory committee. As we are working through this next step of restructuring the oversight, leadership, and accountability for this entire strategy that connects to so many others, we will continue. That is really at the place where many of the details will be worked out in terms of who will be the full lead on the items that have been mentioned. I do know for sure that we will be a partner to it, but I am not exactly sure if we will be the lead on it, so we can't really speak on behalf of others who are named in this until we have worked with them more closely.

MLA Tredger: I wonder if the minister can explain a little bit more. I understand there is an implementation plan, and it sounds like there is another more technical plan coming, which will have the details of who is going to be the lead and some of the details of what those will look like.

That might not be quite accurate, so perhaps the minister could just explain to me a little bit more about how we are going to get from this implementation plan to services on the ground and what the steps there are and the timelines, if possible.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, it is still early days in terms of the entirety of this plan being released. We did release, in 2022, those first 12 priority areas. For a lot of our partners, it is still very early days in terms of working toward really determining the leads. As we report out on this on an annual basis, it is at that technical table where we will start to identify — we have a good sense of what that will look like right now, but we will be identifying the departments within the Government of Yukon that will be leading certain areas within this implementation plan. I don't see another — it is kind of a living document, so things may become more of a priority than others, as time goes by.

The way I have always envisioned it is that there would be, you know — as the leads are identified, then there would be a little bit more detailed action plans that will be addressed, and then a way for us to easily report back to all of our partners but to our families as well around the steps that are being taken to fulfill the milestones and reconfirm some of the milestones, as well, because this was an implementation plan that was developed by the Yukon advisory committee. There will be more detail that will go into achieving each of the milestones, and I think that will be determined as we go forward.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

MLA Tredger: I thank the minister and the officials for being back to answer just a few more questions — I promise.

I have some questions on the national action plan. I want to dig into the numbers a little bit. There is approximately \$1.4 million for transfer payment agreements that were discussed earlier. I was doing the math on this. There are 10 organizations eligible for \$69,000 per stream — so, two streams — and I think, based on my back-of-the-napkin math, that adds up to about \$1.38 million. So, there is about \$44,000 left over, and I am just wondering what that extra money is for.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We are actually including funding — and I did talk about it in my opening comments. There will be \$60,000 for the Yukon Women's Coalition. It actually is approximately \$20,000 more than the ask that we have today,

which we will be funding through dollars that are already existing within the Women and Gender Equity Directorate.

MLA Tredger: Thank you. That's really helpful, and sorry for missing it in the opening comments. It's really good to know that the Yukon Women's Coalition will also be getting some funding through that.

So, in those transfer payment agreements — usually, in a transfer payment agreement, there is a percentage that can be used for administrative fees — or not fees, administrative costs that typically include things like the executive director salary, like the electricity bills, the phone bills, and all those things that aren't project-specific but really do need to happen in order for the organization to be able to administer that project.

What's that percentage for those TPAs?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The administrative costs within the funding streams will be up to 10 percent of the total request from the Women and Gender Equity Directorate.

MLA Tredger: Thank you for that. One of my concerns about this funding, which has already come up, is that it is project funding and not core funding. So, it's for, from what the minister said, either expanding existing projects or starting new projects — and that's great. Of course, we want to see expanded and new projects, but that's not what was asked for by the organizations; they asked for core funding. What they said is that they don't actually have enough money right now to do the work they are doing right now.

The solution to not having enough money to do the work that they're doing right now is not to give them new money for a new project; it's to fund them for the work that they're already doing.

Core funding is so hard to get for organizations, and it's so key, because when you're chasing proposal after project to try to get enough money to cobble together to pay your staff and pay your ED and keep the lights on, make sure you have computers that work and make sure you can pay a janitor to come clean your space — like, there are so many costs that aren't project-specific, but they really and truly are crucial in order to keep these organizations running, and that's not addressed here. I think that's a missed opportunity; I think that's a shame.

I was interested in the number for admin fees, because I'm curious — I want to say this question really respectfully, because I have a huge amount of respect for the work that the Women and Gender Equity Directorate does, and I think they're well-resourced to do it. I don't think the organizations on the ground are — the NGOs — are as well-resourced to do it.

So, I'm wondering what percentage of the national action plan is going to go toward administering it. I know there are two positions already — the two positions we have here to coordinate, track, and report on the agreement. That's about six percent of what the funding will be for this year. I'm wondering if we have a sense, across the government, of what percentage of that funding will go to administration.

Hon. Ms. McLean: We have committed to working with the equality seeking groups to do the review. It is very important, and we are funding that; we don't expect the

organizations to fund that. We have allocated part of our supplementary budget to include that work to do the review, and we have worked with organizations to determine this process that we are in right now to include the bridge funding. We believe that there will be NGOs that the project fund will definitely be a bridge for while we go through the review, and we are very mindful of the needs. We are funding the Yukon Women's Coalition separately for the work that they will do on this review and for other aspects of the NAPGBV.

In terms of your question about our administration, it is seven percent. So, it is lower than what we would be allocating for the 10 percent that will be allowable through the funding agreements.

MLA Tredger: Thank you for that, and I appreciate that about the administration. I mean, I think it is also important to consider the amount of resources that are available through the Yukon government. I don't know exactly how the department budgeting works, but when you call IT, when you need a space to work, or when you need a computer — all those things — there is a lot of support provided through Yukon government departments that non-profits have to do on their own. They have to come up with ways to write those policies and find those resources on their own. It is really, really tough for those organizations to try to make ends meet while trying to do their work.

Something I hear — this isn't specific to these non-profits but across the non-profit sector — is that they can't keep up with wages. They cannot afford to pay their workers comparable wages to what people make at the government, and that means that they lose staff constantly to the government. Please know that I am not suggesting that Yukon government is overpaying their employees; I'm suggesting that they are not funding non-profits to pay comparable wages.

I know that this decision has been made for this funding. I think, as I have done every Sitting since I started this job, I am going to say again — just a plea for core funding for these organizations so that they can do that work with some confidence and security, instead of spending so much of their efforts trying to figure out how to get to the next month.

That is all of my questions for this department for now. I do want to thank the department again, and please know that I have huge respect for the work that the department is doing and the people in that department. I think they are doing a phenomenal job, so thank you to them. Thank you to the minister for this conversation today, and I will cede the floor.

Hon. Ms. McLean: I echo the comments from the member from the New Democratic Party, and I definitely hold my hands up to the directorate, as well, in terms of — you know, it is a small directorate that provides support throughout the entire government. The work I have been able to work with them on over these last many years — almost seven years now when it was the Women's Directorate and now the Women and Gender Equity Directorate — has been phenomenal in terms of the support of all of the work that we did on the national inquiry to — there are so many accomplishments, I think, that we have been able to experience, from that work on the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, to the *National Action*

Plan to End Gender-Based Violence, to expanding the sexualized assault response team and the *LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan*. That is a huge area of focus as well.

Now, just really moving into the implementation of all of this — the work on the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and the national action plan. We are so welcoming of the new Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Gender Equity that is going to be helpful to us. Also, you know, something we haven't talked about for a while is the gender inclusivity and diversity analysis, which is another area that the directorate supports.

I, too, echo that we have a small directorate, but it is quite mighty in terms of the work that they do. We are leading the country in so many ways. I thank you for being here today, and I thank the members opposite for the thoughtful questions and the debate today.

Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate?

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

MLA Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, cleared or carried

Chair: The Member for Whitehorse Centre has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 11, Women and Gender Equity Directorate, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$2,165,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$2,165,000 agreed to

Women and Gender Equity Directorate agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Highways and Public Works

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, I am pleased to speak to the supplementary budget for the Department of Highways and Public Works in the Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly 2023. To my left, I have Richard Gorczyca, assistant deputy minister, and to my right, Catherine Harwood, the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works, in support.

This request highlights our department's dedication to going above and beyond for all Yukoners by providing safe and efficient highways, airstrips, buildings, and information systems. HPW is proud to work for Yukoners. We provide necessary services throughout Yukon's transportation network, like road repairs and upgrades. We build, maintain, and upgrade government buildings, including schools. We provide internal services for the rest of Yukon government, including IT, procurement, and asset management. All of this requires careful planning so that, each year, we do our absolute best to allocate the resources needed to do this vital work.

Before I speak about the supplementary budget before us today, I would like to give some updates on some key projects that are improving infrastructure across the territory.

This fall, we are celebrating the completion of the Carmacks bypass project — a component under the Yukon Resource Gateway program. This project has been a collaborative effort between the Yukon government and the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. The new road and bridge will create safer road conditions by enabling industrial trucks to go around the community of Carmacks. Pelly Construction Ltd. was awarded the \$29.6-million contract to construct the new road and bridge on November 3, 2021. The project is now substantially complete and we will be attending an opening ceremony soon. I am happy to report that this project is coming in on time and on budget and includes three percent more First Nation labour than the contractor's ambitious original commitment — a testament to economic reconciliation.

This past fall, we also made progress on the north Klondike upgrades. The north Klondike Highway is a vital link for industry and a well-travelled route for Yukoners and tourists from around the world. Through the federal government's national trade corridors fund, the Department of Highways and Public Works is upgrading critical sections of the north Klondike Highway over a 10-year period. There are 209 kilometres between Carmacks and the Dempster Highway intersection that are eligible for reconstruction under the national trade corridors fund. These upgrades will increase safety, improve driving conditions, better connect the Yukon's resources to markets, and increase the resiliency of the highway to the impacts of climate change.

Since 2019, we have completed the construction of approximately 57 kilometres of highway. These upgrades also include replacing and upgrading some of the aging bridges. For example, the Crooked Creek bridge was open to public traffic

in the fall of 2022, and for those Yukoners who have driven that, you will know that there is a completely different profile of that valley now because there really was quite a circuitous access to a very small bridge and then you came out of that bridge. It now looks completely different and it looks like an amazing safety improvement, in my opinion. The remaining asphalt paving, minor civil works, and final cleanup was completed this past summer. I am pleased to report that this bridge replacement project came in underbudget.

A second example is the Moose Creek bridge rehabilitation that is now substantially complete, with some final work being finished this fall.

Another major infrastructure project happening along a Yukon highway is the Dempster fibre project. While not fully complete yet, the project is progressing well. This project began back in July 2022; I think that it was sooner than, that but I certainly can confirm that. It will extend 800 kilometres of high-speed fibre line along the Dempster Highway from Dawson City, Yukon to Inuvik, Northwest Territories. This is an essential piece of communications infrastructure, as it will benefit both territories by providing a backup line in the event of a service disruption. As of September 2023, 780 kilometres of cable conduit have been installed and 405 kilometres of cable have been installed inside the conduit. This includes installation under three major rivers: the Mackenzie, the Peel, and the Arctic Red.

This project goes beyond just improving telecommunications. It is an example of how we can work with Indigenous governments in order to create opportunities for local communities. The Government of Yukon is actively engaged with three Yukon First Nations and five Indigenous groups in the Northwest Territories whose traditional territories the project passes through.

Under a First Nation and Indigenous participation plan for the project, 20 percent of the contract value is allocated toward subcontracting, employment, and training for First Nations in the Yukon and Indigenous groups in the Northwest Territories. This provides opportunities for First Nations and Indigenous businesses and subcontractors in the form of direct employment benefits and training and capacity development. We currently anticipate that the construction will be complete in the fall of 2024, with the operation of the line beginning in early 2025.

I had the opportunity to travel on the Dempster Highway this past summer and saw the installations and general construction taking place. It certainly is an engineering marvel.

Another exciting project happening in the northern region of our territory is the installation of solar panels and battery energy storage systems at two highway maintenance camps located along the Dempster Highway. These camps currently rely only on diesel generators for power. Installing a renewable energy system at these sites will allow the generators to run significantly less often and will replace approximately 100,000 litres of fossil fuel each year, further reducing our reliance on diesel-generated electricity. These systems are expected to be ready by the end of the fall season. It is great to see these projects move forward and we are actively looking into more ways to incorporate renewable energy.

Highways and Public Works didn't just build infrastructure; we also removed outdated and aging buildings to create space for future development. In 2022, Macaulay Lodge was demolished using a local First Nation company to do the work. This was a great example of the Yukon First Nation procurement policy in action. This year, we demolished the Carmacks district office and the Carmacks grader station, which were beyond their useful life. All three of the demolitions came in underbudget.

The future plans for these sites are still being determined, but we are always seeking new ways to use space better to serve the territory and Yukoners.

As everyone knows, Highways and Public Works maintains our transportation network, allowing travellers to stay connected. While the department does its best to plan for maintenance costs and required upgrades, we cannot control or predict all possible circumstances that will affect our infrastructure.

In recent years, climate change has created unprecedented challenges in planning for our seasonal operation and maintenance costs. We are experiencing increasing impacts to our infrastructure, and the events that cause the damage are often unpredictable and occur with little notice. This spring, there were extremely high snow packs and high groundwater in the Klondike region, which was unusual for that area. When the spring weather finally came, the meltwater quickly overwhelmed the local river systems. Water flooded over the river banks and impacted buildings, highways, and even the Dawson City airport. Within one week, there were multiple washouts along our major highways. These washouts required numerous Highways and Public Works crews to give their full attention and resources to repairing the road.

When the Dempster Highway washed out, we had crews on the ground within an hour to address the situation. While fixing this washout, two more washouts occurred on the Dempster, causing even further damage. The Highways and Public Works crews in the Klondike area worked tirelessly, and the Dempster Highway was reopened two days later to single-lane traffic.

On the same day of the Dempster Highway washouts, the Clear Creek bridge, at kilometre 594 of the Klondike Highway, was damaged due to high water. As soon as the department got word of the extreme high water at Clear Creek, we sent engineers to the site that evening to assess the situation. Based on the severity of the damage, we hired a contractor to assist with the required repair work. Just when the bridge was fully repaired and almost ready to open, the north Klondike Highway also experienced a washout just a few kilometres south of the Dempster cut-off. Thankfully, it was Highways and Public Works staff who found the washout and we had staff on the ground fixing the issue within hours. They were able to repair the washout the same day and have the road reopened by 6:00 p.m. that night.

With all the road washouts, keeping the Dawson City Airport open was even more essential. This required additional workers and equipment to mitigate the loss of power and water pooling on the runway. The total cost for the flood efforts,

including the highway washouts and airport management, was just over \$1 million. I would certainly at this point like to thank all Highways and Public Works crews that responded to the emergency and rose to the challenge. I had the opportunity in my tours of the Klondike area this summer to attend at the Dawson City Airport and get a good visual as to how saturated the ground was there for a period of time. I was advised that pumps were operating almost continuously for 30 days. Those were extraordinary circumstances, and the Highways and Public Works staff, placer miners, and Dawson residents in general rose to the occasion to keep roads open, keep the Dawson City Airport operational, and mitigate any possible flood damage to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in farm. I know that I can speak on behalf of Yukoners when I say that we appreciate the work that you do.

In addition to responding to emergencies in our expansive transportation network, we also help to maintain and open many resource access roads. We know that mining is an important economic driver for the territory and that miners need early access to their claims to maximize the short mining season in the Yukon.

As you know, some roads in the Yukon are only maintained during the summer. In response to requests from industry, the department opened certain roads ahead of schedule this year so that mining companies could better plan for their seasonal operations. On March 10, 2023, the department opened the Hunker loop, which includes Bonanza Creek Road and Hunker Creek Road. On March 17, 2023, the department opened the Top of the World Highway. The crew also continued clearing and maintenance on the Top of the World Highway to Sixtymile in April.

In order to open resource access roads early, Highways and Public Works must dedicate some additional resources to remove snow, clear ice, and patch gravel. The Yukon government recognizes the importance of early access to these work sites for many in the mining industry, which is why we have committed to a planned early season opening once again in 2024. While the opening of any road is somewhat dependent on the conditions of the weather, the department is working toward an early opening before April. Highways and Public Works is developing a schedule for road openings next spring and will communicate with stakeholders in advance of the openings.

In order to provide this level of service in the 2023-24 season, we require an additional \$660,000. The last supplementary request we have is in regard to the collective bargaining agreement increase. Like all other departments, HPW requires additional funds to account for the new collective agreement. The additional \$5.6 million will go toward paying the hard-working employees at Highways and Public Works.

Beyond our supplementary request, I would like to speak to the capital reductions in this supplementary budget. The Government of Yukon evaluates capital budgets on an ongoing basis in order to improve the efficiency of capital spending in alignment with the territory's capital infrastructure needs.

Each year, the supplementary budget provides a chance to address new and emerging opportunities. The Government of Yukon is currently negotiating with the Municipality of Skagway on the construction of a marine service platform, which we have heard about in the House at some length already. It will be capable of supporting ore export infrastructure for Yukon mining companies as part of the municipality's port redevelopment project. This is an important project in order to secure long-term tidewater access for Yukon's mining industry. As part of the supplementary budget, the Department of Highways and Public Works has identified several initiatives where funding can be reallocated in order to support the ore export opportunity.

Before I close, I would just perhaps provide some additional detail about some of the specific work that has been done in the last year. For the 2023-24 season, final resurfacing totals by the end of the construction season will be approximately 136 kilometres of BST application and 45 kilometres of gravel road resurfacing.

Line painting of approximately 80,000 litres of paint was applied in 2023. The painting trucks travel at an estimated 14 kilometres per hour. For persons listening at home, we have 3,340 kilometres of white lines and 2,224 kilometres of yellow lines to maintain across the network. Line paint in the Yukon lasts anywhere between one and four years, depending on traffic volumes. To keep lines in an acceptable condition, in 2023, we painted approximately 800 kilometres of white lines and 950 kilometres of yellow lines.

With respect to vegetation control, which I am sure will be the subject of some conversation and debate with Highways and Public Works, since the beginning of the program in 2019, we have brushed 2,387 kilometres and mowed 1,014 kilometres of vegetation. This totals 3,401 kilometres cleared by the department. We issued 57 contracts for vegetation control in 2022, 17 of which were awarded to First Nation businesses. We issued 23 contracts for vegetation control in 2023-24 for 984 kilometres, and we completed approximately 620 kilometres of clover mowing in 2023-24.

With respect to bridges, there were approximately 200 overweight requests that were processed each year. In 2022-23, the bridge inspection team conducted 35 safety and monitoring inspections, 70 detailed bridge inspections, and 120 structural culvert inspections.

I just would conclude that I would like reaffirm our commitment to providing Yukoners with safe and efficient transportation systems. The Department of Highways and Public Works prioritizes the safety of Yukoners, and we are proud to continue providing these services. I look forward to answering questions in Committee of the Whole debate for Highways and Public Works, but now, seeing the time, Deputy Chair, I move that you report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Deputy Speaker resumes the Chair

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled October 18, 2023:

35-1-114

Yukon Development Corporation 2022 Annual Report
(Streicker)

35-1-115

Yukon Energy 2022 Annual Report (Streicker)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 144

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, October 19, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, October 19, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker absent

Clerk: It is my duty, pursuant to the provisions of section 24 of the *Legislative Assembly Act*, to inform the Legislative Assembly of the absence of the Speaker.

Deputy Speaker takes the Chair

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): I will now call the House to order.

We will proceed at this time with prayers.

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This afternoon in the House, we have a couple of people here for our Great ShakeOut earthquake drill tribute. I have Greg Blackjack, who is the director of the Emergency Measures Organization, and we also have Julia Duchesne, who is a communications analyst with Protective Services.

I would also like to introduce a good colleague of mine, Carla Gostick, who is with us this afternoon.

Applause

Deputy Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of International ShakeOut Day

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker — such a quick turnaround.

I rise today about earthquake preparedness in the Yukon, including the Great ShakeOut earthquake drill. Earthquakes can happen at anytime of the day or night, anytime of the year. Most of the land in our territory is in a medium to high risk — zone 4 earthquakes. Today, October 19, is ShakeOut Day. At 10:19 a.m., Yukoners and people across Canada practise drop, cover, and hold on for the Great ShakeOut earthquake drill. Millions of people worldwide participated in the same drill, learning how to stay safe during an earthquake. During most earthquakes, you will reduce your chance of injury if you drop, cover, and hold on. Drop where you are, onto your hands and knees. This position protects you from being knocked down by shaking and reduces your chance of being hit by falling or flying objects. Cover your head and neck with one arm and hand. If a sturdy table or desk is nearby, crawl underneath for shelter.

I know that my good colleague once tried that in this House. I am not going to do that this afternoon because I

wouldn't be able to get back up, but that is what you are supposed to do.

If no shelter is nearby, crawl next to an interior wall, stay on your knees, and bend over to protect your vital organs. Hold on until the shaking stops. If you are under shelter, hold on to it with one hand and be ready to move with the shelter if it shifts. If you have no shelter, hold on to your head and neck with both arms and hands. If you use a walker or wheelchair, adapt this drill — lock, cover, and hold on. First, lock your wheels. Sitting on your walker or wheelchair, carefully bend over as low as possible, cover your head and neck with your arms, a book, or a pillow and then hold on until the shaking stops. After an earthquake, an emergency kit will help you be self-sufficient if the power is out, the supply chain is disrupted, or you can't get to help.

Emergency preparedness is a joint effort and starts with every individual long before an emergency occurs. I have said this many times in this House and I will say it again: This week, take the time to learn more about earthquakes and take simple steps around your home to protect yourself and your family. Visit prepared yukon.ca for more information on how to prepare your emergency kit and learn how you and your family can get prepared for any emergency.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize October 19 as International ShakeOut Day, dedicated to earthquake preparedness for families, schools, and workplaces.

Most of us remember the earthquakes that hit Yukon and Alaska in the early hours of May 1, 2017. A magnitude of 6.2 earthquake shook Yukoners awake at about 5:30 in the morning and caused some damage to buildings as well as power outages. The epicentre of this quake was located around the border between BC and Yukon, about 80 kilometres from Skagway.

Another quake came at about 7:30 a.m. and even more felt this one as they went about their morning routines. Aftershocks were felt throughout the morning. These earthquakes were a reminder that, while we may be isolated here from a lot of the natural disasters faced elsewhere in the world, earthquakes can happen anywhere anytime, and it's important to be prepared.

ShakeOut Day is an opportunity for families and for schools to review earthquake practices with children to learn what to do before, during, and after an earthquake. Remember to drop, cover, and hold on and to stay in this position for one minute or more after the shaking stops.

Applause

Ms. White: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to congratulate the millions of people worldwide and the 3,628 Yukoners here at home who, today at 10:19, practised earthquake drills at work, home, or school with the Great ShakeOut. Practice makes perfect, and the more people who have practised the drill of drop, cover, and hold on, the more people who will be ready for an earthquake.

Thank you to all those in schools, businesses, and governments who organized and ran drills to make us all better prepared.

Applause

In recognition of International Pronouns Day

Hon. Ms. McLean: I rise on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to International Pronouns Day.

My pronouns are “she” and “her”. Pronouns play a major role in defining who we are and how we perceive others. They are essential in affirming people’s gender identities and acknowledging their authentic selves.

Our words matter. The language we use serves as a lens through which we perceive and interpret the world around us. The significance of International Pronouns Day extends beyond courtesy and linguistic correctness. It’s about validating individuals, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring that everyone feels valued and respected.

Recognizing the importance of pronouns extends beyond today; it is a year-round endeavour that requires our ongoing commitment to education and understanding. The burden of normalizing correct pronoun use should not rest solely on the shoulders of transgender or gender-nonconforming people. I encourage all cisgender Yukoners to reflect on their gender identity and what it means to them. We need to affirm everyone’s gender identity and gender expression, as this is part of how we respect, value, and affirm all members of our community.

Even if you are not a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and you think sharing your pronouns is not necessary for you, remember that you are not doing it for yourself; sharing your pronouns is an act of ally-ship because it creates a safe space for everyone else to share theirs without being singled out. Furthermore, when cisgender people share their pronouns, it deconstructs the idea that gender identity can be assumed based on one’s outward appearance. That idea conforms to and reinforces the gender binary and leads to harmful stereotyping of gender expression.

In the Yukon, we support the use of correct pronouns through inclusive policies and language guidelines and fostering safe and inclusive spaces in our schools, because education is key to building a society free of prejudice. Recently, we have seen a rise in political movements and legislation that targets the rights of transgender people in Canada and internationally. Teaching children about diversity and inclusivity is essential for building a more tolerant, equitable and compassionate society. It equips them with the skills and attitudes needed to navigate the world with empathy and understanding.

May this International Pronouns Day be a reminder that sharing one’s pronouns and being respectful of the pronouns of others is a simple yet powerful way to champion and normalize diversity and inclusivity.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize International Pronouns Day, which took place on October 18. This day was established in 2018 to help bring awareness to gender-inclusive language and provide more information about what pronouns mean to people. Respect for others is key to a healthy community, and it is important to recognize that using the preferred pronouns of an individual is one of the easiest ways to show respect and acknowledgement for someone who is transgender or gender-nonconforming.

Understanding when and how to use preferred pronouns may not come easily to all, and mistakes will be made. However, making the effort makes a difference to many. We will continue to do our best to make Yukon a welcoming place to everyone.

Salamat po.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP for International Pronouns Day and I would like to say some thank yous. Thank you to the trailblazers who showed us what was possible, even when everyone told them it wasn’t. Thank you to the people who kicked and kicked at heteronormativity until the cracks began to show because, in those cracks, there is room for so many more of us. Thank you to Ivan Coyote for their poem, “A mantra for the misgendered”. I thought about trying to read it here and decided I couldn’t do it justice, but thank you for creating space and hope for so many — including myself. Thank you to Heather Kuttai, the Human Rights Commissioner of Saskatchewan who resigned this week over Saskatchewan’s discriminatory pronoun policy being forced into schools. Thank you to the students in Saskatchewan and New Brunswick who so bravely shared their stories about how these anti-trans policies are hurting and endangering them. Thank you to the people who are fighting back against anti-trans hate across the country through court cases, protests, and solidarity. Thank you to all of the people who support their family, friends, students, co-workers, and community members in so many ways. Thank you to all of the people who practise new pronouns on their own until they get it right. Most of all, thank you to the incredible members of the trans community who provide so much love, support, and protection for each other. Thank you for fighting for a place for all of us.

Applause

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

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Ms. White: Madam Deputy Speaker, I have for tabling today a letter highlighting the teacher on-call shortage that has been sent to numerous people in this House.

Deputy 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. McLean: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House:

(1) expresses disappointment with the Government of Québec for their decision to raise tuition rates for non-residents of Québec attending English-speaking, post-secondary institutions in Québec;

(2) urges the Government of Québec to reverse this decision; and

(3) supports the Government of Yukon in their commitment to offering French first and second language education options in the Yukon.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Highways and Public Works to order a review of safety at the intersection of the Mayo Road and the Alaska Highway to determine how well changes made in recent years are working and whether additional measures such as improved signage or a flashing light are needed to improve safety.

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

THAT this House urges the Auditor General of Canada to conduct a performance audit of the Yukon business nominee program and the Yukon nominee program.

I also give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do order the return of documents showing the savings from the closures of:

(1) the Queen's Printer; and

(2) government stores.

Deputy Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sexual orientation and gender identity policy in education

Hon. Ms. McLean: As the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, I am deeply invested in ensuring that every student in the Yukon feels safe, respected, and included, especially students from the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Just two months ago, we took an important step forward by updating our sexual orientation and gender identity — SOGI — policy. This move aligns with the Yukon's *LGBTQ2S+ Inclusion Action Plan* and embodies our unwavering commitment to inclusivity. We have modernized the language, clarified roles, and turned our recent *Education Act* amendments into an actionable policy. Through training and professional development, we are translating this policy into actions that empower our educators to foster a culture that welcomes all identities.

Another example of our commitment to this work is the recently announced partnership between the Department of

Education and the ARC Foundation, a charitable foundation supporting SOGI-inclusion educational practices in K to 12 school settings.

The foundation's SOGI 1 2 3 inclusive education supports a collection of lesson plans and resources that are renowned for equipping educators to make all students feel safe and educated in school. The ARC Foundation is also supporting our schools in the development of school-based procedures and guidelines that will help them fully implement our SOGI policy. Rainbow rooms, gender and sexuality alliances, or GSAs, and planned activities to celebrate diversity in some of our schools are notable examples of how our communities are embracing this journey toward inclusivity for all.

Each elementary school and secondary school follows its own path on this journey based on the specific needs of their students. Our aim is to nurture an environment where every student feels valued and safe, irrespective of their age and grade.

I am aware that some parents and families in our community have concerns about SOGI education; however, it's crucial to understand that almost two-thirds of 2SLGBTQIA+ students report feeling unsafe at school. While families have every right to teach their own values at home, children also have human rights. These are protected under the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which includes the right to be safe in their schools.

Our schools also have a legal and ethical duty to ensure the safety and inclusion of every student. We teach about different religions and cultures at school, but we don't teach students to change their belief systems. No one chooses their sexual orientation or gender identity simply because they learned about it in school.

I am always open for discussions on continuous efforts toward fostering inclusivity in Yukon schools. Our doors are open for meaningful dialogue that contributes to a broader understanding and support for our 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

On behalf of the Government of Yukon, I want to express my deepest gratitude to educators, administrators, and all school staff in our schools.

Mr. Kent: I would like to thank the minister for delivering this statement here today on the updates to the sexual orientation and gender identity, or SOGI, policy, as well as for the August 17 letter that she sent us, outlining the changes made so far and what will be looked at in the next phase of the review.

We believe all students need to feel safe, respected, and welcome at schools in the territory. That's why the Yukon Party initially introduced a school SOGI policy in 2012.

In the August letter, the minister outlined three areas of focus for the changes: modernizing language to ensure that it is inclusive, current, and relevant; the requirements outlined in Bill No. 304; and finally, addressing the use of pronouns for students, updating terminology to trans-inclusive, and clarifying points of contact and responsibilities at both the department and school levels.

The issue that we have seen making news in other jurisdictions is the use of pronouns and the appropriateness of

parents being informed of their child's choice or, in some cases, needing to consent to that choice. This is something that we have heard about from Yukon's families as well that are seeking clarification from the minister on this issue. The policy itself states — and I'll quote: "Administrators, staff and students will recognize people's correct pronouns, as declared by the individuals themselves. This requirement applies to students who have not made official changes to their name or gender in school records."

The question for the minister is: What role do parents, caregivers, or guardians have in the child's pronoun choice? Is there currently a duty to inform them if their child chooses a different pronoun? Is the minister considering different rules regarding the need to inform families, depending on the age of the student? Obviously, circumstances will vary from child to child and family to family, so how is this policy reflective of those differences?

I think we can all agree on the need for students to feel safe, respected, and welcome at school. We can also all agree that the success of a student increases when their parents or guardians are partners in their education. It is also important that parents and students feel respected by the government and that all reasonable concerns and suggestions are treated seriously. This is an issue that many people have strong views on, and it is important that government sincerely tries to foster respectful discussions and dialogue where parents and students all are heard and treated with respect.

When the minister responds, can she tell us where to direct families who have questions or concerns with the policy as it exists? How can families offer their thoughts on the next phase that is being developed? What opportunities will they have for input on the proposed policy?

Ms. White: There has just been a quick change on our side as we try to process, actually, the statement from the Yukon Party in response to this. First and foremost, let me just say that gender identity and one's chosen pronouns — not preferred pronouns — should be respected at all times. A child should be able to decide and it should be respected in school. What we have now just heard from my colleagues is worrisome for me.

Back to the SOGI policy, we appreciate the update. We will have questions at different points, but right now, more than ever, it is important that we, in this Assembly, stand by children as they are making these decisions.

This is not nearly as prepared as I expected it to be, but having been to schools and having sat with children, it is also important to note that when we talk about pronouns, we are not talking about preferred pronouns; we are talking about chosen pronouns. They identify who we are, and it is important that it is reflected in this policy and we appreciate that. We expect that there will need to be more work and more education around this, and I believe that it will be a conversation for another day.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you for the comments made. I want to reiterate just how important this topic is to so many Yukoners and how we share valuable information such as what

our schools are doing to increase safety and that it really does matter.

We are fortunate to be able to share this information with Yukoners and hear from all three parties on the record — I think that today is an important example of that — on this topic through the opportunity provided by ministerial statements. These statements are crucial for keeping the public informed, encouraging healthy debate in this democratic institution, and will serve as valuable resources for future generations, providing insights into current economic, social, and political landscapes. I have to just point this out because it is important.

In yesterday's issue of the *Yukon News*, I noted that the Member for Lake Laberge and the Member for — and I know that there are different topics every day — and the Member for Whitehorse Centre essentially said that these statements are not important. I hope that the members don't think that highlighting the importance of inclusivity in schools is a waste of the electorate's time. Our government certainly does not.

There are things worth repeating, and when we look at what is happening in Saskatchewan, where the government has tabled a bill with the notwithstanding clause to deprive trans children of their ability to feel safe, loved, and respected at school, I can say without doubt that this topic matters. The importance of a supportive environment for 2SLGBTQIA+ children and youth cannot be overstated.

When the lack of perspective and support is not shown, the risk for suicide, depression, and other negative outcomes increases significantly. Support for families, adults, and peers in schools can help reduce these risks. I have already talked about some of the tools that we are bringing in to support educators, to support this dialogue, to ensure that we have age-appropriate learning around Yukon's physical and health education curriculum, literacy around health and active living, social and community health, and mental well-being. In the months ahead, we will be engaging, again, with all partners in education, including parents, families, and others, to further refine our SOGI policy to address broader issues, such as trans inclusion in sports. That's another topic that we are talking about.

This collaborative approach ensures that our policies continue to evolve in line with the needs and aspirations of our diverse school communities. Madam Deputy Speaker, all youth and staff deserve a safe and supportive school environment. Our government is committed to advancing gender equity and championing equity in our schools.

I thank you for the debate today. I know that there will be a lot more to come in the months to come.

Deputy Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Housing development memorandum of understanding with Government of Ontario

Mr. Cathers: Madam Deputy Speaker, several months ago, the Premier travelled to Toronto to sign a housing development MOU with the Ford government in Ontario. The

agreement is supposed to offer the opportunity for the Yukon to learn from Ontario's "... significant public and private experience in promoting housing development..." The problem with this is that Ontario's housing development plans led to a scathing Auditor General's report, the minister resigning, and more recently, the launch of an RCMP investigation.

So, can the Premier tell Yukoners what actions have been taken to implement this MOU with the Ford government since he signed it?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Deputy Speaker, the focus of the work with the Ontario government was to look at having their Economic Development department provide a conduit for Yukon developers to access what you would call "patient funds" from institutional investors. We haven't seen a lot of institutional investment here — such as real estate investment trusts or even pension funds — coming into this market, but what we saw for a long period of time was only condos being built, because there weren't patient investors; so, that was the goal.

We have had developers in the Yukon reach out, and I know that our teams are going to be working to have them have opportunities to meet with institutional investors in Ontario.

Mr. Cathers: After questions and criticism from both the Yukon Party and the NDP about the MOU, the Premier did a radio interview. He was asked about his MOU commitment to host a familiarization tour in the Yukon for Ontario housing developers. The interviewer asked — and I quote: "And so it would be developers or business people from here going to Ontario, or people from Ontario coming here?" The Premier replied — and I quote: "No, it's about our folks going out there..."

The problem is that isn't what the MOU actually says. Section 2 of the MOU makes it clear that the Yukon government will host a familiarization tour, or trade mission, here in the Yukon for housing developers from Ontario to explore opportunities.

So, why did the Premier incorrectly describe what the MOU he signed with Premier Ford actually says?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: At the end of the day, this is what we are going to get. There is going to be no policy debate in this House with me. There are going to be no new ideas from the opposition. Every single thing that my team undertakes, whether it is a trip to Toronto to try to bring money here to build apartments, which we are talking about that we need, or whether it's a trip to India to go to try to recruit nurses, there is going to be something cast every single time — that is what it is going to be. It won't be a policy debate; again, they are going to try to throw some curve ball. I think that it does a disservice to the public servants who do this work. We think that bringing funds or even partnership, if it looks like that, between folks here and Ontario is a good thing.

We have done absolutely nothing incorrectly. This is a sad day when, every single time we try to do something innovative, we get attacked on something that seems to be, again, just really sad politics — always trying to bring it to the lowest common denominator; that is what we will see. I will wait for question 3.

Mr. Cathers: Madam Deputy Speaker, that wasn't an answer, and I would remind the Premier that I am not asking about his failed trip to India; I am asking about the questionable MOU with the Ontario government. That MOU is quite clear. It says that the Yukon government is hosting a tour for Ontario-based businesses to explore opportunities here in the Yukon. It clearly states that it is aimed at Ontario housing developers. Page 2 says — and I quote: "... for housing developers and professionals to explore opportunities in the territory." But the Premier tried to claim the opposite on radio.

The Ontario AG's report was highly critical of that government for giving preferential treatment to certain housing developers. Two questions to the Premier: Will any of the housing developers that the Auditor General said received preferential treatment from the Ontario government be part of the FAM tour hosted by his government? And who is picking which Ontario housing developers will be part of this tour the Premier's government is hosting?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that, if there are folks who want to invest in housing from Newfoundland, or Saskatchewan, or Ontario, or Alberta and they want to come here and partner with developers here, I think that's a good thing. I hope that the Member for Lake Laberge would. He touched on it and said "the failed trip to India". Again, I would like to know what metrics — because next week, we are meeting with another organization through Health and Social Services that is looking to help us support our needs and capacity when it comes to health resources. We have heard for days — specifically from the Member for Lake Laberge, who gets up and criticizes different areas of health.

So, when we go out and try to solve a challenge, we hear that there is a problem with it — I am answering the question. We will probably have questions today about rental housing, so we try to go out and make sure that the funds are here to build rental housing — from the person who had funds in his hands but decided that, because someone in his riding told him not to build affordable housing, he didn't. So, I'm not going to take any advice on housing. This is a person who got moved out of a portfolio because he didn't even know how to handle dealing with investment in housing.

So, the last person that anybody in this Assembly should take any advice from is the Member for Lake Laberge.

Question re: Rent control

Mr. Dixon: Yesterday, we presented stats that clearly demonstrate that the Liberal rent control policies are failing. Rents have increased dramatically since the policy was introduced, and the policy has failed to deliver any improved supply. In fact, the Premier acknowledged that the policy was causing people to leave the rental market and even lose their homes and used that fact to justify the launch of his new taxpayer-funded cash handout for landlords.

It was not lost on anyone that he launched this new landlord support program during Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. What message does the Premier think it sends to launch a landlord support program during Poverty and Homelessness Action Week?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Well, I think that during Poverty and Homelessness Action Week, standing up for individuals so that they will not lose their homes because of flawed legislation around the rental market is a good thing. What we heard, which was pretty clear from the Leader of the Official Opposition, is that he doesn't want to stand up for those people who are in a vulnerable situation, which I think says a great deal about his perspective when it comes to this topic.

Here is where we are: We are going out to try to make sure that there are more rentals. We hear the Member for Lake Laberge attack. We see the Leader of the Official Opposition quote something from the newspaper. It's a flawed methodology. I will state that. When the Leader of the Official Opposition gets up, with his background on these topics, I want him to tell me if he thinks that the methodology used to see if the rent cap was a successful program or is working — does he think it's a flawed methodology that was used by Mr. Halliday or is it an accurate one? I would like to know that when he gets up.

It may be a new idea, because we are on Thursday of this week, and the man with new ideas hasn't brought one new idea to the House.

Mr. Dixon: What's clear from the stats is that the Premier's policies have failed. I think it's clear to all Yukoners that the Premier is deeply out of touch on this issue. The rent control policy was introduced with the intent of keeping rents affordable. It's quite clear from the data that is not happening. It's quite the opposite, actually. Since the policy came into effect, we have seen rents increase much faster than inflation. We have seen the supply tighten as the number of rental units is not keeping pace with population growth. Affordability and availability of rentals are both getting worse. The Premier's solution to this is to hand out \$338 per unit to each landlord in the Yukon.

Does the Premier really think that limiting the amount landlords can charge with one hand and then handing them cash with the other is going to work?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What we have seen is extensive investment in the rental market by this government. There are hundreds of new units being built. When we looked at new units coming online over a period of five years, we saw 12.9 percent of new units coming online with a population increase of 12.1 percent. So, yes, we were keeping up, even if we were dealing with some of the legacy challenges from my friends across the way.

I will also say, there is nothing within that methodology that says that this process did not stabilize our existing rental market. That's the thing; it's flawed.

The member opposite put an eloquent question together, but deep down, he knows that methodology does not take into consideration existing relationships in the rental market. What we wanted to do was to make sure that anybody who had a long-term rental was in an area — or that their rental rate was stabilized. All the new stuff we have invested in — yes, they are all coming on to the market with higher rates, so when you take the average, there has been an increase, but I will tell you

what it isn't: It's not an over 70-percent increase, which we are seeing in other provinces in this country.

So, yes, I think that the people who were vulnerable and who now have some stability — and during this week, appreciate it — and I do think that the landlords will appreciate the funds we are putting out over the next year.

Mr. Dixon: The Liberals have admitted openly that they did not campaign on rent control and have only implemented it because it was part of CASA. However, now the Premier has become the policy's most ardent supporter. His belief in the policy has only become stronger, he said last week. But now he is admitting that the policy hasn't worked and his solution now is to hand out cash to landlords, but this isn't fooling landlords or renters, Madam Deputy Speaker. The statistics are clear to everyone. The Liberal policy has failed, and this most recent cash handout is hardly the solution.

Does the Premier really think that giving landlords \$338 per unit will stabilize the rental market?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Madam Deputy Speaker, what I will say — after signing on to our CAS agreement, there were two commitments that I made. One is that we looked at making sure that there was an increase for folks who were receiving minimum wage. We knew that would impact business as well, but we knew that the people who were going to receive that minimum wage needed it and appreciated it, and I support that policy. What we did say is that we would come back with something else. What we did was a nation-leading program for sick leave. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has stood up and applauded us on that program. Other provinces and territories are looking to support that.

At the same time, with the rent cap, I also committed that we would come back and we would offset if there was a delta between the five percent and CPI, which was 6.8 — 1.8 percent. We have calculated that out. We're providing a grant over this year. We are building new legislation because it is flawed and we don't need people getting rent-evicted and out on the street. We are not going to be like in the days when there was a tent city out there and all of these folks were walking into their offices because people were getting evicted and couldn't find a home, when, again, the Member for Lake Laberge decided to sit on money because one of the folks in his riding told him to. That is not how it's going to be. We are going to look after the rental market and we are going to see an increase in investment across the rental assets in this territory.

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Consultation on school replacement

Ms. White: Twice a day, Takhini residents have to drive through their neighbourhood to get to work while commuters drive through Takhini to get downtown, the university, the Correctional Centre, and not to mention the office buildings on Range Road. Then there is the bicycle traffic and the many parents who drop off and pick up their kids at Takhini Elementary School. What we are left with is heavy traffic on a road with few crosswalks, limited safety features, and not enough lighting. Takhini residents are concerned about what will happen when this government quadruples the number of

students and parents using Range Road every morning and every afternoon. The traffic on Range Road is already too heavy to be considered safe. The City of Whitehorse was ready to improve traffic safety, but the government's failure to consult on the placement of this new school forced the city to wait.

What traffic and safety studies were conducted by this Yukon government before the minister decided to drop a school on this part of Range Road?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I would like to start by saying that, of course, our government is proud to be investing in new school infrastructure. École Whitehorse Elementary School has been identified for replacement with a new modern facility that will meet the needs of the community for years to come.

In terms of the work that has been underway, we are in a planning phase right now for this new, important elementary school. We have been working — and I have spoken previously about the project advisory committee that has designated seats from the Whitehorse Elementary School Council, Whitehorse Elementary School administration, City of Whitehorse, Government of Yukon, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, and Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

In August — and I have had a chance already to speak about this today. We have the project advisory committee to facilitate collaboration and the exchange of ideas between key partners, stakeholders, and Government of Yukon. This group meets regularly and we have recently hired our prime consultants, Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd., who are doing the site assessments.

Ms. White: Notably left out of the minister's list was any representation from the Takhini neighbourhood. This government has made a series of unilateral and heavy-handed decisions about École Whitehorse Elementary School. The Liberals haven't bothered asking what parents think, what educators think, what school councils think, or, in fact, what any of the stakeholders think. Instead, they rushed through a process that affects hundreds of people without talking to anyone who would be affected first. They just made a decision and expected everyone to be fine with it. Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, they aren't.

We have spoken to experts whose voices need to be heard, teachers who are experts in education, parents who are experts in what their children need, educators and principals who are experts in how to run a school, and residents who are experts on their neighbourhood. Why has the government repeatedly refused to consult and engage with parents, teachers, neighbours, and others on finding the best way forward?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Again, we are very proud to be investing in our school infrastructure. The Takhini land reserve is a central location that can accommodate French immersion students from around Whitehorse. The Department of Education has established a project advisory committee to facilitate collaboration and exchange of ideas with key partners and stakeholders, including the residents of the Takhini neighbourhood. Project timelines will be determined as further planning work is undertaken.

Again, in August of this year, Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd. was awarded the prime consultant contract for École Whitehorse Elementary School, a replacement project through a public tender. A preliminary site assessment is currently underway. This is an important investment for our government. When we looked at the Takhini education reserve, it's one of the largest in Whitehorse and has enough room to accommodate the type of infrastructure that is contemplated. There are not a lot of other sites that are centrally located and would meet the needs of a new school. There is not a lot of vacant land, plus it has all of the infrastructure that is already in place.

Ms. White: Takhini residents have made it very clear that they are upset about being shut out of consultations about the new school. The tender documents, which were blocked from public view after they were published this summer, state that Takhini Elementary might have to be demolished. Along with everything else in this file, this was yet another surprise for my community, which has been left in the dark every step of the way.

This government has done nothing to understand the impact that this project will have on our neighbourhood — no studies on safety and no study on how this will affect the greenbelt, sports facilities, or the walkability of the neighbourhood. So, when will this government formally engage with Takhini residents about the impacts that this school will have on our neighbourhood?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have gone over the information about the committee that's in place. In August, we hired Kobayashi and Zedda Architects Ltd. as the prime consultant. This work is underway. I appreciate the information that the Leader of the New Democratic Party is bringing forward today. We are in a full planning stage, and folks will certainly be brought into the discussion, including sporting groups and other partners that need to be part of this conversation.

We are moving forward in building new school infrastructure. We certainly did inherit a deficit when it came to school infrastructure, particularly elementary schools and particularly in the City of Whitehorse, and we are catching up to that and building new schools. We will have Whistle Bend come online soon and we are building a school in Burwash Landing, and we're moving forward on the planning for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School in Takhini.

Question re: Better Buildings program

Mr. Istchenko: When the Minister of Community Services proposed the creation of the Better Buildings program, he promised that it would meet the targets set out in the *Clean Energy Act*. The minister committed to a target of 2,000 residential, commercial, and institutional buildings in the next six years. Yesterday, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources revealed that the Better Buildings program has had only, in his words, about a half a dozen successful applicants.

Does the minister think that we are on pace to meet the goal of 2,000 buildings retrofitted under this program?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am happy to talk about all the work that this government is doing to adapt to our changing climate,

to reduce our energy consumption in the territory, and to make life a little bit more affordable for Yukoners, which is exactly what the Better Buildings program was designed to do, to help Yukoners make their homes more energy efficient.

The Better Buildings program, as the member opposite knows, offers low-cost funding to eligible property owners to complete energy-efficient retrofits. This means that more property owners will have the means to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint. The funding is repayable by a local improvement charge attached to the property. It's based on the interest rates that are currently in effect, and we give a discount on that, so it's a very good deal for Yukoners and I encourage anyone who is thinking about improving their house to please apply.

Since the program launch on October 25, 2022, the Energy branch has received 55 applications from clients wishing to participate, so we are working on those applications. We hope we have more. As I said, interest rates have gone up, which is probably affecting the uptake of the program, but we are committed to making life affordable for Yukoners and are offering this program to do that.

Mr. Istchenko: The question that I asked was: Does the minister think that we are on pace to meet the goal of 2,000 buildings retrofitted under this program? I didn't get an answer.

It will be even harder for this program to be successful since the Liberal government has cut the budget by \$1 million, and the budget is only \$1.5 million to start with. Instead of cutting the budget, why doesn't the minister go back to the municipalities and ask for their feedback on making changes to this program that is so obviously not working as it was intended?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I can say that I began conversations with municipalities, it has to have been three or four years ago, around the Better Buildings program. We slowed it down in this House. The opposition voted to slow down passing this legislation. Okay, that's all right. And then, after consulting with municipalities — and now, all municipalities have signed on to the agreement. We opened it up, and the last information I have is that we have had 55 applications to the Energy branch.

There is starting to be those applications. Thank you to Yukoners. I think that this is a good policy, I think it's a good program, and I know the folks who are doing the work over at the Energy branch are very good at this, and I encourage Yukoners to go and talk to them about this opportunity to retrofit our homes. When we do this, we end up having to pay less for energy in the first place, and we save dollars for Yukoners over the long term, and that's why it's a good program.

The Yukon Party isn't interested in this program; I get it; that's fine, but I think it's good for Yukoners. I think it's good because it reduces our dependency on fossil fuels. That's why it's a good program.

Mr. Istchenko: Madam Deputy Speaker, he paused the program because he didn't consult — we forced you to go and consult. During the debate about the legislation, we heard from several municipalities that had concerns with the program. Even after the government agreed to make changes to the

program, several mayors and councils have expressed concern that this program is going to be very difficult for rural Yukoners to access, and according to the minister yesterday in this House, there has only been one successful applicant from rural Yukon so far.

So, will the minister agree to revise the program to make it more accessible to Yukoners living in rural communities?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: No, I don't think that is a good question, because what I hear is that the Yukon Party just wants us to stall the program again. What the Minister of Community Services offered to do is to have those conversations with municipalities while we got the program up and running, but no, the Yukon Party said: No, no, don't do that. Actually, I don't think that the Yukon Party is actually interested in this program at all. What I think is that they would like to see the program stall right out.

It's a great program. I encourage Yukoners to go to the Energy Solutions Centre to have conversations. I know that the Minister of Community Services is totally willing to have conversations with our municipalities, if they have any concerns; that's fine. I hope that they don't change their minds, because this is a great program for Yukoners, and I want to see it all across the territory.

Question re: Parent advisory committee

Mr. Kent: Madam Deputy Speaker, during a CBC interview on September 8 regarding the IPC's report on sexual abuse at Hidden Valley, the Minister of Education was asked about the parent advisory committee that was at the school. The minister told the host that she "... asked the department to make a permanent parent advisory committee...", later saying that it would be for all schools, not just Hidden Valley.

So, can the minister confirm that she means one committee for all schools or one committee per school, and when exactly did she direct the department to establish a permanent parent advisory committee for all schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I think I will start by just talking a little bit about the safer schools action plan, because that is really where the parent advisory committee came from. Of course, folks know that it started through an internal review of matters that happened at the Hidden Valley Elementary School. It resulted in seven recommendations and 23 action items that made up an action plan for safer schools.

One of those actions included establishing a parent advisory committee to work with us as the reports became available, and there are a few. I also, as I am on my feet, want to thank all of those who offered insights into what had happened at Hidden Valley Elementary School. That parent advisory committee has worked with us — me — throughout this process, and I will continue to build on that as we go forward.

Mr. Kent: I have the transcript here, and during that interview, the minister commented that — and I quote: "I've asked the department to make a permanent parent advisory committee." The interviewer said: "For all schools or just Hidden Valley?" The minister said: "Yeah, yes, for all

schools.” But the minister didn’t answer the question that I asked off the top.

So, can the minister confirm for us that she means one committee for all schools or one committee per school, and when exactly did she direct the department to establish a permanent parent advisory committee for all schools?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I did, in fact, say that I want to establish a parent advisory committee that would be able to advise me as we go forward, and, yes, I do confirm that I said that on CBC. I have had those discussions, as we were wrapping up some of the last discussions that we had with the current parent advisory committee that was specific to Hidden Valley Elementary School.

We talked about the need to have a parent advisory committee that could work with the minister’s office and Department of Education on matters that are — we have accomplished the safer schools action plan, and we know that there is more work to be done. My intention is to continue working with a parent advisory committee that would be able to have other members from other areas of the Yukon and be able to advise me and work with me as we go forward to further advance the work on safer schools in the Yukon.

Mr. Kent: The minister told the CBC on September 8 that she had asked the department to make a permanent parent advisory committee. So, the questions that I asked earlier today — neither of them was answered — but a number of school communities have been asking us about this new committee. There has been little or no consultation about it with school councils that we have heard from.

Has any consultation regarding this committee that the minister asked the department to establish been conducted so far? If not, when can education partners, including school councils and school boards, expect to be consulted on the establishment of the permanent parent advisory committee that the minister referenced on the local radio?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I have just said in the House that I have asked for this to happen to ensure that we have a parent advisory committee that can continue doing the work. I am not sure if the member opposite is, you know — I get it that there is always kind of this “I got you” kind of politics thing that is going on. It is just not the way that I do my work, and I am always a little bit shocked at that kind of tactic that is used in here.

This is a great thing for Yukoners. It is a great thing to have more connection with the minister’s office, and it is completely within my authority to establish such a committee, and I have done that with the safer schools action plan. My intent is to continue to work with a parent advisory committee. It will not take away anything from our other partners, including school councils, so I can rest assured that you are not catching me on anything here. We are working with Yukoners, and that is my commitment going forward.

Deputy Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 774

Clerk: Motion No. 774, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Deputy Speaker: It is moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT the membership of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees, as established by Motion No. 12, be amended by:

- (1) rescinding the appointment of the Hon. Ranj Pillai; and
- (2) appointing the Hon. Jeanie McLean to the committee.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Madam Deputy Speaker, this is just a straightforward motion replacing the membership of one of our standing committees.

Motion No. 774 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Deputy Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 33: *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*.

Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Deputy Chair, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*. I have with me Jaime Mellott and Rebecca Veinott, who will be assisting us this afternoon.

This bill amends the *Registered Nurses Profession Act* by facilitating the creation of four new classes of licensing for

nurses in the Yukon and the *Registered Nurses Profession Act Regulation*.

This will support recruitment of registered nurses and nurse practitioners in the Yukon while protecting the health of Yukoners. This amendment supports the request by the Registered Nurses Association, which regulates the profession in the Yukon. These new classes will come into effect when the regulations are passed. These regulations will be consistent with the act and will be enforced by the Yukon Registered Nurses Association. They will allow the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to regulate the profession consistent with national trends and facilitate territorial access to health human resources while protecting the public.

The amendment supports the creation of four new classes of licensing. Those classes are — first is the interim class, which allows newly graduated nurses, nurse practitioners, and internationally educated nurses to register directly in the Yukon. Currently, nurses must be registered in another Canadian jurisdiction to be eligible. Further, applicants waiting for their entry-to-practice exam or other documents can apply under this class. The second class is the virtual class. It enables registered nurses and nurse practitioners from other jurisdictions to provide care for a specified purpose via virtual means such as telehealth. This will keep Yukoners in their homes and communities rather than having to travel for treatment. The third class, the courtesy class, allows specialists who come to practise in the Yukon for a certain time to bring their own specially trained nurses with them or someone who provides training or workshops. The fourth is the student nurse class, which allows student nurses to be registered to work here, for example, for a practicum under supervision.

The amendments also permit the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to enter into agreements with other jurisdictions to allow for portable and flexible nursing services by health care providers who are registered and hold a full licence in either the Yukon or any other participating jurisdiction. This is an important step to support labour mobility and remove red tape for health care providers. Updates will also allow greater flexibility in fees, which, in turn, will be attractive to nurses who wish to work in the Yukon.

We look forward to all the questions that may come this afternoon. We know that there is a lot of interest in this matter, so I will now turn it over to my good colleagues across the aisle.

Mr. Cathers: As the Official Opposition critic for Health and Social Services, I am pleased to rise in speaking to this legislation in Committee of the Whole.

We do have a number of questions and I want to note, as I did at second reading, that we do support the legislation moving forward and recognize that changes were asked for by the Yukon Registered Nurses Association. However, I do have to again state our concern that we were told that draft legislation was not shared with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and the government does not intend to share the draft regulations with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association before Cabinet approves them.

As I noted before, there is nothing preventing government from choosing to share the fine print of proposed legislation or

regulations with stakeholders who will be directly affected by it. As I noted, my caucus colleagues and I believe that it is actually good practice for developing better legislation and better regulations. Also, as I noted in this particular case, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association is a stakeholder, but in addition to being a stakeholder, they are also the regulator responsible for implementing legislation and regulations. When you have a self-regulating profession like nursing in the Yukon, in my view, it is incredibly problematic for government to choose not to share the details of draft legislation and draft regulations with that regulator before bringing it into effect. There just isn't a compelling reason why government can't choose to share that draft if Cabinet approves that sharing.

As I asked at second reading, we would ask the government to revisit their plan and commit to sharing the text of the draft regulations pursuant to bringing this act change into effect with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association before Cabinet approves them. Will the minister agree to do that? If not, why not?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am going to ask for clarification from the member opposite. He is asking that we share the draft regulations with the association. Am I correct in that assertion?

Mr. Cathers: That is correct. I am asking that the minister commit to sharing the draft regulations related to this legislation with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and allowing them the opportunity for feedback on that prior to Cabinet receiving the recommended regulations in the Cabinet submission.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I thank the member opposite for that clarification in restating the question.

As is the long-standing practice when dealing with professional associations with this Yukon government, we will, of course, be drafting the regulations hand in glove with the association that is the regulatory body. The member opposite is the former Justice minister; I am sure he knows this. Nothing has changed since his time in office. We will, of course, work with the association on those regulations. The answer to his question is, of course, yes.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate the minister indicating that. It is a bit different from what we had been told earlier. I just want to ask again, because I actually didn't ask my last question as clearly as I could have phrased it.

Just to be clear, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association will see a copy of the draft regulations and have the opportunity for input on it before it reaches the stage where Cabinet is looking at approving regulations.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Yes, as is common practice.

Mr. Cathers: I do appreciate that answer from the minister, and I am pleased that they will share that with the YRNA. I think it is a very important thing to do.

I want to move on to the question of international nurses and the registration here. We have heard a few different things from here. In looking at the legislation itself and the explanatory note that is contained within the bill that the minister tabled, it doesn't refer to international nurses. Now, the minister, in his remarks here at the beginning of Committee of the Whole, referred to several classes of nurses under the act.

The question, I guess, is if the minister could explain the discrepancy between what we are seeing in the bill itself, which doesn't seem to deal with international nurses — and, in fact, from the nursing community, our understanding is that they were not expecting these changes to address issues related to internationally trained nurses.

Can the minister confirm what the government plans to do in the regulatory package associated with this bill and if it will contain matters related to internationally trained nurses? As I noted, the bill itself doesn't actually contain any references to internationally trained nurses.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Yes, they will be addressed through the regulations. The act amendments allow the regulations that will set new classes of membership. One of those is an interim membership that will allow internationally educated RNs and nurse practitioners to work in the Yukon while they are undergoing their assessments. This interim class will also be available to graduate RNs and nurse practitioners as they undergo their assessments to be fully credentialed.

Mr. Cathers: While that is different from what we understood from looking at the legislation, I am pleased to hear that the minister is looking at it. As you will recall, Deputy Chair, we have previously urged the government to look at — as a number of Canadian provinces have done, including Alberta and Nova Scotia — considering the possibility of identifying a list of countries with similar high standards in the practice of nursing as well as doctors and perhaps other health professions and, subject to consultation with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, considering the possibility of that approach while seeking their thoughts on the pros and cons of such a model. I am pleased to hear that the minister indicated that they are looking at internationally trained nurses.

Following that preamble, my question for the minister is: Is the government looking at doing a short-list-of-countries approach similar to how Nova Scotia and Alberta have addressed this issue of internationally trained nurses?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Deputy Chair, I am just going to preface my remarks to this: I think — and I am not entirely sure — but I think that the Member for Lake Laberge was actually complimenting me and my crew here for the work that we have done on this, and I want to thank him. I really do take that as an endorsement of the work that we have done, and I am glad he is happy that we have done what we always thought we would do and it meets his approval. That's great. And, so, thank you for that. That's gratifying, and I hope you make that public at some point and you share with the world that you're happy with this.

I will say that, as far as the international groups go, yes, it is something we certainly will consider. The nurses are the ones who are the regulators, of course. We will have to work with them to make sure that we come up with a means of doing this that meets their approval. As we said earlier, we are going to work with them on the regs.

Mr. Cathers: I am somewhat amused by the minister's response. I would note that I was trying to be nice in the manner I was asking my questions. The minister — I would encourage him not to try to be too cute about it here today. I do note,

though, that the minister again indicated that they're consulting with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association — welcome news — but I think that he got distracted and missed answering my main question, which is: Are they looking at a model for recognizing internationally trained nurses similar to what provinces like Alberta and Nova Scotia have done, where they have identified a short list of countries with high standards of practice that they will deal with in an expedited manner? Is that the approach being looked at, or is it something different?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Yes, of course, that is the approach that we are considering taking.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the answer. Could the minister let us know: At this point, what countries are they considering putting on that short list, again recognizing that he has committed that they will consult with the YRNA on that concept?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: No.

Mr. Cathers: Okay, Deputy Chair, I was hoping to get that information from the minister, and it is unfortunate that he doesn't wish to share it today. However, the key request — I am pleased that the government has finally agreed to consult with the YRNA on that, so I will move on to other questions in the interest of expediting debate.

As was brought up here at second reading, the Third Party raised concerns that they had heard, and we have also heard, from nurses about potential changes to the model of regulating nursing here in the Yukon, including the indication that it is their understanding, based on an e-mail from an official, that the government has chosen a model that they actually didn't consult on with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association.

Can the minister tell us the government's view on what they are actually considering doing in terms of changing the structure of who the regulator is here in the Yukon? What consultations have they had with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association? What further consultations will he commit to that may occur with them on this topic?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: This afternoon, I will say this: Really, what the member opposite is talking about is a matter for another day, to be quite frank. We are in the process of fixing and expanding the *Health Professions Act*. It's a very big piece of legislation. It's going to take some time. That work does not mean that registered nurses and nurse practitioners will lose their autonomy.

Community Services is in the early stages of the policy analysis to deal with our work on the *Health Professions Act*, another bill that will come before the House, and the member opposite, in his capacity, will be able to question us about it at that time. It is certainly well beyond the purview of the act we have before us today. I can say that we are in the early stages of policy analysis for the review and no doors are closed.

I want to state that just because health professions will come under the broad *Health Professions Act* does not mean that the nursing association will lose its autonomy. As I said, we are talking to the nursing association. We will continue to work with the nursing association into the future as we work on this new piece of legislation.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate that indication from the minister that — to use his words — “no doors are closed” and the indication that they intend to consult further with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association on that matter.

We have heard concerns from nurses regarding what they had understood the government is planning to do related to changing the regulatory model, and we were also concerned by that. I gather that I am not going to get more information from the minister on that topic here this afternoon, but I do look forward to hearing more in the future. We want to ensure that, going forward, the regulatory structure is an appropriate one and that changes to it respect the input of the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and its members.

We are very concerned about priorities in the area of health care, including increasing access to nurses and other health professionals, strengthening our public health care system, reducing wait times, and also ensuring that high quality standards of patient care continue to be in place within our system for now and the foreseeable future. I do appreciate that indication from the minister.

At this point, Deputy Chair, I think that I will actually wrap up my questions at this stage in the interest of allowing us to use the House’s very limited time to address other business. I look forward to any other information that the minister can provide on this topic. I do, again, welcome the commitment that we have heard here today to consult with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association on draft regulations, as well as on the changes government is considering under the *Health Professions Act*, and with that, I will cede the floor to either the minister or the Third Party for additional debate at the Committee stage.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I want to thank the member opposite for raising his concerns this afternoon. I note in the last concern that was raised and voiced and another concern alleviated — at least for now. I also thank the member opposite for acknowledging the robust consultation that this government does with the stakeholders who are involved in the legislation and the work we do. I do appreciate that endorsement, and I look forward to hearing from the Leader of the Third Party.

Ms. White: In conversation with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, they said that most of their recommendations were adopted in this change to the legislation but not all. Can the minister share with us which ones were not included and why?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to welcome the Leader of the Third Party to the discussion in Committee of the Whole this afternoon. I can say that, in a letter from April 28, 2022, the Yukon Registered Nurses Association requested five amendments to the legislation. The first was to allow the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to compel the production of documents for the purpose of an investigation. Number 2, they asked that we remove the requirement that a finding of incompetence, misconduct, or incapacity be included in a complaint resolution agreement when a complaint is dismissed but does not get referred to a formal hearing. They asked that we remove the requirement that the personal information of

registrants be published on a public register. They asked us to move the power to create licence classes from the regulation to the bylaws and limit the liability of the Yukon Registered Nurses Association staff from carrying out their duties in good faith.

In our legislation, we have accommodated their ask to remove the requirement that personal information of registrants be published on the public registrar. We have done that. The other four requests we got from the letter are being worked into the larger — they are a little bit more involved and require a lot more work are being worked into our new *Medical Profession Act*.

That’s what it comes down to. We have been able to accommodate one of the asks, and the other ones have been moved to the larger piece of legislation. What we are dealing with in this legislation is to deal with the immediate need to recruit more nurses in the territory. That’s the layup that we have orchestrated with this piece of legislation, and we are working with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association very closely on fulfilling the other ones in the broader piece of legislation.

Ms. White: Just for clarification, the minister just said the “*Medical Profession Act*”. Did he mean the *Health Professions Act*?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Please let me correct the record; I did mean the *Health Professions Act*; I misspoke.

Ms. White: Out of the five changes that were requested by the YRNA, one is included in this information, and the minister just indicated that the others, just for clarification, will be included in the revised *Health Professions Act*, or will they be addressed at another point? In which act or regulations or where will they be addressed?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: They are being rolled into the broader *Health Professions Act* legislation.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Just on the basis that the minister has just mentioned — that act is something that is being worked on. When can this House expect to see that coming forward for debate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: It is a very large piece of legislation. We are at the beginning of policy work on that legislation. We are looking at about two years before it looks like we will be delivering that piece of legislation.

Chair (Ms. Blake): Is there any further general debate on Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*?

Seeing none, we will now proceed clause-by-clause.

Ms. White: Madam Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the title of Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, read and agreed to.

Unanimous consent re deeming all clauses and the title of Bill No. 33 read and agreed to

Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all clauses and the

title of Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, read and agreed to.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Clauses 1 to 29 deemed read and agreed to

On Title

Title agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 5 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Department of Highways and Public Works — continued

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I think I have very little time, but I will just introduce Deputy Minister Catherine Harwood and Assistant Deputy Minister Richard Gorczyca. I look forward to questions this afternoon.

Mr. Hassard: I think the minister had about two seconds left there if there was something else he wanted to add.

I, too, would like to thank the officials for being here today to assist the minister in going through a few questions that we have from the Official Opposition.

I will jump right in. The first question I have for the minister is — we know that the government has said that they have done a cost-benefit evaluation on the closing of some roadside rest stops throughout the territory. I am wondering if the minister could give us some insight into that evaluation.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. Our rest areas along Yukon highways are an important part of our transportation network and provide all travellers with safe and appropriate areas to rest. Some rest areas have outhouses, garbage disposal, and interpretive messaging on the Yukon's history and environment.

The Yukon government is developing a rest area strategy to provide a high, consistent level of service for rest areas with a standardized distance between them, allowing highway travellers to predict and be able to rely on the Yukon system of rest areas for outhouses and garbage services.

We know that there is a need for a rest area between Faro and Carmacks, which is why we are, in fact, planning to add a new rest area on the Robert Campbell Highway.

I think that, technically under the auspices of Tourism and Culture, although Highways and Public Works has taken the lead on this file in cooperation with Tourism and Culture, the Yukon government is permanently closing three rest areas on one road, the north Klondike Highway, this fall. This aligns with the Yukon government's rest area strategy. The three sites that are closed or will be closed and where outhouses will be removed are as follows: the Conglomerate Mountain point of interest at kilometre 297.8, as there are other outhouse facilities within 10 to 20 kilometres on either side of Conglomerate near Braeburn and Montague Roadhouse; Yukon Crossing at kilometre 395.2, as there are outhouse facilities within 13 kilometres of Yukon Crossing at Five Finger Rapids; and the Stewart River viewpoint at kilometre 551, as there are outhouse facilities at Stewart Crossing at kilometre 535, which is, by my calculation, 16 kilometres away.

As I indicated, the three outhouses will be removed by Highways and Public Works, and Highways and Public Works will evaluate the impacts of these closures on nearby rest areas to inform the rest area strategy. Implementing a long-term strategy envisioned for a more standardized and cost-efficient system of roadside amenities will involve some outhouse closures. Highways and Public Works is also planning to install fast-charging stations at certain rest areas where feasible. For example, in 2024, we are planning the installation of a charging station at the Canol Road rest area on the Alaska Highway.

As the department develops and implements the rest area strategy, the department will continue to meet the needs of Yukoners and travellers travelling on our highways. In summary, to follow up on questions from the member opposite, the plan is to have rest stops at reasonable intervals. Sometimes, just based on the planning between departments — in this case, the Department of Tourism and Culture and the Department of Highways and Public Works and I know the Department of Environment sometimes as well, although the Department of Environment is not generally involved with highway outhouses — it is important to maximize efficiencies.

I have also been advised that expenses related to, let's say — "evacuation" I believe is the word. The evacuation of materials has significantly increased as well. In that respect, it's prudent to do so.

That is the reason and the bottom line is that Conglomerate is within 10 to 20 kilometres of an approximate outhouse location, the Yukon Crossing is approximately within 13 kilometres of another location, and the Stewart River viewpoint is within 16 kilometres of another outhouse location.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that. I have a couple questions coming from that. Do I understand the minister correctly, then, that there is potential for other rest stops to be closed as well? He talked about the removal of outhouses and garbage cans from those rest stops, but will those actual pullouts be closed, or will those pullouts be kept open for people to still pull over when they need to have a rest?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I did ask this question of my officials yesterday on this topic with respect to the three sites where the outhouses and garbage cans will be removed. Yes, for now, there will still be pullouts. The plans are to put signs there indicating the proximity to a full-service pullout. Those signs, we hope, will be in place relatively soon. The signage will be in place quite soon. As I indicated in my prior response, the Yukon government is developing a rest area strategy to provide a high, consistent level of service for rest areas, plus standardized distance between them, allowing highway travellers to predict and rely on the Yukon's system of rest areas for outhouses and garbage services.

I am advised that the Yukon-wide strategy should be in place by early 2024. At this time, I am not aware of any additional outhouses that are planned to be decommissioned and removed, but it is certainly possible. I am unaware of any others that are planned to be decommissioned and removed, but as indicated, there will be an overarching, Yukon-wide rest area strategy.

Mr. Hassard: The minister spoke about a new rest stop between Faro and Carmacks. Of course, this is something that has been advocated for quite a while by several of my constituents in the Faro area.

Once Highways and Public Works agreed to move forward with adding this new rest stop, the citizens who have been promoting this, or pushing this, had an area chosen overlooking Little Salmon Lake. I know that, when Highways and Public Works went back to the community of Faro with their proposal on this new rest stop, it was actually down in a gravel pit by Drury Creek. The government was also proposing to put in an EV-charging station there.

I know there was a lot of pushback from the community and, I believe, from the municipality government of the Town of Faro. I am wondering if there is any update from the minister on this particular rest stop. Is the government going to move forward with the government's plans, or will they listen to the community members and put the roadside pullout where they have requested?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Personally, I would say that I do understand, in discussing this matter briefly with my colleague the Minister of Community Services, that the Mayor of Faro in a general sense was certainly — I will just speak of what I heard about from the Mayor of Faro, which was that the community of Faro was certainly pleased that there would be a rest stop. I'm not sure if it is roughly equidistant between Carmacks and Faro but somewhere in the middle.

I have heard the member opposite with respect to his question about it being on a site overlooking Little Salmon Lake versus being in Drury Creek. I will undertake to get back with a legislative return with respect to the considerations that are made with respect to implementing, actualizing, and deploying a rest stop and the considerations that Highways and Public Works are engaging in with respect to choosing a site.

I am certainly open to continuing the discussion, and I will get further updates from my officials on the topic of location and the active planning factors that are in play at HPW in

determining the placement of a new rest stop with outhouses and potentially also with an EV-charging station.

Mr. Hassard: I am happy to hear that the minister is still open to this, because I know that there has been a lot of work done by community members in Faro regarding this issue and very passionate work, too, I may add. So, I certainly hope that the minister and the department keep a very open mind and give serious consideration to the work and the thoughts that have been put into it by those community members.

Moving to bridges, Madam Chair, I have a few questions around the Big Creek bridge. Of course, we have discussed it here in the Legislature previously. I asked questions of the minister last year, and the department was going to get back to me with some more details — which I have not yet received, I will note — in regard to subcontractors being paid. When I asked the question in the Legislature during Question Period, the minister wasn't able to provide a full answer to that. So, I guess my question is: Have statutory declarations been signed by Julmac indicating that they have, in fact, paid all of the subcontractors on this project? How much has Julmac been paid in regard to the overall contract? I will stop there and see where we get to from that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Just to follow up on the question of the additional rest stop and outhouse on the Robert Campbell Highway, my information is that the location is still under review and has not been confirmed. The final location will be determined based on power availability, and Highways and Public Works is now looking at the kilometres between kilometre 460 and kilometre 470. That is the most up-to-date information that I have on that topic.

With respect to Big Creek, I will provide some basic information that I have, and I have some additional details. I also believe that I have some information that may have been provided to the member opposite this summer.

Briefly, Big Creek bridge is located approximately 65 kilometres west of Watson Lake on the Alaska Highway and is an important part of Yukon's transportation network. In 2020, the tender was awarded to Julmac Contracting Ltd., and the original planned completion was in 2022; however, in 2022, defects within the concrete deck were discovered during inspections of the new bridge. As I think I have indicated previously, Julmac Contracting's contract was terminated in May of 2023 on the basis of delay and breach of contract milestones.

On August 11, 2023, Julmac Contracting Ltd. filed a statement of claim with the Yukon Supreme Court. The Yukon government has counterclaimed for the as-yet-undetermined cost to complete the project and repair the deficient work.

As the matter is now before the courts, I won't be in a position to comment much with respect to the active litigation; however, the Yukon government is exploring all options available to complete the project. We are working with the engineer for the project to perform a full assessment of the bridge. The assessment will provide details of what additional work is required to allow the bridge to be open for public use. Until the new bridge is ready, we will continue to perform the

regular maintenance and inspections of the existing bridge to verify that it remains safe for the travelling public.

I am advised that the payment of subcontractors is a private commercial matter between the general contractor and the subcontractor, as per their individual subcontracts. In the event of a subcontractor claim, the process is administered by the Department of Highways and Public Works Procurement Support Centre and the Department of Justice. This process and its requirements are laid out in the contract and procurement regulations.

I did send a letter to the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin. It had some of the information that I have just provided, but of note, I wrote to the member indicating that the contractor has not completed the work in accordance with the contract terms, and the Government of Yukon has now removed the contractor from the project. Our department has high standards for the safety of our transportation infrastructure, and all our projects must meet these standards. The Government of Yukon will perform further assessment of the new bridge in order to determine what the next steps are to complete the project.

As I indicated in my previous comments, until the new bridge is ready, the existing bridge is still operational. We are continuing to perform regular maintenance and inspections to ensure that it remains in safe condition. That was by way of correspondence in July of this summer.

I provided a legislative return that was tabled on April 27, 2023, which had the information about the payment of subcontractors being a private commercial matter between the general contractor and subcontractor, as per their individual subcontracts. Further, just to confirm, in the event of a subcontractor claim, the process is administered by the Department of Highways and Public Works Procurement Support Centre and the Department of Justice. This process, as I indicated, and its requirements are laid out in the contract and procurement regulation. So, that appears to have been tabled on April 27, 2023.

The member opposite will know that the territorial government enters into hundreds of contracts every year, and most of them proceed, work is performed, they are resolved, and payment is made uneventfully, which is what we would wish to have. Sometimes — this is — we, of course, would want the Big Creek bridge replacement to be complete and recognize that there is a delay. This, of course, occurs in the territory on contracts from time to time, but the Yukon government will be pursuing all of its remedies.

By way of an update, I can advise that Highways and Public Works engineers were on-site yesterday with consulting engineers to conduct assessments of the bridge in order to inform the next steps regarding repairs. Of course, we want to — I have driven down to Watson Lake a few times, and I have certainly seen that structure there. Yes, we obviously wish to have that bridge replacement project finished sooner rather than later.

Mr. Hassard: The minister didn't comment or didn't mention about how much money Julmac has actually been paid on the original contract, so I am wondering if the minister could provide that number to the Legislature today.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised that the Yukon government has paid slightly over \$6 million to Julmac for work performed — or perhaps not performed — satisfactorily so far.

Mr. Hassard: I guess I would like to ask if the government feels that they got \$6 million worth of work from that, but I am assuming that, since it is in front of the courts, I probably won't get an answer to that question, but if the minister decides that he would like to tell us, you know, I would be happy to hear that.

With that, Madam Chair, I will move on to the Nisutlin Bay bridge. I am curious if the minister can give us an update on timelines and budget for that project as well.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I do have a number of updates with respect to this project. It could be a bit more than eight minutes, but in any event, I am sure that there will be a bit of discussion about this project.

As the member opposite well knows, the existing bridge will be replaced by constructing a new bridge that will span 483 metres across Nisutlin Bay and have a scheduled service life of approximately 100 years. The 2023 construction season started on March 16. Work continued to ramp up this construction season with 30 to 50 rotating staff on-site at the construction camp throughout the summer. There is another anticipated winter shutdown planned, and the timing for the winter shutdown is seasonal and weather-dependent. The anticipated substantial completion date is September 30, 2025, and the total completion date is March 31, 2026.

The contractor is constructing a temporary trestle bridge, which will serve as a working platform for the construction of the new bridge. As of now, about a week ago or so, 21 of the total 30 spans have been completed and are facilitating the construction of the new bridge, starting with the piling. As well, the following work has been completed to date by the contractor: site mobilization and permanent pilings for the north and south abutments; permanent casings for pier 2 and pier 3; the piles for pier 2; concrete pours for the south approach embankment; clearing and grubbing for the new road on the south side; and the installation of two of six cofferdams is complete, and I am advised that the third is ongoing.

Granular bit development and rock production is at kilometre 1238 near Teslin, and environment measures such as hydroacoustic monitoring, fish salvage, and water sampling are ongoing. The \$159.96-million contract was awarded on May 3, 2022 to Graham Infrastructure Limited Partnership. Infrastructure Canada's Building Canada fund committed \$41.25 million to the project, and Transport Canada is also contributing \$52.5 million, through the national trade corridors fund, to the project.

The approximate budgets for the next three fiscal years are as follows: The capital plan indicates approximate spending in 2023 of \$40 million to \$45 million; for fiscal year 2024-25, \$45 million to \$50 million; and for fiscal year 2025-26, \$25 million to \$30 million. These numbers are subject to change as the work progresses.

Highways and Public Works continues to work collaboratively with the Teslin Tlingit Council and engage with

the Village of Teslin, the public, and specific stakeholders on this project as it moves forward. The Yukon government project team meets with the Teslin Tlingit Council on a bi-weekly basis in order to discuss the project and troubleshoot. As well, the Yukon government, the Teslin Tlingit Council, and the primary contractor, Graham Construction, meet on a monthly basis in order to review the project and to discuss potential community issues and solutions.

Graham Infrastructure Limited Partnership has staffed a community wellness team that includes a liaison for workers to contact and a separate liaison for community members to contact with any health and wellness issues pertaining to the project that they may have. The contract has developed and enforces policies for all staff regarding drugs and alcohol and a respectful workplace, including equity, inclusion, and diversity. Transfer payment agreements were signed with the Teslin Tlingit Council that address project planning, participation, implementation support, and environmental and socio-economic baseline studies.

I am happy to report, Madam Chair, that I was very recently able to sign off on a transfer payment agreement with the Teslin Tlingit Council for sonar enumeration. Environmental protection of the Nisutlin Bay area is a major component of the work on the bridge. Under the *Fisheries Act* authorization, we were required to establish a sonar enumeration project. This is to make sure that the construction work is not negatively impacting fish populations or migrations.

As indicated, we have now signed a transfer payment agreement with Teslin Tlingit Council that provides funding to support this sonar project. The sonar enumeration project will last until the Nisutlin Bay bridge project is completed. The project helps researchers with the Teslin Tlingit Council count chinook salmon passing through the Nisutlin River delta national wildlife area. This important natural area is also the migration route for chinook salmon returning to the Nisutlin and Wolf rivers and their tributaries.

The sonar covers a relatively narrow and shallow section of the river. Like a police officer measuring car speeds with a radar gun, the sonar pings various objects, in this case, salmon, as they go by the sonar. The result is translated into a daily count of salmon. This work is essential to protecting salmon and making sure that the fish reach their spawning grounds while a new bridge is being built in Nisutlin Bay.

There is more here, but I will sign off for now. What I will say is that I had the pleasure and honour to be in Teslin three times this summer for various reasons. I certainly was able to see the demonstrable progress that has been made on this major and important piece of Yukon infrastructure which will keep the supply route on the Alaska Highway intact for a long time. I am certainly impressed by the work that has been done so far, and I met, in a joint meeting, with the Teslin Tlingit Council and the Village of Teslin on this topic. I am certainly very alert to the issue — both the Village of Teslin and the Teslin Tlingit Council certainly do wish for this to be a strong project, a good legacy with demonstrable benefit to the community.

I believe that is largely occurring. As indicated, there are at least bi-weekly meetings, and we are continuing to be in contact with Graham, the Village of Teslin, and the Teslin Tlingit Council on a very regular basis.

Mr. Hassard: I am just curious. Can the minister, in fact, tell us that the \$159-million original contract price — are we still on target for that price?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. As I did indicate in my preliminary remarks, yes, the numbers are subject to change as the work progresses on this significant project. I do have some details that I can share with the House, and I will certainly share additional details as they become available and can be disclosed.

The Yukon government and Graham Construction have been negotiating about a change order that would reflect the impacts of the terms of the *Fisheries Act* authorization for the Nisutlin Bay bridge project. Negotiations such as these, of course, are ongoing and confidential because of their commercial nature and to maintain confidential positions. What I can tell you is that Yukon government has done its due diligence in handling this matter and in mitigating risks due to the original 2022 *Fisheries Act* authorization for the project.

When the Nisutlin Bay bridge project went to tender, there was no reason to expect any significant deviation from similar previous *Fisheries Act* authorizations that have been received from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. It had been a regular practice for Highways and Public Works to award contracts with similar sample *Fisheries Act* authorizations, and then the contractor would meet the terms of the actual *Fisheries Act* authorization as part of the contract.

As the member opposite is aware from previous debate that has occurred, the Yukon government received *Fisheries Act* authorization that had new restrictive limits, such as cumulative noise impacts to fish. The Yukon government did successfully work with the Teslin Tlingit Council, the Government of Canada, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans on an amendment to the authorization. This did take some time.

The amendment was received in March 2023, at which point negotiations began between the Yukon government and Graham about a new schedule and workplan. There were costs that were alleged to have been incurred due to the need to rearrange work and procurements while the amendment to the *Fisheries Act* authorization was obtained from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, which is the regulator. Graham has submitted details about those costs.

As part of the negotiation process, the Yukon government has hired independent, expert consultants with deep experience in bridge construction. These experts advised the Yukon government about the claims and the supporting documents from Graham Construction. Using expert and legal advisors, the Yukon government has taken an evidence-based, reasonable approach to the negotiations.

Once the outcome is agreed to, the Yukon government can share the information about that outcome. Until then, negotiations are not complete and details cannot be shared. Discussions are ongoing, and the work continues, but it is

anticipated that the cost will exceed the original \$159-million-plus contract for this significant infrastructure project.

Mr. Hassard: We certainly look forward to an update from the minister when he can provide us with the rest of that information, because I am sure that taxpayers will be more than wanting to know.

I know that I have asked the minister questions in the Legislature before about the gravel pit that was intended to be built by Ten Mile Creek, which was supposed to supply the project with granular material. That project has not been finished. The contractor, in fact, went and found somewhere else to get that material for building the approaches to the bridge.

I guess I am curious: Will that gravel pit continue to be developed and when will that work take place? What will be the purpose of that source of gravel? Will it be just for the Teslin Tlingit Council as part of the agreement with the government on building the bridge? I guess maybe the minister can fill in some of those blanks for us.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I do have some answers with respect to the granular material. With respect to your last question, we will see if I can get some additional details with respect to future plans for the pit.

The Nisutlin Bay bridge will use over 100,000 cubic metres of aggregate for the various components. This does not include asphalt. All the granular material for roadwork is locally sourced. However, the Nisutlin Bay bridge project will require approximately 2,400 cubic metres of coarse aggregate for the cast-in-place concrete being used. This small amount of coarse aggregate for concrete work is coming from Whitehorse. The aggregate being used in this concrete has specific requirements to ensure the structural integrity of the bridge. I am advised that there are very limited sources of aggregate in Yukon that meet this requirement, which is why aggregate from the Whitehorse area will be used for this specific portion of the bridge, which equates to less than 2.5 percent of the aggregate estimated to be needed.

The other specific question was with respect to what the future — I believe the member opposite can correct me and clarify the question — plan is for Ten Mile and whether the general plan is for that to be shared between Teslin Tlingit Council and HPW, and I believe the current plan is that, yes, that is the plan going forward.

Mr. Hassard: The minister had talked about getting some more information regarding the construction and the use of that pit. Am I to understand that we will get a legislative return with that answer, or is the minister hoping to get that information here before the end of the day?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: If I could just get a clarification on the question from the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin so that we can confirm specifically what the nature of the legislative return will be.

Mr. Hassard: I am curious as to when that pit development will continue, when the expected completion of that pit development will be, and, as the minister said, who will be using the material from that pit?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I can advise that the department will be in a position, and I will be in a position, to provide a legislative return to answer the questions posed by the member opposite.

Mr. Hassard: I look forward to that information from the minister's office.

Another question with regard to that is if the minister could provide us with whether that pit development was, in fact, part of the contract for the Nisutlin Bay bridge or if it was a separate entity.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I can advise at a high level that it was identified as a source for the Nisutlin Bay bridge contract, but with respect to the follow-up question as to the development, I can also provide that information as well in the legislative return that I have committed to.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate that from the minister and look forward to that as well.

I have a couple of questions around brushing. I know that there are many questions around brushing, but one in particular — I had asked this question of the minister, maybe the previous minister, and a few department officials. A brushing job started between Johnsons Crossing and Lone Tree Creek. Some guys came in from Fort Nelson, did one pass up one side and down the other, and left the country and never came back. I have asked — there never appeared to be a contract for it. It was an add-on to a contract that was done the previous year from Marsh Lake to Johnsons Crossing.

I am curious if there is any update at all as to when brushing may occur between Johnsons Crossing and Lone Tree Creek.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We are endeavouring to get the fairly specific answer to the question raised about brushing around Johnsons Crossing. We will certainly endeavour to get that while we are in Committee of the Whole today. I just wanted to advise Yukoners that, since the beginning of the modified brushing program, or vegetation control program, in 2019, the Yukon government has brushed 2,387 kilometres and mowed 1,014 kilometres of vegetation. This totals approximately 3,401 kilometres cleared by the department.

As I am told frequently in my notes and also by my officials, the Yukon has approximately 4,800 kilometres of roads that Highways and Public Works is responsible for. That's a significant percentage.

We issued 57 contracts for vegetation control in 2022, 17 of which were awarded to First Nation businesses. We issued 23 contracts for vegetation control for 2023-24 for approximately 985 kilometres, and HPW completed approximately 620 kilometres of clover mowing in 2023-24.

I did have the opportunity this summer to do a number of community visits. As I indicated, I drove out to Teslin a number of times and Burwash Landing and past Burwash Landing about three times. I was up the north Klondike Highway to Carmacks, Pelly, Dawson, and up the Dempster. I would say that although, of course, we can always do better, in my view, we are making significant progress on brushing. Generally speaking, the sightlines are good along the majority of the

Yukon highways that I had the honour of driving on this summer.

The Government of Yukon awarded \$3.6 million in vegetation control contracts this season. This represents approximately 1,000 kilometres of clearing. The majority of the work is scheduled to be completed by the end of October, with one winter project this fiscal year. Depending on size, projects will be offered by direct award, invitational, or open tenders to the full list of qualified companies.

I will see if I can get an answer to the specific question.

With respect to next year, as Highways and Public Works has done since 2019, HPW is conducting site visits this fall in anticipation of setting kilometres and issuing tenders. We will look into the work that was mentioned by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin. My officials do not have specific information with respect to the concerns that have been raised in the House today but certainly understand the concerns.

It was around Johnsons Crossing. I didn't quite get where the end point was, but I am sure that when the member rises again, he can provide me with whether it was to Johnsons Crossing. I can confirm that work is planned in that area next year. Of course, as the member opposite well knows, if you have a logical, sequenced program of vegetation control —, in the vernacular, “brushing” — then, of course, the vegetation does not grow as much and trees do not have a certain diameter. I have been advised that, of course, if they have a certain critical diameter, then it is more labour-intensive and machine-intensive. So, if you stay on top of it across the territory, which I am led to believe is occurring with this vegetation control program, then you will get returns on your scheduled investments because the diameter of trees will be less, and you can mow more of the rights-of-way and use equipment that is less costly. I believe that we are in the position where Highways and Public Works is beginning to reap the rewards of that prudent planning.

We will get back to the member opposite with respect to the specific question about perhaps deficient brushing work that may have occurred in the Johnsons Crossing area, but as I indicated, Madam Chair, there does appear to be planned work in that area for next late spring and summer.

Mr. Hassard: I agree wholeheartedly with the minister on the fact that once we can get that scheduling done — and I believe that is work that was originally started by Mr. Gorczyca, who is with us today. I appreciate that and agree completely, but if I could just put a plug in for the folks from Johnsons Crossing and south of there.

You know, that section of highway was rebuilt in the early 1980s. I have been there that entire time, and I am quite sure that it has never actually been brushed, so some of the trees in that area are getting quite large and it's going to be a bit of a major undertaking. I am certainly happy to hear that there is work planned for that area this coming year and look forward to seeing that work done.

I had a couple of questions for the minister regarding the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport. Of course, there is a large project going on up there, so maybe the minister could

just provide us with some timelines, dollar amounts, and a little bit of insight on how things are going and progressing there.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: This is certainly a good news story for transportation infrastructure for our territory. As the member opposite knows, this is a contract that has a similar dollar value to the Nisutlin Bay bridge, so it is an unprecedented time for vital infrastructure upgrades for the territory, and I have some good news to report on this project.

The member opposite has heard me respond, both in Question Period and in previous Committee of the Whole debate, that a lot of the aggregate and material underneath the main runway dates from approximately 1942 or 1943, so certainly, it's time to upgrade. I will just provide some information here, and then I can continue, if there is insufficient time.

Madam Chair, the Government of Yukon is making crucial investments to the Yukon's infrastructure to provide Yukoners with safe and reliable aviation infrastructure for years to come. A number of improvements to the airside of the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport are needed to replace infrastructure and to keep the airport up to current standards. This work will support current and future airport operations. Improvements completed to date include upgrades to the parallel runway, the taxiways, apron panels, and developing airport land for institutional and commercial uses.

The \$160.7-million contract to reconstruct the main runway was awarded to Flatiron Constructors Canada Ltd. on May 19, 2023. The proposed work is scheduled for 2023, 2024, and 2025 for those construction seasons and for it to be substantially complete by early 2026. While this is a large project, we expect there to be minimal disruptions overall for the travelling public. We will be working closely with aviation stakeholders in order to minimize impacts on their operations during the construction period.

This year's work involved preparation for the main runway reconstruction, including airfield drainage improvements, water and sanitary line extensions, fencing to secure the work site, and construction of two access roads to the parallel runway in preparation for next year's construction season. In the following years, major construction work will begin on the main runway. This will include fully replacing the main runway and adding additional features, such as increased lighting. On August 3, we held an information session for aviation stakeholders about the project, and the members in the House will know that, on September 28, an information session was held for tourism stakeholders about the project. It's probably not a bad time to provide some clarity about that.

In the long term, the Government of Yukon will be evaluating how the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport could support larger aircraft. These aircraft fall under the category of aircraft group number 5, or AGN V. To increase the service level at the Whitehorse airport from AGN IV to AGN V, there are a number of program and infrastructure investments that would need to be made. These additional investments would include aircraft rescue firefighting resources, increased aircraft maneuvering services, increased space and processing capacity for Canada Border Services, and

increased passenger processing and screening facilities. While additional investments are required to support this category change, the length and width of the existing and new main runway will not limit the Whitehorse airport from supporting the larger AGN V aircraft.

Just to be clear to Yukoners who may be listening today and to the members opposite, when the main runway is complete, that is not — the size and width of that runway is not an impediment to receiving, for instance, the new Condor planes, which will be relatively new Airbus A330s. It is not the length or size of those airplanes; it is an assessment of what the economic model is to improve the various services, which I have outlined here, for the airport to come under the aircraft group number AGN V classification.

Perhaps also of interest to Yukoners who may be listening or reading Hansard, at some point, if they are having difficulty sleeping — but no, this is good stuff. There are nine airports in Canada that support AGN V aircraft for scheduled service, and they are all the predictable airports, but it is Pearson, YVR, Trudeau, Calgary, Edmonton, Macdonald-Cartier in Ottawa, James Armstrong Richardson in Winnipeg, Stanfield International Airport in Halifax, and the smallest airport is St. John's International.

Pearson — trivia question — how many passengers a year? In 2022, 34.7 million passengers, down to the St. John's International Airport, which has average annual passengers at 1.09 million passengers, and I believe that Whitehorse receives somewhere around — we have approximately 400,000 passengers. So, 2.5 — rough math — fewer than the smallest Canadian airport that receives AGN V classification.

It's still certainly an open conversation, and Whitehorse may very well be in a unique situation, but it's good to have context on the question of how many Canadian airports have the AGN V classification.

I have more on this exciting project, but for now, those are my preliminary answers. I am excited about this project. It's going well so far.

Mr. Hassard: I am not sure if that information is really relevant to what we're talking about today, but I guess I will ask the minister this: Of those five airports that he talked about, how many of them actually have a restaurant? Because we have heard, on more than one occasion here in the Legislature, the fact that the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport restaurant was going to reopen in 2019; then there was COVID. At any rate, here we are today, and there is still no restaurant. I am wondering if the minister could provide us a little bit of insight as to when we might see a restaurant in the Whitehorse International Airport.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I don't disagree with the member opposite that we would have liked to have seen food service sooner than now, but I do have news on this topic. I do agree that the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport ought to have food service and that it was reasonably interrupted by COVID; however, we are, of course, out of COVID, and we are excited for the next phase at our international airport.

Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport is the aviation gateway to the Yukon, welcoming passengers from

across the country and around the world. As I said in my previous response, the airport hosts approximately 400,000 passengers a year, and food service is an important part of the services offered at the airport.

We are excited to share that the Yukon government has signed an agreement with Air North to offer food services at the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport. The agreement is in place to permit Air North to undertake final renovations and outfitting, with a targeted opening in late 2023 or early 2024. Our goal is to provide quality food services for Yukoners and the thousands of passengers who pass through the airport every year. Soon, travellers will be able to not only enjoy Air North's delicious warm cookies and meals at 30,000 feet but also what they have in store for travellers at the Whitehorse terminal.

Until then, food and beverage options will continue to be available within the airport gift shop vending machines and at nearby hotel restaurants.

We are close. I don't disagree that it would have been good to have had this in place sooner, but certainly I do have fruitful, useful, and productive conversations with Air North and other air service providers in the Yukon. I certainly thank them for the valuable service that they have provided.

Going into COVID and during COVID and coming out of COVID, I am excited for this additional service, as it certainly is a feature of an airport which ours has been lacking. We do hope to be in a position to provide additional details shortly on this topic.

While I am on my feet, once again, with respect to the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport airside improvements, just briefly before I sit down, we have also entered into two community development agreements for work on the main runway with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and one with the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Both agreements are tailored to maximize socio-economic benefits that are important to each community, such as employment contracts, subcontracting, training, and workforce and business development. An example of implementation of these agreements is subcontracting work performed by First Nation businesses. Additionally, the contractor held a job fair this past August targeted at employment for First Nation citizens.

Another job fair will be held prior to next season's start-up. The framework for these agreements was developed as part of the Yukon First Nation procurement policy. We are working closely with both First Nation governments to implement these agreements.

Just generally with respect to the parallel runway, which is now substantially complete — time flies, but last September, I had the opportunity to do an airside tour of the parallel runway, the apron, and other work that was being done on the Whitehorse airfield. I can advise that the construction tender to upgrade the parallel runway was awarded to Terus Construction Ltd. and Skookum Asphalt Ltd. for approximately \$21 million.

Construction began last year. To meet Transport Canada regulations, this summer we extended the runway safety area of the parallel runway. This required infilling some — not a great deal but some — of Puckett's Gulch, which involved relocating

the airport fence line, clearing trees, and removing some vegetation to build a stable slope. I would shout out to the City of Whitehorse for working cooperatively with Highways and Public Works on this file. We also had an information session with respect to that, as the active transportation enthusiasts in Whitehorse were certainly very interested in maintaining all access to the Black Street stairs and the gulch there. It was a strong presentation which indicated that it wasn't a great deal of the Puckett's Gulch that was actually required to be infilled.

The parallel runway was closed in September 2023 in order to allow the contractor for the main runway replacement to complete site preparation work for the main runway project in the vicinity. The final parallel runway work includes grooving, painting, and some electrical work, which we expect will be finished in October.

I think I said in my preliminary comments on the airport that when the main runway is being worked on next summer and in the subsequent summer, the parallel runway will be the primary runway, so it will absolutely be operational for next spring, summer, and fall while the main runway project proceeds.

Mr. Hassard: This will probably be my last question, since it will be time to let the Third Party have their opportunity to ask the minister questions, so I will just thank the officials for being here.

My last question is with regard to the third-party rental agreement. I have heard from contractors that the engineering branch of Highways and Public Works has not been very happy with the third-party rentals, whereas Transportation Maintenance has been using it more. I am curious if there has been any update on how things are working with the third-party rental agreements. Will Highways and Public Works continue to use the third-party rental? If so, when will the third-party agreements come out again for tender?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As the member opposite very likely knows, this is a tool that has been in the toolbox of Highways and Public Works for many years, I am advised. Of course, it's important. My officials have your specific question and I will certainly undertake to table a legislative return on this topic.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

MLA Tredger: Thank you very much to the officials for being here today and for the great briefing we had. I am pleased to be asking questions about this department.

I want to start with a question that I got from a number of Yukoners this summer. I was out in Pelly Crossing, and I talked

to a number of different people, and they all brought up the walkway that goes across the Pelly River in between the two sides of Pelly Crossing. They talked about how unsafe and kind of scary they found that walkway. They didn't feel good walking on it. I went out after the barbecue to check it out. I have to admit that it was a pretty terrifying thing to try to walk on. There were actually holes in places where the rebar was bent where someone's foot could very easily slip through. It felt very uneasy.

As I was walking back from this, I stopped a couple of people who were walking toward the bridge and said: Hey, how do you feel about the bridge? It was like: We don't take the walkway; we walk on the road across — which is also very unsafe because there is no pedestrian space on that bridge on the road. So, people are making the choice between walking on this often-icy walkway that has damage to it or walking on the highway with the traffic across the bridge.

So, I am wondering if the minister can speak to that — if they are planning to address that and make it safer for people in Pelly Crossing.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: My team and I, both from Environment and Highways and Public Works, met with Selkirk First Nation Chief and Council in August. We had a productive meeting, and there were various priorities that were flagged and we have that worklist. But, yes, the bridge was flagged. My deputy minister, after the meeting, walked on the side path that is beside the bridge. My assistant and I had a look at it as well, and I don't disagree with the member opposite that there can be improvements. I am advised that HPW is planning a safety review for Pelly Crossing, which includes the bridge. Officials from HPW have been in contact with the Selkirk First Nation community safety officer to talk about those concerns. It is a curious design because the walkway is slightly below the level of the road. I am a little unclear about why that design ever happened, but that was some time ago. At the very least, I certainly will be pushing for, in the short term, improved lighting and, given that the cost of LED lighting is now — whatever. Lighting is a priority as well. I have heard loud and clear from the Selkirk First Nation Chief and Council — from Chief Nelson and her council — that this is one of their priorities and we will make our best efforts to finish the safety audit, and I will push for there to be improved lighting in the near future.

MLA Tredger: I will pass that on to the people who shared their concerns. I hope that, by the next time we have this debate, we won't need to discuss it anymore.

The other concern that I heard from folks in Pelly — what they told me is that the runway doesn't have lights, so medevac planes can't land at night. I wonder if the minister can confirm that and talk about what work is being done to address that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: This was also a topic of discussion with the Selkirk First Nation Chief and Council. I can certainly provide additional information to the Member for Whitehorse Centre about the criteria that are employed with respect to the number of flights in a given year. My understanding is that Carmacks and Mayo are both medevac-equipped airfields, but I can provide additional information as to why there are

perceived to be limitations in the community of Pelly Crossing. What I can say about Pelly Crossing is that in both the summer of 2022 and the summer of 2023, there was service and upgrade work that was done to the Pelly airfield, and I actually received positive feedback on that — that the work done with respect to the actual airstrip was of high quality and that it was appreciated.

But I also did hear that Pelly Crossing — Selkirk First Nation — would like to have medevac service in their community, but right now, based on criteria, which I can provide to the Member for Whitehorse Centre, the current medevac airfields or airstrips are in Carmacks and Mayo.

MLA Tredger: I would actually be interested in knowing more about why Pelly Crossing isn't a medevac site.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will provide that information to the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

MLA Tredger: I guess that is coming in a legislative return or something like that, but it isn't available right now. I just really feel for the people living in a town that doesn't have medevac services, where they have to drive around two hours to get to a place with medevac services — maybe a little less — especially given how urgent that it might be. I think that is leaving a community behind. I think that if the only barrier to them having medevac services is lighting, then that is something that should be looked at and should be considered and I really hope that it will be.

Another concern that I have heard about a little closer to Whitehorse is the Kusawa Lake Road and, of course, I hear about this from people who are camping at Kusawa Lake but also the people who live and have cabins on Kusawa Lake Road. They tell me that it is often quite dangerous to drive and quite risky for their vehicles. I am wondering if the minister is looking into that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Just to clarify about the prior question from the Member for Whitehorse Centre about the medevacs, you can medevac in and out of Pelly Crossing during daylight hours. It's the night issue and having the appropriate night lighting at that airfield or airstrip. To clarify the record, medevac flights are conducted or can occur in Pelly Crossing.

With respect generally to secondary roads, I can advise briefly for Yukoners listening, of course, that HPW has a lot of work to do on the primary roads, but in the last season, the Highways and Public Works team completed the following work: Venus Place in Golden Horn, there was subgrade repairs, BST, and sweeping of approximately one kilometre; Arctic Drive, which is also in Golden Horn, had subgrade repairs, BST, and sweeping of 1.1 kilometres; on the Old Alaska Highway, there were three to five metres of shoulder-brushing on the entire road; on the Cowley Lake subdivision road, there were upgrades to the last 400 metres, ditching, grading, razing, and culvert installs; on the Cookies Road — I do not know where that is, but in any event — there was a grade raze on the Cookies Road; on the Nolan Road, a soft spot repair and grade raze; and on the Takhini River Road, work was done there as well.

As I have found out in my role in this position for the last two and a half years, there are a lot of secondary roads, and

there are also a lot of public roads that are maintained by HPW to a point, and then they are not. I am interested to hear about the Kusawa Lake Road, but I do have a casework file with respect to the Kusawa Lake Road. Highways and Public Works ensures that the road surface is graded twice a year and receives one calcium application, which is completed after the first grading. This first grading can only be completed once the road surface has dried and the ground has fully thawed, typically in June. Maintenance crews began grading the road on June 28 to improve the condition of the road surface. An application of calcium to the surface to control the dust would follow the completion of the grading. Highways and Public Works is also working with the Department of Environment to coordinate funding to complete repairs in a couple of areas on the Kusawa Lake Road.

I certainly look forward to any specific concerns that a constituent or someone has raised to the Member for Whitehorse Centre, but this is a pretty similar type of grading and surface repair that occurs on these secondary roads. Apparently — the most up-to-date information, we have two graders on the Kusawa Lake Road right now.

I recognize that when there is late spring precipitation and early fall/early winter precipitation, some of these secondary roads can degrade fairly quickly. What was really quite acceptable — there were no concerns whatsoever — could degrade fairly quickly.

I certainly received concerns raised by many of the members opposite and my colleagues on this side of the House as well with respect to the condition of secondary roads. I think that, generally speaking, I just want to give a shout-out to the Transportation branch at Highways and Public Works. They are on it, but certainly, it's a vast territory with not very many people outside of Whitehorse.

Just to be clear for the member opposite, I am advised that there are graders on the Kusawa Lake Road as we speak.

MLA Tredger: I am very glad to hear it. That's great.

I want to ask about government Central Stores. Since that has been cut, has the department been tracking the savings made from that decision to not have a central government store? What have those savings been?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Yukon government is improving the service delivery and providing better value for taxpayers by modernizing the way in which government does business. The Central Stores warehouse closed on January 31, 2020, and the Queen's Printer Agency officially closed on March 31, 2020. By closing these units, we eliminated the long-term warehousing of a wide variety of centrally distributed supplies. For example, Yukon government no longer has supplies that could expire on the shelf or become outdated. Also, supplies such as high-visibility vests can become outdated when safety regulations change.

We have contracted out printing that used to be done in the Queen's Printer Agency, including confidential printing like budget documents.

The department is pleased to report that we have also modernized many processes through these changes. For example, many paper forms have been digitized and now lie

with e-Services for Citizens, which is progressing quite well in my view. We no longer have staff doing actual printing, but instead they are facilitating printer contracts with local printing companies. The Queen's Printer, I guess, is now the King's Printer. The King's Printer agency had a previous budget that ranged between \$530,000 and \$600,000 each year. This budget is now zero, as the agency does not exist.

The Central Stores budget was embedded within a larger departmental budget, and Central Stores had a previous budget that ranged between \$550,000 and \$570,000 per year. The Central Stores budget is now zero.

The King's Printer is referenced in Yukon's legislation and the position is held by the director of the Supply Services branch. That position is the sole position and there is no King's Printer agency. The King's Printer position is responsible for ensuring that official versions of legislation are accessible to those who request them.

Not a single employee lost their job because of this change. All staff affected at the Queen's — now King's — Printer and Central Stores were reassigned to other areas in Highways and Public Works or to other departments filling vacant positions. Some staff have now also retired.

There were 16 employees were affected by this change. The central purchasing unit in the Supply Services branch remains a key department function and continues to serve the Yukon government by facilitating procurement pricing and order management for supplies and printing as it has always done.

Wherever possible, Highways and Public Works sources office, paper, and cleaning supplies through standing offer arrangements and local vendors.

My officials can assist and I can likely provide additional information, but obviously there is a budget. There is a cost, but it's a different cost.

That is the information I have with respect to the King's Printer and Central Stores.

MLA Tredger: How much is spent now on external printing contracts that have replaced the Queen's — or King's Printer?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: We can provide a legislative return for that specific question.

MLA Tredger: I would appreciate that, because I would argue that the budget has not actually gone to zero; it has just turned into contracts rather than being in-house services.

I am also curious whether they have tracked how well that is working. Have they tracked wait times, for example, for external printing contracts compared to the wait times when it was a central agency?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I can certainly attempt to get some of the requested data to the Member for Whitehorse Centre, as well, in a legislative return. In a general sense, this was likely the focus of the debate some three or four years ago, but in hearing from my officials, I am advised that there is a robust, local, private market that has been able to provide cost-effective, efficient, high-quality services where there is a reasonable amount of competition and that the services that have been provided after this reorganization, or this

reconfiguration, have been more than satisfactory to Highways and Public Works and that it is working well. I know that the tagline a number of years ago was "getting out of the business of doing business", but in this case, it is supporting local business, and so far, the experience is that local business has been able, as I indicated, to provide cost-effective, efficient, robust, high-quality service.

MLA Tredger: I look forward to that legislative return. What would be really helpful is if it had the amount that was spent on external contracts for printing across the government, not just for Highways and Public Works, because that is really the comparable that we are looking at, and I am really interested in the information on how well it's working. I know our office has waited over a month for printing at different times, and I'm curious if that's an isolated example or whether that's happening elsewhere and whether this is a system that is improving efficiency, as well as improving costs.

I will leave that for now. I wanted to ask about the planned roundabout at the top of the south access on the Alaska Highway. When is that planned to be installed?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will just take this opportunity to provide a bit of an update as to some of the upgrades through the Whitehorse corridor, and I will answer the Member for Whitehorse Centre's question, as well.

The Yukon government is making several safety improvements along the Alaska Highway through Whitehorse. These improvements include removing uncontrolled highway accesses and installing pedestrian-controlled traffic lights at crossings. This will help increase public safety and reduce the risk of collisions. We have already completed several projects along the Alaska Highway, including: installing a left-turn light at the Robert Service Way intersection; geometric design improvements at both south and north Klondike Highway intersections; improvements to the Range Road intersection, including traffic lights with pedestrian-controlled lights and a paved multi-use trail; improvements at the Hillcrest intersection, including acceleration and deceleration lanes and traffic lights; and improvements between Hillcrest Drive and Burns Road, including the addition of street lights through crossings with pedestrian-controlled traffic lights, a paved multi-use trail connecting to trails going to downtown, and upgrades to the multi-use trail adjacent to the highway.

Public engagement for these projects happened at various times over the last few years and included open houses, pop-up information booths, an interactive website, expert panel discussions, and meetings and presentations. In addition, the project team has engaged with a variety of stakeholder groups, the City of Whitehorse, local businesses, and First Nation groups.

Members opposite will know that there were safety upgrades between Lodestar Lane and the Whitehorse weigh station that started in 2022 and were completed in July 2023. Upgrades included: upgrading the street lights; creating two lanes on each side, with acceleration and deceleration lanes; adding durable, high-visibility road paint markings; building a new multi-use paved trail; and improving access to the Whitehorse weigh station.

With respect to the Robert Service Way intersection, we are continuing to plan for the upgrades between Robert Service Way intersection and Philmar RV. This work will include the consolidation of uncontrolled highway accesses and the construction of new frontage roads. Two design options for this portion of the project are being considered to determine which option will allow for the safest and most efficient intersection operation, including an option for an improved four-way traffic light intersection or a roundabout.

While standardized intersections are familiar to most road users, roundabouts are important to consider because they can allow for better traffic flow by operating continuously. Roundabouts can also improve safety by reducing the number and severity of collisions by requiring drivers to slow down and by changing the angle of impact if it occurs. Roundabouts can be designed to make it safer for pedestrians and cyclists across the highway.

Those two options are still being considered. I remember there was a — I'm not sure if it was an April Fools' note, maybe about a year ago, but it showed some massive roundabout being conjectured up there. I don't think that is what is going to happen, but if a roundabout is the way that we will go, then it will be a fairly significant-sized roundabout, but that decision has not been made yet.

Just briefly while I am on my feet and because there was a question about the Two Mile Hill intersection, as well, today, the City of Whitehorse and Government of Yukon are partnering on the Hamilton Boulevard-Alaska Highway and the Range Road-Two Mile Hill intersections, also known as "HART", the combined intersection upgrade project. This joint initiative will focus on developing designs to improve the Hamilton Boulevard and Alaska Highway, and Two Mile Hill Road and Range Road intersections, with an emphasis on making travel safer and more efficient for all transportation modes.

In June 2023, the City of Whitehorse started the first round of public engagement for the project, which included an online survey that received 455 responses. The next round of public engagement is planned for the fall of 2023.

With respect to the Robert Service Way intersection, the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board has completed its review and issued their recommendations. The Yukon government issued the decision document. The water licence and the DFO letter of advice has been issued for this project. The initial desktop heritage assessment has been completed and a detailed heritage assessment is in progress.

Based on the comments received, the department is reviewing the design options that would best address public concerns while still upholding highway safety priorities and limiting environmental impacts to McLean Lake.

I am advised that there is a possible delay of the Robert Service Way intersection project due to the fact that there is going to be a heavy haul of material from the airport during the period of time that I set out, which is the summer of 2024 and the summer of 2025. Just to be clear, the final design plans for that intersection will be communicated to the public once they are complete.

MLA Tredger: Thank you for the update.

I have a few more questions about safety along the Alaska Highway corridor as it moves through Whitehorse. One is about the speed limit between Two Mile Hill and then through Porter Creek. Particularly after Kopper King, I believe it goes back up to 90 through Rabbit's Foot Canyon. That may have made sense at one time, but we now have a lot of people — we have Raven's Ridge, for example, along there. There was actually a petition about this in the Legislature, I think it was last year, by a lot of very concerned people who felt very worried about, every day, having to turn out onto that highway with people going 90.

That's a really quick and easy change. That's not something that needs years of work to make happen. It's a matter of putting up different signs. I am wondering if the department is considering doing that as an interim measure while they work on some of the other longer term projects.

I am also really concerned about lighting at the pedestrian crosswalks on the Alaska Highway at Porter Creek. Particularly, there have been some changes in that area, and those crosswalks, frankly, are hard to see. A lot of people are going quite quickly through there. Pedestrians have to be really, really proactive when they are crossing there to make sure that they are going to be safe.

Is there a look at doing lighting at those pedestrian crosswalks in Porter Creek on the Alaska Highway?

My last question about that corridor is regarding sound barriers between Takhini and the highway and whether there is a look at putting sound barriers there.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: If I could just perhaps get clarification. There are three questions, and I will make best efforts to get the information for you as soon as possible. I think the one is a question about the speed limit between the KK and Rabbit's Foot Canyon; is that correct? The second is lighting at crosswalks in Porter Creek. The third is — I am unfamiliar with this issue — sound barriers in — is that Takhini North? — up against the Alaska Highway. If I could just get clarification, then I will make best efforts to get the information.

MLA Tredger: To clarify the last question, I was talking about in between the Alaska Highway and Takhini North, as the highway is being developed, if there is an opportunity to provide sound barriers for the residents in that area.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I think, in sequential order, with respect to the speed limit, I am advised that there is a consultant who is doing a safety audit with respect to the Whitehorse corridor, generally, on speed. We will certainly have a report or feedback on an analysis of the Whitehorse corridor and speed limits, hopefully in the near future.

With respect to Porter Creek crosswalk lighting, I am advised that there is an invitational tender that has been issued. The tender is under review. We hope to have that work completed in the spring of 2024.

And to the best of my knowledge, there is no plan for sound barriers to divide Takhini North with the Alaska Highway, but I can certainly look into that further. I think what the member opposite is suggesting is something like what you would see — my experience would be something that you see in Toronto on

major highways where there are significant walls. In any event, I can look into that, but I think those are the answers to your questions with respect to speed, lighting, crosswalks, and sound barriers.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister for that. We just have a little bit of time left, so I want to talk a bit about *Our Clean Future* and Highways and Public Works' role in that. I want to start by asking about what — I think what we have been talking about before is the sustainable procurement policy. This is I2, and I see that there is a change of course in the last report around that, so I am wondering what is happening with work on the sustainable procurement policy. Are we going to see something like that soon? Just what are the intentions?

Request for Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole

Chair: At this time, I will ask if any private member wishes to volunteer to be Acting Chair of Committee of the Whole.

Member for Takhini-Kopper King rises

Acting Chair (Ms. White): Order, please.

Is there any further general debate on the Department of Highways and Public Works?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Acting Chair, I am just checking the *Our Clean Future* report card under I2, and it is showing as the categories to develop procurement guidance, operational requirements, and a collection of evaluation criteria to better support sustainable and local procurement by 2024, shown as being “ongoing”. We are developing a sustainable procurement strategy and implementation plan to support procurement authorities across YG and making more sustainable and environmentally friendly decisions while procuring goods and services. For example, procurement authorities will be encouraged to buy goods with certified eco labels that signify that the item is environmentally friendly. Moving forward with sustainable procurement is one more example of how we are modernizing our procurement system, and I know that work is currently underway with respect to this initiative.

With respect to a fairly significant initiative on sustainable procurement, the Yukon government is committed to electrifying its vehicle fleet to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Department of Highways and Public Works is leading by example by adding zero-emission vehicles to the fleet and promoting sustainable and suitable vehicle options that meet requirements while embracing new vehicle technology. The department will continue tendering for electric trucks, vans, and SUVs to replace gasoline vehicles as appropriate. This goes well beyond the target for cars that was originally set in *Our Clean Future*. These tenders show climate leadership by signalling the government's intended direction for emissions reductions and clean transportation options.

In late 2021, 12 plug-in hybrid SUVs were ordered and were delivered in 2022. In 2023, the Yukon government received 13 gas hybrid pickup trucks that are now in use in the fleet and two battery electric cargo vans that are being used by the mailroom. They are outside of this building. They are full-sized Ford Transit Cargo Vans. I was quite excited when I saw

those. I know that the mailroom is quite excited to be using them. I was pleasantly surprised that they could be procured.

In 2024, we will add two more cargo vans and three pickup trucks, all battery electric, which will be deployed to program areas based on the best use for these vehicles. Fleet Vehicle Agency is building relationships with Ford Canada, and the local dealer helped in the procurement of the gas hybrid pickup trucks. In addition, we anticipate that 30 more battery electric cars will be delivered in the spring of 2024 in order to replace older gas models.

Highways and Public Works continues to meet with the local dealerships to build relationships and understand market conditions so that we can maximize the number of electric vehicles in the government fleet. Market stabilization and transition to EV production for battery electric trucks and SUVs is evident with recent bids from suppliers of EVs. Effort is still required to align procurement with production schedules. Once the 30 vehicles are in the fleet, approximately eight percent of the Yukon government's light-duty fleet will be either plug-in hybrid or battery electric. We're leading by example and I'm certainly excited that this is occurring. As I have always said, I think that those transit vans in communities make a great deal of sense because they drive around in a fairly tight radius, but they drive around consistently, and they can be recharged at night and they are ready to go the next day. This is obviously a sustainable procurement of sorts. In any event, I just wanted to highlight the good work that Fleet Vehicle Agency and the Department of Highways and Public Works are doing. We are beginning to see the untying of the knot, which was supply chain and procurement problems, and that the large North American manufacturers actually do have product available, and we are taking advantage of those opportunities.

MLA Tredger: Is the sustainable procurement policy going to apply to services that are procured by the government? Are we looking at bid value reductions for companies? Is that going to be part of the plan?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised that there is a national committee that is working on policies and best practices in this regard. We are certainly prepared to piggyback on that to have the most robust and dynamic sustainable procurement policy, but as indicated in the *Our Clean Future* key Highways and Public Works action, we are developing a sustainable procurement strategy and implementation plan to support procurement activities across YG in making more sustainable and environmentally friendly decisions when procuring goods and services. We hope to have that in place with a deliverable next year.

I certainly look forward to receiving guidance, advice, and education from Highways and Public Works as to what that will look like. That is where it is at as far as the sustainable procurement strategy right now.

MLA Tredger: I do have more questions and I am hopeful that we will get this department back so we can dig in to them, but for now, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Acting Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse Centre that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Acting Chair, I move that you report Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, without amendment.

Acting Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse West that the Chair report Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, without amendment.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Deputy Speaker resumes the Chair

Deputy Speaker (Ms. Blake): I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. White: Madam Deputy Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, and directed me to report the bill without amendment.

Committee of the Whole has also considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following document was filed October 19, 2023:

35-1-156

Teacher on call shortage, letter re (dated October 18, 2023) from Selkirk Elementary School Council (White)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 145

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Monday, October 23, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, October 23, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Last Tuesday, October 17, the Minister of Health and Social Services participated in the proceedings of the Assembly by video conference, and during the Daily Routine, she gave oral notice of a motion. A paper copy of the motion was then provided to the Table.

Members will note that the motion, Motion No. 777, is currently on the Order Paper. The Sessional Order adopted on October 12, 2023, when Motion No. 744 carried as amended, allows members to participate in sittings by video conference when they are unable to attend in person due to illness. Providing notice of motion was not one of the permissible actions explicitly listed in the Sessional Order.

I have, however, determined that the intent of the Sessional Order is to authorize the full remote participation of MLAs when they are ill and that the Order of the House can be interpreted to permit members to perform all actions by video conference that they could perform while physically present in the Chamber.

As Speaker, it is my responsibility to ensure that each MLA's right to be heard in the House is respected. I will note that the one exception that I think is warranted would be presiding over proceedings. The Chair must be physically present to ensure the proper operations of the Assembly.

On a related matter, our previous practice was to only accept on motion forms "wet" signatures — that is, original signatures in pen and not electronic, printed, or copied signatures. While our Standing Orders still require motions to be provided in writing, I have decided to permit MLAs to submit motions, amendments, and committee reports with printed electronic signatures.

This will assist the Clerks and members in processing forms for the Assembly as newer photocopiers provide nearly perfect representations of wet signatures and it is very difficult to distinguish from a photocopy or an inserted electronic signature. This will also allow members who are participating electronically to fully participate in proceedings.

I will note that the use of electronic signatures on forms does not apply to petitions.

The current Sessional Order on video conference participation will expire at the end of this Sitting. I urge the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections, and Privileges to consider providing more fulsome guidelines should a decision be made to make remote attendance permanent.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we have a couple of guests here today for the memorial tribute to Linda Augustine. Could we please welcome, from the South Klondike Local Advisory Council, Marg Blewett, and from the Mount Lorne Local Advisory Council — and other volunteer duties from them both — Al Foster. Can we welcome them both, please?

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In remembrance of Linda Augustine

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of all Members of the Legislative Assembly to pay tribute to the memory of Linda Augustine, who passed away this past fall in Carcross. She was a person who always worked to make a difference in her community and the world around her. When I met Linda, we were working together on reducing solid waste and promoting our free stores. She was involved in many, many things.

Linda Augustine was a confident, creative, and beautiful person — inside and out. She loved, nurtured, and cherished her family and had a special spot in her heart for her granddaughter. She cared deeply about Carcross and the Southern Lakes in which she lived and worked. Linda was a master educator with a big heart who worked at the Ghùch Tlâ Community School for many years. Linda influenced generations of children by teaching them both academics and life skills, guiding them through their feelings or their physical challenges, and acknowledging their every success. She complimented the students consistently, always encouraging.

Linda had a knack for breaking down a lesson into understandable parts for the students, and they came home and told their parents about their appreciation for Ms. Augustine.

She was a team player within the Yukon education community and spoke up regarding the collective educational needs of all. In 2003, Linda received a Yukon Excellence in Education Award. After Linda passed, a small scholarship was set up under her name at the Ghùch Tlâ Community School.

By the way, Linda was also a swimmer, and in 2014, she was part of Team Yukon at the Canada 55+ Games, bringing home three golds and a silver in her first-ever appearance at the games.

For a time, Linda was a councillor with the South Klondike Local Advisory Council. She wanted and believed she could make a difference within the community, and she did make a difference in many ways. She was thoughtful and deliberate in her contributions to the council. As her MLA, Linda spoke to me a lot. It was never complaining; it was always with a sense of wanting to make things better.

The Carcross council — which, by the way, helped me to write this tribute — asked me to acknowledge their deep appreciation for Linda's commitment to her community, which she always showed through her actions. They also asked me to

mention her phenomenal administrative skills and record-keeping in regard to the local advisory council.

Linda was diligent and passionate about the recycling of clothing and household items. For years, she volunteered to maintain the Carcross transfer station free store by bringing items, organizing them on hangers, getting hangers, and, as I mentioned a moment ago, pressing government for answers and trying to add value to the transfer station contracts so as to improve the whole recycling situation in Carcross. The community is grateful for Linda's contributions through raising awareness of what can be recycled, reused, or repurposed and, overall, for reducing our footprint at our landfills.

I understand that Linda also did some home care and physical therapy work and was appreciated for her calm energy. Some of the folks she worked with said they enjoyed her company and that she was very articulate and understood their physical situations even more than they did. By the way, Mr. Speaker, I know that several of the people with whom Linda worked with are listening in today.

With great sadness, Linda passed away last fall with her family around her. Family and friends would like to express their gratitude for the support and care provided by nurses and staff at the Wind River palliative care unit in Whistle Bend, with special thanks to Dr. Sally Macdonald and Dr. Alex Kmet for all they do.

Her vibrant smile, community spirit, and creative ways will be missed by many.

Thank you, Linda. Rest in peace.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a letter dated October 20, 2023 from the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce to the Premier.

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

THAT this House celebrates:

(1) the 30th anniversary of the signing of the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and the signing of the first four Yukon First Nation final and self-government agreements by Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Teslin Tlingit Council, and the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation;

(2) the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in final and self-government agreements; and

(3) the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Kluane First Nation final and self-government agreements.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House celebrates the incredible contributions of Christine Sinclair throughout her long career on the international stage as a member of the Canadian national women's soccer team and in her work to seek equal pay with the men's team.

Ms. McLeod: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to work with the Town of Watson Lake, the Liard First Nation, and area residents to plan and build a continuing care facility in Watson Lake.

Mr. Hassard: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to cancel its plans to close the Silver City, Braeburn, Keno, and Johnsons Crossing solid-waste transfer stations and work with the residents of each area to ensure that they have appropriate solid-waste disposal solutions that meet the needs of their communities.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to adopt the recommendations of Canada's premiers to extend the repayment deadline for the forgivable portion of the Canada Emergency Business Account for an additional year.

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to call witnesses from the Yukon Hospital Corporation to appear during the 2023 Fall Sitting to provide information and answer questions from MLAs.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Minister of Health and Social Services to provide this House with a detailed report showing gaps in emergency medical services coverage over the past three years and table a plan to resolve those gaps in community coverage.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to work with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and Yukon University to begin offering a registered nursing program for Yukon students.

MLA Tredger: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce short-term rental legislation that will:

(1) require hosts to register their short-term rental accommodations;

(2) limit short-term rental housing to only the primary residence of a host and secondary suite or accessory dwelling on the property of a host; and

(3) apply to Whitehorse with an opt-in option for all other municipalities and communities.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to provide funding to municipalities to implement sustainable recycling programs.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Yukon convention centre

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, last week, our government, in partnership with the Yukon Convention Bureau, announced that the highest ranked proponent has been selected for the construction of a new Yukon convention centre. Envisioned as a public/private partnership, a new convention centre will lead to a range of benefits. There is strong support within the Yukon tourism industry and business community for a new convention centre in Whitehorse to fully realize our potential as a convention destination.

Conventions, conferences, and other forms of meetings are strong economic drivers and can contribute to year-round, high-yield tourism visitation. With the loss of a dedicated convention space in the Yukon, industry stakeholders have identified an immediate need for a modern and purpose-built replacement to meet the needs of the Yukon's growing events and conferences market, which, pre-pandemic, contributed approximately \$6.5 million to the local economy.

Development of such a facility also aligns with the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy's* goal of doubling the Yukon's tourism business revenues by 2028. In addition to being a place for visitors to convene in the territory, it will be a gathering place for Yukoners to hold events and festivals. The request-for-proposal phase of this process generated strong interest. After thoughtful and thorough assessment, the Chu Níikwän Limited Partnership's concept for a building along the Whitehorse waterfront emerged as the highest ranked proponent.

Highlights of the Chu Níikwän proposal include: direct integration with the existing Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre; convenience of a downtown location showcasing the Yukon's natural beauty; and 100-percent First Nation ownership on First Nation land.

With our government's support and involvement, the Yukon Convention Bureau has now begun negotiations toward a funding agreement, a design/build construction contract, and a maintenance and operating contract. With the negotiation

process only just underway, cost estimates, design specifics, funding arrangements, and other details are still under discussion. But as we have been doing from the start, we will continue to provide updates every step of the way.

Our government is proud to be working in partnership with the Yukon Convention Bureau to support the development of a new Yukon convention centre. I am confident that this new venue will be a source of pride for Yukoners, benefiting businesses, individuals, and communities across the territory.

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the Yukon's tourism industry is one of the main economic drivers in the territory. It plays an important role in sustaining a healthy private sector and it affects thousands of Yukoners. That is why the industry, among others, has been asking for a convention centre over the past few years. The issue was pushed further to the forefront with the closure of the Yukon Convention Centre at the old High Country Inn. That facility hosted hundreds of conferences over the years, including the chamber of mines, Geoscience Forum, both federal and territorial government conferences, the Festival of Trees for the Yukon Hospital Foundation, and the ever-popular Yukon Quest start and finish banquets.

The venue is missed by a lot of Yukoners and Yukon organizations. So, like many in the tourism industry, we were excited to see the announcement from the Yukon Convention Bureau and the Yukon government about the identification of a proponent for the new convention centre. That proponent, as announced last week, is the Chu Níikwän Development Corporation. The proposed site will certainly augment the many events that take place at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. However, we do have some questions about the next steps for this exciting project.

We notice that there is no money currently identified in the five-year capital plan for this project. Can the minister tell us how much capital funding the Yukon government intends to invest in this project and how much funding may be available from the federal government? The news release from last week indicates that the Yukon Convention Bureau will lead the tendering of the design/build contract. We have seen the bid package from the development corporation and it is clear that it is a large, complex project. Is it the intent that the Yukon Convention Bureau will tender the construction and project management of this project, or will it fall to the Government of Yukon?

What can the minister tell us about the operating model for the new convention centre? Will the territorial or federal government provide funding for O&M? Who will collect the revenue that will accrue from its operation? Will the Yukon Convention Bureau play a role in the operations? Is it the intent that it will be profit-generating, or will it run as a non-profit?

Yukoners are obviously excited about this development, but there did not seem to be much information about the timeline of next steps. What is the timeline going forward, and when can we expect the next milestones?

I look forward to the minister answering these important questions.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, this is one example of economic reconciliation, and we look forward to seeing more projects that involve Yukon government and Yukon First Nations. “Kwanlin” means “running through canyon” in Southern Tutchone. Throughout history, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation has always been linked to the Yukon River. It is always important to include truth when we acknowledge reconciliation.

Today, we acknowledge the repeated relocation history of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and how they have overcome much adversity despite the ongoing challenges of being displaced in their own traditional territory. The people of Kwanlin Dün have continued to show up determined and continue to be open to forming respectful partnerships and growing their community to ensure a solid future for generations to come.

Seeing this proud nation and their development corporation moving back toward the water is as powerful as it is moving. We congratulate the Chu Níkwän Limited Partnership’s concept for a building that would be integrated with the existing Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. We all know how valued and appreciated the cultural centre is within the community and how it impresses thousands of visitors each and every year while always bringing communities together to celebrate cultures and the diversity of our territory.

We look forward to seeing what becomes of this project and look forward to seeing the dream of a new convention centre become reality.

Mahsi’.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: To begin with, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for Porter Creek North and the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for their remarks. It is great to see that all of us here in the House support this important project. I can say that when I first took over the role of Minister of Tourism and Culture and sat down with the tourism industry, this was by far their number one concern. We have been working very closely with the Yukon Convention Bureau ever since.

I agree with all the comments that were given by both members regarding the importance of this project. With respect to the specific questions about how many dollars we are going to put toward the project, whether it is going to be the Yukon Convention Bureau or the Yukon government that leads in the building, how much is going to be required for operating, whether it is going to be revenue neutral or profit generating — all of those questions are part of that negotiation that is happening right now.

For example, there can be quite a blend around more focus on capital dollars to go into it with lower operating expenses over the long term, or it can be just the other way around. That’s all part of that conversation that will happen now with Chu Níkwän.

With respect to the timeline, I was talking with the department over the weekend, and we anticipate that we might start to hear things back over several months of that

conversation. There still will be work ongoing, but I will do my best to update the House as I get information. I am sure that when we are here in the fall again, I will have more updates if we haven’t already announced those publicly.

The sorts of things that I just want to finish off here with — this is a comprehensive process and it’s a new process for me where we go out with the expression of interest first and then identify the preferred partner and then negotiate with them through a public/private partnership. I am looking forward to how that model works. We believe that it will yield a better result over time, but, of course, it will always need careful consideration.

I can also say that I have had very good conversations with the federal minister — our new tourism minister — who is no stranger to infrastructure projects because of her history with Cabinet. She has expressed an interest in hearing more about how these negotiations go as well.

Again, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today to speak about this important project.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Rent control

Mr. Dixon: When the Liberals first intervened in the rental market with their rent control policy, they said it would help with affordability and availability of rentals. However, in the technical briefing for media on their new landlord program, the Department of Economic Development stated that the intent of the program is to try to stabilize the rental market and keep rental units available. This in and of itself is a clear admission that the Liberals’ current policies destabilized the rental market and have threatened the ongoing supply, which have made this new program necessary.

In the words of the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce — quote: “... current policies have unequivocally hampered investment in additional supply.” So, rather than piling a bad program on top of bad policy, why not simply correct the failed policy that started the whole problem in the first place?

Will the Premier set aside this flawed program and actually work to correct the failed policies that they imposed in 2021?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that we will have tremendous debate over this next couple of weeks on the subject. The Leader of the Official Opposition has made his point clear — and again, in that question, requesting to remove rent caps altogether and deregulate and let landlords charge whatever they would like. I think that we are hearing from other sides — and I am sure that there will be some debate with the Leader of the NDP around the implementation of this new program — here we are in the middle of this conversation.

What I will say is that we think it is very important to invest in affordable housing and that is why we have put supportive housing options in for low-income seniors and elders — again, launching the Yukon home ownership loan program and expanding that. We think that supporting the construction of 150 new affordable, energy-efficient homes was a good investment. We think that opening new accessible, affordable

duplexes in Mayo and Carmacks and triplexes in Watson Lake, Mayo, and Whitehorse was good. We think that developing over 800 lots since 2016 was a good investment. We think that the funding of the construction at Boreal Commons for the many, many units that it has brought in — almost 100 units — is a good investment, and we think that the funding of the development of 401 Jeckell Street — again, to create 47 new affordable homes — is a good investment.

I did see, of course, the letter and I look forward to discussing it in questions 2 and 3.

Mr. Dixon: Nowhere in the Premier's remarks was any reference at all to the program that I actually asked about.

It seems that everyone in the Yukon except the Premier knows that this program is a bad idea and won't actually solve any of the problems. Here is what the business community said in a letter to the Premier — quote: "Until the Government of Yukon enacts meaningful policy change, lost trust and lost supply will not be recovered."

So, Mr. Speaker, not only have the Liberals' failed policies hurt the rental housing market, but they have undermined the trust that the business community has in this government and this Premier. The Premier's response so far has been that this program is needed to stabilize the rental market until the Yukon *Residential Landlord and Tenant Act* can be changed in 2025. However, the program announced by the Premier is only for 2023.

My question is simple: Is this program going to be extended until the amendments to the act are tabled in 2025?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I guess my sense is, from the Leader of the Official Opposition — I would like to know if, for clarity, the point is to cancel this program and the grant. I want to hear that — maybe if we have an opportunity today. That's a fair comment. Do you want us to cancel this? I know you want us to cancel rent caps, but I would like to know on the record.

I do have another letter as well — and I will table this — from the Yukon Residential Landlord Association, which commends and supports the territorial government for the program as well. I'll table that today. That's also business owners and entrepreneurs.

I also think that, as we talk statistically — I have asked officials to set up a meeting with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. When you talk about — that it has damaged our investment in residential investment. What I saw on Friday were the stats that came out that showed that, across Canada, between January and August — if you look at 2023 compared to 2022 and so since the new CASA has been in place — over that time frame in Canada, we have seen a decrease in residential investment by 14.1 percent, and in the Yukon, we have seen an increase of 19.3 percent.

I want to look at the numbers that they are looking at. I see the numbers that were tabled by the statistics bureau here in the Yukon.

Mr. Dixon: Once again, the Premier has completely ignored the question that I asked.

Since the Premier announced his new policy of handing out cash to landlords in an attempt to, in his words, stabilize the rental market, the response from the community has been

resounding. Advocacy groups have panned the program. The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition called the program perplexing and said that it's not the best use of public dollars. The Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce called the program out of touch, and even the landlord association, in the release the Premier just tabled, has said that this is not actually a solution to the problem.

Now, we know that the Liberals think that this program is needed to correct the problems caused by their previous interventions in the rental market, but it's pretty clear that they are the only ones who think that this is a good idea.

If the Premier really believes that this program will help, then he will need to keep it in place until the act changes. If that's the case, he should be transparent about it.

Will this program remain in place until 2025?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, we've tabled this program. I haven't — I guess it's clear, and I would like to hear, just for the record, if the Leader of the Official Opposition is saying just that this program should be cancelled for landlords. That's what I would like to hear.

Every day we guess which version the Yukon Party is going to show up with on this particular topic. Now again, when it comes to affordable housing, we saw almost \$70 million of opportunity to invest in affordable housing — \$70 million that we have put in place and \$70 million that the Yukon Party has voted against. I have seen a flip-flop on this policy decision. One minute, it's: No, you should not put funds toward landlords — and then: Yes, you should.

What I know is that, if you go across the country, we see British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, and a number of jurisdictions that have put rent caps in place. I believe that a rent cap in place is an important instrument at this time. We have legislation that needs to be modernized. The landlords and tenants association is saying that it needs to be modernized, and I want to look after those vulnerable folks. It is also a nod to the fact that there are individuals who do have units and there has been pressure on their costs.

Again, we will stay the course here but would like to hear from the opposition if they support us supporting these individuals who have these assets.

Question re: Teacher staffing

Ms. Van Bibber: We have raised a number of questions with the minister regarding a shortage of teachers on call, or TOCs, throughout the Yukon. We have heard from two school councils that the number of TOCs on their morning call sheet isn't translating into answered calls and having the necessary coverage. This often means school administrators, education assistants, and learning assistance teachers are pulled away from their regular duties to cover for a classroom teacher.

What is the minister doing to alleviate the shortage in the near term?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I am sure the minister responsible will get back to the member opposite as soon as possible on this particular issue, but I will say that, in the 2023-24 school year, the Department of Education has been able to make some strategic recruitment actions, which the minister has spoken to

on the floor of the Legislative Assembly. We posted positions earlier to be more competitive with other jurisdictions. We have participated with online career fairs and a Yukon University fair. They have also placed advertisements on YuWIN, Employment Central, LinkedIn, Facebook, Google — the list goes on and on. To date, teacher recruitment has been working to make sure that we do get teachers in positions, whether they be in the bigger City of Whitehorse or into those rural communities.

Ms. Van Bibber: École Selkirk Elementary School Council wrote to the minister last week asking for short- and long-term ideas to deal with what they call — quote: “... the historically chronic, and now dire, Teacher on Call ... shortage.”

They have asked for two actions: an immediate short-term solution, including secondments from the Department of Education staff; and changes to the recruitment and application processes, including remuneration. We understand that the minister has not answered this letter yet.

Can the minister tell us if these two actions are considered, and if so, when will they be acted on?

Hon. Mr. Silver: What I can say is that, as of October 18, 2023 this year, the registered TOCs — 151 registered in Yukon, which is 126 in Whitehorse, 25 rural, and an additional 26 applicants pending — and that would be 19 in Whitehorse and seven rural. I think that this reflects a decrease of eight total TOCs since the September 26, 2023 numbers, as these TOCs have moved up to temporary positions supporting schools.

I also know that the department is continuing to recruit the teachers on call and recognize that the demand for coverage continues to be a challenge not only here but right across the nation. We continue to evaluate and we continue to evolve the recruitment efforts to attract those teachers-on-call roles and support staff in accepting assignments as they are available. I know that the department is holding an information session at Employment Central this week and will follow with sessions in communities in the coming weeks. Also, the department has increased advertisement in recruitment sites and recognizes the collective bargaining agreement ending in the current term in June 2024 as a joint opportunity to collaborate with the YAEP through the negotiation process on this and other issues.

Ms. Van Bibber: The École Selkirk Elementary School Council also asked the minister if they could — quote: “... host a community information session in mid-November to invite community members who may be interested in substitute teaching.” They say that classes at the school may have to close in order to adhere to health and safety standards. They are looking for a response to these requests and others by Wednesday, October 25 because the situation is so dire.

Will the minister write them back by Wednesday and respond to the question that they have raised in this letter?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I can't comment on what that communication has been or the efforts of the minister at this point, but I will again reiterate that there is an information session at Employment Central on October 26 and that there

will be follow-up sessions in the communities in the coming weeks.

Question re: Affordable housing

MLA Tredger: Last week was Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. This government said some very nice words about the importance of ending poverty, so it was a real slap in the face to see them turn around in the same week and hand out \$1 million to landlords.

Instead of prioritizing the people who are struggling to pay rent, or struggling to put food on the table, or struggling to find a home at all, the Premier decided to give \$1 million to the people who already own multiple homes.

Why is the Premier giving public money to people who already own multiple places to live?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think it's important to note — who are the landlords who are out there?

I think about the media scrum I did, and the reporter who was asking questions talked about an example I gave. As he said, that sounds exactly like my landlord. It's an individual, a senior woman who is on a fixed income and who has an extra unit in her home. They are actually using that revenue to ensure that they can support their quality of life. Part of our challenge, in some ways, Mr. Speaker, is that there are not a bunch of big corporations investing in rental space in this territory. Part of our challenge is that we haven't seen large, long-term investments into the rental market. At the same time, it is not big corporations; it is individuals here in the territory.

What we are trying to do, of course, with our rent cap is ensure that individuals who have been vulnerable because of rental increases are supported and at the same time — as we see this legislation that has been in place for a long time. The Leader of the Official Opposition knows full well, as he was responsible for the legislation as the Minister of Community Services. There has been a call to have it repaired and fixed for a long time — that we do that work to also support those folks in vulnerable positions.

MLA Tredger: Despite the stories the Premier likes to tell, the biggest category of rental units are units in apartment buildings. Many of these landlords own multiple apartment buildings and will be getting this government's subsidy for each and every unit. A landlord who owns 30 units — one or two apartment buildings — will be receiving over \$10,000 as a handout from this government. Over \$10,000 each to people who own multi-million-dollar housing portfolios.

Does the Premier think that landlords who own multi-million-dollar businesses need thousands of dollars in handouts from this government?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that it sounds very sensational, the way it has been asked, but I think there are lots of challenges with holding four units or six units or eight units, and I think there are lots of costs that come with it. I think that we want individuals to continue to build units. We have seen over the last number of decades that there hasn't been a lot of market rental being built. Over this year — if we compare this year to last year — we are seeing an increase in residential investment, but I also think that, in a proper, healthy ecosystem, we need to

ensure that vulnerable folks are in a position where they are supported, and I also believe that we have to have appropriate legislation that supports both the tenant and landlords. I don't believe that this is some sort of a large leveraging tool by the private sector. I think it is going to offset some of the pressures and costs that have come in for the rent cap. Again, I think that the preamble to the question makes it sound very sensational. But, no, to be very up front, I think it will offset some of the extra costs that are over and above the five-percent rent cap. That's about 1.8 percent of an extra cost. I believe that is the tool that we will use, and I would hope that the member opposite — probably as a landlord — understands that as well.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been saying that he wants to stabilize the housing market. Well, the elephant in the room is short-term rentals. Whether it's through Airbnb or local property management firms, we know that there are hundreds of potential long-term homes being used as short-term rentals. BC gets it. They just proposed new rules that people can only use their primary residence and one other unit on their property for short-term rentals. This will bring much needed homes back on the market. If the Premier is serious about stabilizing the rental market, he will do the same here in the Yukon. So, will he? Will the Premier bring in regulations for short-term rentals?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I was intrigued to see the motion earlier today and this question. I have asked officials to reach out to the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce. My sense is that the Whitehorse chamber, through the letter — there has been dissatisfaction with the rent cap from the Whitehorse chamber since it was put in place; that's a fact.

But I also think that there is a sense there from the Whitehorse chamber that they really wanted to step up and look at helping the situation. In my meeting with the Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, I am going to ask them to share with us all the data on short-term rentals. I think that they can help work with business owners so we can understand exactly what short-term rentals mean to our market. I also am going to have a good look with our officials at the legislation that has come into BC. I appreciate the question today, and it's something that we have to deeply look into if we are going to look solutions across the board. Thank you for the question, and yes, it is something that I am very focused on.

Question re: Nurse recruitment and retention

Ms. White: Fortunately for the territory, nurses and health care providers continue to serve Yukoners despite the daily hardships and lack of support from this government. Every day, we hear from health care professionals who feel undervalued, ignored, and unsupported. Community nurses are working in tough conditions and are called on to deal with critical incidents that impact their mental health. Nurses across the Yukon often work in isolation under constant pressure and in workplaces that are understaffed — all of this without the supports that they need to stay healthy.

What is the government doing to ensure that nurses are safe, supported, and have sustainable and healthy working conditions?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I certainly don't disagree with some of what has been said in the preamble to the question. As a matter of fact, it is a primary issue that we deal with every single day at the Department Health and Social Services in supporting nurses. I think that Yukoners will remember that, last year, we put in place recruitment and retention bonuses for nurses so that we could increase the number of nurses that we have working here in the territory, both in Whitehorse and in community health centres — that we could support them going forward with bonuses that were in place when they took a new job or when they stayed in a particular position or moved to another position in the territory.

We have 283.75 budgeted nursing positions across the Department of Health and Social Services. This includes nurses working in communities, long-term care homes, home care, public health, and mental wellness and substance use programming. Front-line health care staff are key to our success at providing health care for Yukoners and it is absolutely critical.

Ms. White: The Yukon Hospital Corporation recently decided to cut funding for infusion services in Dawson City. This directly impacts patients with MS, arthritis, and other conditions that require regular infusions. These patients must now commute to Whitehorse for their essential care. We know that there are nurses available in Dawson right now who are willing and able to do infusions. In fact, several nurses have told us that they are frustrated at being denied the chance to use their skills in their community. Yukon Hospital Corporation's funding cut makes no sense from a budgetary perspective and it makes no sense from a community perspective. It is bad for the morale of nurses who already feel let down by this government.

Will the government work with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to reverse their decision to end infusion care at the Dawson hospital?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: What I can do is explain to Yukoners and advise them that we work every day with the Yukon Hospital Corporation to improve and to provide services across the territory. Of course, there are three hospitals for which the Yukon Hospital Corporation is responsible. They provide excellent care to Yukoners. If a particular program, like the infusion program in Dawson City, is an opportunity for us to make sure to investigate and to make sure that we can provide those services as close to home as possible — and if we can do so in a safe way that supports nurses to do so —

Again, often, as I say when asked about particular issues and I'm told across the way that there are individuals who are suffering because of a particular decision or situation, I ask the member opposite to have those people contact us and we can resolve issues with them directly, and I do so again today.

Ms. White: So, those folks have reached out to the media and there are published articles on the issue.

So, the last time my colleague asked a question about flexibility for nurses, the minister responded — and I quote: "... we support health care providers."

Sadly, there's a serious disconnect between what the minister says and what we hear on the ground. Nurses from

different Yukon communities have told us that they were turned down when they asked for flexibility, like job sharing, to prevent burnout. Instead, they had to quit their permanent job so they could take auxiliary-on-call work, costing them their benefits and their job security, and still the government refuses to meet their scheduling needs. Some nurses have since quit altogether.

So, this government tells us again and again that they are taking measures to retain nurses and we keep hearing the exact opposite. When will this government starting listening to nursing staff in communities instead of making their jobs even harder?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Again, I'm very pleased to hear from individuals who are making those kinds of personal decisions based on concerns that they have about the process.

Community nursing is currently experiencing a vacancy rate of approximately 19 percent for primary health care nurses, which is an improvement of approximately 29 percent — an improvement of 29 percent — since the fall of 2022. Long-term care homes are experiencing a vacancy rate of approximately 21 percent for nursing staff. They employ licensed practical nurses, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners.

We have introduced flexibility for nursing positions across the territory. We have met with individual nurses who have experienced that. We have worked to address that particularly in health centres across the territory and will continue to work with every nurse who wants to stay and provide great service for Yukoners. I look forward to working with them going forward.

Question re: Health human resource strategy

Mr. Cathers: In July, the Premier travelled to Nova Scotia. While he was there, he did a photo op and signed a letter of intent with the Premier of Nova Scotia regarding — quote: "... potential collaboration between Nova Scotia and Yukon related to Health Human Resources..."

Can the Premier tell this House what, if anything, is actually happening a result of that letter he signed with Nova Scotia?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, there are two things that come to mind right now that we have been focused on. One is that it has also led to a deeper conversation about seeing if there is an opportunity for doctors to join the Atlantic Registry and give them more flexibility but also use that system for credential recognition.

I think more importantly right now, we are looking at different solutions for red-tape reduction. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has one of their representatives who has worked on the Nova Scotia red-tape reduction for doctors' billings coming to the Yukon. We have reached out to the Yukon Medical Association to see now, as next steps, if there is an opportunity for them to collaborate with the medical specialists in Nova Scotia on that red-tape reduction.

We have requested that — this could happen in the first week of November. They are working here. It's the same time frame as the Yukon Medical Association's AGM, so they are

just looking at other dates. I think that will probably be some of the first work. It will really be focused on improving our billing and reducing some of the burden that we see doctors face across the country.

Mr. Cathers: I would remind the Premier that his government wasn't even paying doctors on time.

The Yukon's health care system is facing serious challenges. One of the most serious is the shortage of health professionals. Several provinces have taken decisive action, including fast-tracking the ability for doctors and nurses trained in a shortlist of other countries to practise in their province.

In contrast, we have seen photo ops and heard platitudes from the Premier and the minister, but there has been a disturbing lack of action. The Premier did a photo op and signed a letter of intent with Nova Scotia about collaboration on health human resources months ago.

Can the Premier tell this House if this agreement has led to even a single new health professional coming to the Yukon and working here?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: First of all, I would say that we did early work, which was a letter of intent. Both departments reviewed that work. We are finalizing — I spoke with health officials and the minister last week about this — and finalizing some of the work to define that.

We have made a commitment to go out and look at a number of things. The member opposite is going to criticize me for trying to do something innovative with another jurisdiction. He was a Health minister and nothing like that was ever done. He was in a situation where there were capacity challenges when he was Health minister.

At the same time, I have tried to work with our Health officials to go abroad and look for areas in this country where other provinces are doing — they have gone out to recruit and we have gone out to recruit, and we are still having good conversations and looking at that opportunity. But in that case, it is: Do what others do sometimes but maybe not when it adds to a good political question here in the House.

At one moment, you are telling me to reduce the burden and work with other provinces; that is what we are trying to do. On the other side, some of those provinces are going and recruiting in India. We have gone to do that, but you are telling me that it is not something I should do.

It is going to be a criticism each and every time. What we are going to do is we are going to look to make sure that we use every tool available to us — and the minister is doing that — to ensure that we can improve the health care system in the Yukon.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, this is an unprecedented problem. Thousands of Yukoners currently need a family doctor and rural communities have seen an unprecedented series of health care centre closures. They want action now.

This Liberal government ignored our calls for a new health human resources strategy until rural nursing vacancies hit almost 50 percent. The Premier signed a letter with Nova Scotia this summer but hasn't been able to point to any real results.

I will finish with a simple question for him. Early this year, Nova Scotia began allowing doctors and surgeons trained in the

US who were board-certified to practise there without writing exams. The province is promoting this, telling US doctors that — quote: "... it's as easy to move your practice here as it is to fall in love with your new home."

Is the Yukon government considering following in Nova Scotia's footsteps by allowing US-trained doctors to practise here? If so, when will they make a decision?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: You are on mute.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: My apologies, Mr. Speaker. Health human resources presents one of the greatest challenges facing Canada's and Yukon's health system today.

But I think that what the member opposite needs to remember is that this is not unique to the Yukon Territory; this is Canada-wide and, in fact, worldwide, including the United States and Europe. Domestically and globally, we are facing unprecedented challenges, including an insufficient supply of health care workers.

It is something that was exacerbated by COVID-19. It has to do with a growing and an aging population here in the territory. This is something that we will solve together.

As a result, this government has taken on the Health Human Resources Steering Committee, which is jointly led by the Department of Health and Social Services and the Yukon Hospital Corporation. It is an unprecedented group of decision-makers who have put together a strategy that I expect to be able to introduce at any time now. This is the work being done by the professionals here in the territory to help us solve this problem — front-line people.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 33: *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)* — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 33, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Mostyn.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Community Services that Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking each of the honourable members who have risen to speak on Bill No. 33, *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*. This amendment will facilitate the recruitment of registered nurses and nurse practitioners in the Yukon and protect Yukoners' health. It paves the way for four new classes of licensing for nurses in the Yukon at the request

of the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, which regulates the profession in the Yukon. This legislation allows them to regulate their profession consistent with national trends. It also gives these health providers greater access to the Yukon as a place to work, while continuing to protect the public.

The amendment allows for the creation of four new classes of licensing and regulation, Mr. Speaker. An interim class will allow newly graduated nurses, as well as nurse practitioners and internationally educated nurses, to register directly in the Yukon. They will also be able to work while they wait to write their practice exam or for other documents.

The virtual class will allow registered nurses and nurse practitioners in other jurisdictions to provide care to Yukoners for a specific purpose via virtual means like telehealth. The courtesy class is for a specific purpose and time frame. For instance, it will allow specially trained nurses to join the specialists who come here to work for a set period of time. It will also include those who provide training or workshops here in the territory. Lastly, the student nurse class will allow student nurses to be registered to work here under supervision — for example, during their practicum.

These amendments are an important step that supports labour mobility and removes red tape for health care providers who want to be working in the Yukon. They expand the ability of the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to enter into agreements with other jurisdictions. These changes allow for portable and flexible nursing services by health care providers who are registered and hold a full licence in either the Yukon or any other participating jurisdiction. This is a major move forward as we compete with other jurisdictions to recruit more nurses to work in the Yukon.

As well, we are replacing the restrictive annual licence with a time-flexible licence to support these new classes. These new classes will be enforced by the Yukon Registered Nurses Association when the amendment to the regulation is completed and passed and the bill comes into effect.

Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to thank the folks within Community Services and Justice for all of their work on this file. I want to thank the opposition for the debate that we had just the other day.

I move that Bill No. 33, entitled *Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Mr. Cathers: In rising to speak to this as the Official Opposition critic for Health and Social Services, I do want to note, as I did at both second reading and in Committee, that we recognize that changes were asked for by the Yukon Registered Nurses Association. We do support those moving forward.

Again, as I noted in rising to speak to this in the House previously, we were told that the draft legislation was not shared with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association and expressed concern with that practice. I also noted that we had been advised that the government was not planning on sharing the text of the draft regulations pursuant to this act change coming into effect with the YRNA before Cabinet approved them. I raised that as a concern with the minister at second

reading. During Committee debate, he indicated that in fact they would share those draft regulations with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, and I thank him for agreeing to do so. We believe that it is very important that stakeholders have the opportunity for input on legislation and regulations that will affect their lives and their livelihoods and, in this case, doubly so because the Yukon Registered Nurses Association is not just a stakeholder. In fact, as a self-regulating profession, they are the regulator in this area. It is vital that they see the details of regulations and legislation before they come into effect. I do thank the minister for making that commitment to share that with the YRNA, as I had requested.

I also expressed concern, as we had heard from nurses about potential changes to the model of regulating nursing here in the Yukon, including an indication based on an e-mail from officials that the government had chosen a model that they hadn't actually consulted on with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association at the time. I was pleased that the minister did indicate that — and I will quote him from October 19, page 4065 in Hansard: "... we are in the early stages of policy analysis for the review and no doors are closed." The minister then went on to say: "I want to state that just because health professions will come under the broad *Health Professions Act* does not mean that the nursing association will lose its autonomy." The minister then went on to committing to consultations with the YRNA regarding that. I would advise him that we will be holding him to that commitment and monitoring the progress in this area because we do believe that, in the interests of Yukoners, it's important to ensure that nurses see and have input into the regulations before they are put into place.

I do want to emphasize, as I did previously, that my colleagues and I see health care as a high priority, and it is very important to take access — including increasing access to nurses and other health professionals, strengthening our public health care system, reducing wait times — and also, it is fundamentally important to ensure that high-quality standards in patient care continue to be in place within the Yukon's health system now and for the foreseeable future.

I look forward to discussing health care on a number of occasions — hopefully throughout this Fall Sitting — but I will conclude my remarks on this legislation at this point in time. As I noted at the beginning, we will be supporting the passage of this legislation.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated in Committee of the Whole, I do have concerns about the future going forward as we move toward the *Health Professions Act*. As highlighted by my colleague from Laberge, there is an interest with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to see the regulations before they are adopted — that being the fact that this is very much affecting the organization and that's what these changes are for.

As also indicated in my first reading speech and in Committee of the Whole, we will be supporting this legislation.

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. Mr. Clarke: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Agree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: 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.

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

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 33 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 33 has passed this House.

We are now prepared to receive the Commissioner of Yukon to grant assent to bills that have passed this House.

Commissioner Webber enters the Chamber accompanied by her Aide-de-Camp

ASSENT TO BILLS

Commissioner: Please be seated.

Speaker: Madam Commissioner, the Assembly has, at its present session, passed certain bills to which, in the name and on behalf of the Assembly, I respectfully request your assent.

Clerk: *Act to amend the Environment Act (2023) and Act to amend the Registered Nurses Profession Act (2023).*

Commissioner: I hereby assent to the bills as enumerated by the Clerk.

Commissioner leaves the Chamber

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

French Languages Services Directorate

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would just like to begin by welcoming the departmental folks who are here to assist us today — Deputy Minister Manon Moreau and Nancy Power, pour la première fois je pense, la gestionnaire des communications bilingues de la DSF. Nancy is the manager of bilingual communication and it's her first time here in the Assembly.

I am going to give my opening remarks in French and English, completely in both, and I will just go back and forth.

Je prends la parole cet après-midi au sujet du budget supplémentaire des dépenses de la Direction des Services en français. I rise this afternoon to speak to the supplementary budget for the French Language Services Directorate. Il y a deux raisons à l'origine de ce budget : la réorganisation de la Direction et la nouvelle convention collective entre le gouvernement du Yukon et le Syndicat des employés du Yukon. There are two reasons for our budget today: the directorate's reorganization and the Government of Yukon's new collective agreement with the Yukon Employees' Union.

La Direction a récemment terminé sa réorganisation, un exercice entamé le 1er juin 2021. L'objectif était de concevoir et de mettre en place une nouvelle structure axée sur la clientèle. Conforme au mandat de la Direction, cette nouvelle structure favorise une approche à l'échelle du gouvernement pour satisfaire aux exigences de la *Loi sur les langues* du

Yukon. The directorate recently completed a reorganization that started on June 1, 2021, and the goal was to design and implement a new client-focused structure aligned with the directorate's mandate to foster a government-wide approach to fulfilling the requirements of the Yukon *Languages Act*.

Parmi les points importants de la réorganisation, mentionnons la création d'une nouvelle division de l'aménagement linguistique et le remodelage des services de communication et de conseils stratégiques offerts aux ministères et aux organismes publics. Ces nouvelles fonctions vont les aider à fournir de l'information en français à la population yukonnaise. Aucun nouveau poste à temps plein n'a été créé, mais la réorganisation a entraîné des augmentations de salaire rétroactives au 1er juin 2021. Highlights of the reorganization include a new language policy and planning unit and an enhanced communication and strategic advisory role to better support departments and public bodies in providing services and information in French to Yukoners. There are no new full-time employees, but the reorganization led to wage increases that are retroactive to June 1, 2021.

La Direction a été en mesure de couvrir l'augmentation des dépenses liées au personnel pour l'exercice 2022-2023 à même son budget existant. The directorate was able to cover the increase in personnel costs for the 2022-23 fiscal year within its existing departmental budget.

La nouvelle convention collective ratifiée cette année prévoit des augmentations de salaire rétroactive au 1er janvier 2022. La Direction a été en mesure de couvrir ces paiements pour l'exercice 2022-2023 à même son budget existant. The new collective agreement ratified this year included wage increases that are retroactive to January 1, 2022. The directorate was able to cover these retroactive payments for the 2022-23 fiscal year within its existing departmental budget, and that's why we didn't see it here earlier on the 2022-23 supplementary estimates.

Toutefois pour tenir compte des paiements rétroactifs et de l'augmentation salariale après le 1er avril 2023, le présent budget supplémentaire des dépenses prévoit une augmentation de 548 000 \$ pour la Direction des services en français. However, to address the retroactive payments and wage increases after April 1, 2023, the supplementary estimates include an increase for the French Language Services Directorate in the amount of \$548,000.

Voilà qui conclut mes remarques sur le premier budget supplémentaire des dépenses de la Direction des services en français. Deputy Chair, this concludes my remarks on first supplementary estimates for the French Language Services Directorate.

Je suis prêt à répondre aux questions des membres sur le sujet.

I welcome any questions from colleagues.

Ms. Clarke: Thank you for the introduction and welcome to the staff. I understand that the supplementary budget vote request for the French Language Services Directorate is to address increases from the collective agreement. Due to that, we have no additional questions and I will pass this over to my colleague.

Ms. White: Merci beaucoup. C'est toujours un plaisir d'avoir la Direction et les membres officiels du département ici pour en parler. Comme je l'ai dit avant, la première fois que l'on a eu un débat en français été en 2012. Alors c'est une grande chose. It is a pleasure, of course, to have the officials here. The challenge here is always that, when we talk about the French Language Services Directorate, we have come so far in the last 12 years that there aren't too many questions or criticisms. It's more about finding out what's next and what the next big thing is. As an example, I am currently on the yukon.ca website en français. At this point, with my very quick perusal, I believe the entire Yukon government website has been translated, which is an achievement in itself.

One of my favourite things in the briefing for the French Language Services Directorate is the infographic. I have encouraged the minister before, but I will encourage him again — that infographic, if ever there was a place to share it so people could see just how far the French Language Services Directorate has come and just how far it will go — I think it is really eye-opening about how much has been accomplished and those goals going forward.

The only real question I have for the minister is: What's next? What are the goals of the department and what are we working on now?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the member for the question. There are a few things, of course. Every three years, we have a new strategic framework, and the department has been working very diligently on that. That is going to the Cabinet Committee on Priorities and Planning shortly. I do hope to have it back in front of us, as a House, maybe next month sometime. That is my hope — but soon, anyway. It might be sooner.

The timing of that framework is very good because we will be coming toward the end of our agreement with the federal government in terms of funding, so it sets us up to talk to the federal government about where we are trying to go. Our director, Mr. Andre Bourcier, is out-of-territory right now. He has been doing work with national counterparts to talk about issues like justice and how to support French language through issues related to justice. Then he is on his way to meet with colleagues — I think he is actually just in-between right now and on his way to talk with colleagues about the federal-provincial-territorial meetings.

There are a couple of specific areas that I think we are looking at. Really, we are concentrating on how, as much as possible, to improve our services across departments. I thank the member for her comments about the website and about the French Language Services Directorate's infographic. There will be some infographics in the new strategic framework, so I will make sure to table that here and I will, of course, pass her compliments on about the translation services.

Ms. White: Deputy Chair, I just wanted to make sure that the minister — if there is anything else that he would like to say about the French language department or whether we want to celebrate that there are 71 French speakers offering the on-the-spot translation or 23 at the Yukon Hospital Corporation or any of those things — so if there is anything that he would

like to celebrate right now, I am happy to hear it and then look forward to our spring debate as we map things on a go-forward basis.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will make one more comment. When I was out this summer at the meetings for the ministers of French language, we were asked to do a small presentation about technology and about how it's working. One of the things that we have been doing is trying to think about how we deal with communities that are far-flung. We found a way to use a translation service where you could provide French translation and you didn't need to be face-to-face because we were using this sort of technology — like a Zoom type of technology, but bringing people very close to each other. Amazingly, that same technology will work very well for a myriad of other languages, and it has been, including for American Sign Language, which is super important because it's a visual thing, not an oral thing.

The interesting thing that we discovered as we were looking at this technology and starting to use it — and then reporting on it to our national counterparts — was that we had employees across government who were nervous to say that they had French language in their background — to identify it. The reason was that if they identified, they were worried that they would be called upon in situations where they didn't feel completely comfortable to use their French — for example, in areas of health care where you have a bunch of French and you could assist but you would struggle if you got into very technical conversations which are not your area of expertise. But when we started to supply that ability to provide that translation service, suddenly we had other people who were willing to designate themselves as bilingual or on the spectrum.

This was one of the really key points that we made to colleagues across the country: When our public service feels supported, they are willing to go further themselves. It was actually a really nice moment that was shared. We got lots of questions and had lots of conversation around the table about the program, so it's an example.

One of the things that I will always say about the team at French Language Services Directorate, or DSF, is that they are always looking for ways to stretch the resources that we have to try to serve as many Yukoners as possible.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 27, French Language Service Directorate, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Takhini-Kopper King has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 27, French Language Services Directorate, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$548,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of nil agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$548,000 agreed to French Language Services agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Community Services

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Deputy Chair, I'm going to start debate this afternoon by welcoming my two officials to the room here. We have John McGovern, director of finance, and Matt King, the deputy minister. So, John McGovern and Matt King.

This afternoon, I'm pleased to present the Department of Community Services' *Supplementary Estimates No. 1* for 2023-24, the total increase being \$21.3 million in operation and maintenance expenditures and a decrease of \$6 million in capital.

It was an extraordinary year for fires, which is the focus of our request — \$19 million and change for Wildland Fire Management — as this summer was intense. Fire management crews and our emergency measures team were challenged by the scale and intensity of the wildfires this summer, some of which were on the doorstep of our communities. There were several evacuation alerts due to fire activity and evacuation orders issued in Mayo and Old Crow and for the Eagle mine — the Yukon's largest gold mine — as we can all remember; it wasn't that long ago.

Responding to these events was a collaborative effort. We are thankful to our Yukon Wildland Fire Management and Emergency Measures Organization teams, our partners in Yukon First Nations Wildfire, First Nation and municipal governments, and the additional personnel from other parts of Canada who joined us under our Mutual Aid Resource Sharing

Agreement through the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre. We thank everyone involved for keeping us safe.

Deputy Chair, we are requesting \$19.6 million in this supplementary estimate for Wildland Fire Management's response this season. We are also requesting an additional \$1.7 million for increases resulting from the latest collective bargaining agreement.

In terms of capital funding, we are scaling back our spending — we're returning a little bit of money. This \$6.2-million decrease includes money from the deferred Investing in Canada infrastructure program projects happening in future years, a reduction in the local improvement charge program estimate given the reality of the reduced consumer spending due to rising interest rates and a deferral of the purchase of a fire truck.

With that, I am going to open the floor up to my good colleagues to ask all of the many questions that I am sure they are chomping at the bit to get at.

Ms. McLeod: I want to welcome the officials back with us in the Legislature to discuss this department that affects all Yukoners. The minister just touched on the decrease in the supplementary budget of \$5 million for the Investing in Canada infrastructure program funding. Can the minister explain this decrease in a little more detail, please?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We have a few projects here that are still priorities of this government and certainly for the communities involved. They are just not happening right now and so we are deferring them to a future year. They include: the Beaver Creek lagoon — there is \$1 million there; the Haines Junction water well replacement — \$100,000; Watson Lake infrastructure phase 1 construction — \$3.9 million. Those are basically the projects that we are deferring to future years because they just weren't able to get off the ground this year.

Ms. McLeod: If the minister could speak closer to his mic, I would appreciate that.

I do have a few more questions about the Watson Lake infrastructure project, but we can talk about that in a little bit.

What is happening to the federal extension to the ICIP program, and what does it mean to Yukon's funding?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you, Deputy Chair. When we know more, we will certainly inform the House.

Ms. McLeod: Now, of course, this program is very important to Yukon communities, so when will the minister have some inclination? That program does expire this year.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have had several meetings this summer with ministers of infrastructure from across the country, ministers of municipalities from across the country, and public safety ministers. The new infrastructure money has certainly been a topic of conversation at all of those meetings. The federal government is currently putting its plan together, and as soon as they know more, they will inform us and I will certainly inform the members opposite.

Ms. McLeod: I am sure the minister knows this, but, of course, our Yukon communities are looking forward to something very soon. They need this information in order to plan, of course.

With regard to phase 4 of the infrastructure project in Haines Junction, has this been tendered yet? If it has, when is it anticipated to begin?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As far as I know, the \$100,000 project in Haines Junction has not yet been tendered. I can certainly look into that for the member opposite, but to my knowledge, it has not yet been tendered.

Ms. McLeod: Some projects are tendered and they come in overbudget, and they are sent back for redesigning to bring down the costs — such as some fire halls in our communities. Other projects, even though they are considerably overbudget, are allowed to proceed. What are the criteria for the projects to be changed before they move forward, and who makes those decisions?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are talking a little bit about the abstract here. If the member opposite has a specific project that she would like to delve into — generally speaking, the projects, after they are tendered, come to Management Board, so that's a decision that Cabinet takes at the Management Board table on whether or not a project proceeds. It depends on many, many criteria, I guess — how important the project is to the community involved, how much overbudget it is, what the circumstances for the overage are. There are lots of factors that go into such decisions at the Management Board table. If the member opposite has a specific project that she would like to talk about, I am happy to talk about specific projects. Of course, I have to respect Cabinet confidentiality at the same time, but we can get into specifics as opposed to hypotheticals.

Ms. McLeod: As I understand the minister, it is Management Board that makes those decisions and not the minister or his department staff; is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Yes, that is correct. Generally, those decisions are taken by Cabinet at the Management Board table. I can confirm that the tender is planned for the Haines Junction project that the member opposite was talking about. The tender is planned for the spring of 2024.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that update on Haines Junction.

Now, this summer, AYC passed a resolution calling on Canada to increase Yukon's share of the community building fund, or gas tax, and I believe that FCM has requested an increase for all three territories. Has the minister written to the federal minister to make this request as well?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I indicated earlier, I had several meetings at the federal-provincial-territorial level in several places in Canada. At every single one of those meetings, I have spoken to my federal counterparts about the amount of funding that the territory receives and how we would like to see more funding given to the territory.

I have also worked very closely with my two colleagues in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. We have communicated several times and have actually had conversations as the northern region with federal ministers on the amount of funding coming to our northern jurisdictions. We have also written the federal minister about that as well.

Ms. McLeod: If the minister has been raising this at every opportunity and has written to the Government of Canada

to make these requests, what has the response been so far? When can Yukon communities expect to hear that they are getting increased funding?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The federal government has received the requests, I guess, from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and, of course, from the Association of Yukon Communities. We have not yet heard what the federal plans are for the increase in the former gas tax fund. We are still waiting for word on what the federal government is going to be doing in terms of increasing funding to regions of this country, including municipalities.

Ms. McLeod: Can the minister give us his impression of how these discussions are going? Are they being received in a favourable light? Obviously, the minister has some sense of where these discussions are going.

What is his sense of how this will go?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In addition to the letters and the work that I have done with my colleagues in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, I have been reminded that the three territorial premiers have also written to the federal government about the importance of more funding for the north.

I can say that for the upcoming renewal of our infrastructure programs, we are engaging with the Government of Canada — ultimate recipients, meaning municipalities and First Nation governments, as well as the Association of Yukon Communities — over the winter. We look forward to continued work to enhance the next generation of this fund. Again, we are getting a little bit ahead of ourselves; these conversations are happening this winter, and we are working with the feds.

I can say to the member opposite that we have heard from every single municipality and every single provincial and territorial minister that they are all looking for more infrastructure funding. There is a hunger for this. With the unprecedented investment that Ottawa made in our infrastructure after years of drought, it has built up a hunger for more investment in our infrastructure. We all know how important it is. We do know that there are some in Parliament who are urging restraint at the federal level. I don't have to tell the members opposite who those folks might be, but the federal government is looking to balance investment in the communities across the country with the political realities of a minority Parliament.

Ms. McLeod: Given the minister's comments there, it doesn't sound like the minister is too encouraged, let's say, that the requests are going to be looked upon favourably.

I am going to move on to an issue that we have discussed in this Sitting in this House, and it is regarding the issue around the City of Whitehorse's drinking water and the letter that the minister sent to the city about it. The minister expressed a lot of concern about the issue, but he didn't seem to commit any funding to the city. We notice that there doesn't seem to be any money in the five-year capital plan for this project.

So, can the minister confirm that the Yukon government will not be providing any funding to the city for this water project, and if not, why not?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Right off the hop, I want to just make sure that the member opposite understands that my previous

answer was not meant in any way to indicate that the federal government is not receptive to our requests — the requests from every single province and every single municipality in the country — for more infrastructure.

As I said, the federal government invested historic amounts of money in our infrastructure across the country, and that opened our eyes to how important this funding is. The federal government is very receptive to the requests that we are making of them. They certainly understand that. They understand the needs across the country for renewed infrastructure funding and they are working right now to get a new program before us, so I don't want to indicate in any way that they are not receptive. We are in a time of high inflation. The economy is rolling along very well. I am sure that the federal government is balancing all of these factors in designing and delivering their next infrastructure project.

The member opposite has brought up water in Whitehorse. I am sure that it's shared across the House that water in our municipalities and certainly in Whitehorse is a very important subject. I made my thoughts known on this subject to the Mayor of Whitehorse. We have since had a meeting together — a very fruitful meeting between the mayor and me on this and many other issues just last week. I want to say that the City of Whitehorse has made the prudent decision to go ahead with the planning for a new water treatment facility. We, on this side of the House, are glad to hear that they are proceeding with the planning for this project and we look forward to seeing what that plan looks like once it's completed.

Ms. McLeod: May I presume that the City of Whitehorse would feel some measure of comfort if they knew how this project was going to get paid for? While I can appreciate that the planning process is going ahead, it makes it easier to plan for the project, as I said, when you know where the money is coming from.

Can the minister confirm whether or not they are going to be contributing financially to this project?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The planning for this project was actually funded through what was formerly known as "gas tax funding" provided by the federal government.

We are very heartened to see that going ahead. We don't know what the price or the scope of the project will be. Once we know what that is, through the planning process that is now underway, we will have more information to go with, but at this time we don't have that information.

Ms. McLeod: Keeping our discussion within the City of Whitehorse, what work has the Yukon government done with the City of Whitehorse regarding the Robert Service slide? The mayor indicated that a significant capital project was needed to stabilize the bank and prevent future slides. How much funding will the Yukon government provide for this project?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, the member opposite is — I am sure there is a lot of excitement about these projects. Once we get a request from the City of Whitehorse that has a plan attached to it, we will certainly deal with that when it comes. I haven't had that at the moment. We provided \$2 million in emergency funding for the year previous to this last year. The city has spent all of that money. The slide this

last year did not actually amount to an actual emergency eligible for any federal support for that slide. The city is dealing with that; we are working with the city on their emergency planning. When they come forward with a request for a project for the Robert Service Way, we will certainly have a look at that and work with them on it, as I have told the mayor.

Ms. McLeod: There has been a lot of talk about recycling in the City of Whitehorse. Is the government working with the city to provide a blue bin household pickup service? If so, when will that be in place and how much has been budgeted?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm sorry, Deputy Chair. I am going to ask my good colleague to please repeat the question.

Ms. McLeod: My question was about recycling in the City of Whitehorse and whether or not the Yukon government and the city have been working to provide a blue bin household pickup service. If the answer to that is yes, my question is: When will it be in place and how much is the budget for this?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I want to go back to the disaster mitigation funding. We are working with the City of Whitehorse on a proposal for the federal government on the disaster mitigation for the Robert Service Way, so we are working in tandem with the City of Whitehorse to come up with a plan to deal with Robert Service Way.

As far as recycling goes, yes, recycling has been an issue on many people's minds, certainly since Raven ReCentre has announced that they are going to stop drop-offs in the City of Whitehorse as of the end of the year.

We met with Raven ReCentre and the City of Whitehorse shortly after that announcement was made. Raven indicated to me in that meeting that they had never had a committee to look at this. I believe we had our first meeting of that committee that very week, and the city has been involved in that as well. The city, the Yukon government, and Raven have been working on the recycle file since that meeting earlier this year, and those talks are proceeding with a goal to find a way to deal with the city's recycling — either through a blue bin program or whatever program comes out of the work of that committee. That committee's work is continuing and I have every confidence that we will find some sort of solution that will give recycling options to the citizens of Whitehorse. It is very important, as we deal with waste, to make sure that we divert as much out of our landfills as possible. That has certainly been a goal of mine. I have spoken about it often enough here in the House, and I will continue to advocate for better waste handling in the territory as a whole. Recycling is a huge part of that solution.

Ms. McLeod: I heard the minister say that the City of Whitehorse is working with Raven ReCentre to come up with a plan. Has there been a request from the City of Whitehorse to the government for any assistance — financial or otherwise?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We work with the City of Whitehorse on their requests all the time. Personally, I have not yet had an official request from the City of Whitehorse. As I said, I spoke with the mayor just last week. We did discuss recycling. We are going to have to find a way to fund recycling

in the City of Whitehorse — an approach that has not yet been designed or planned.

I have just been told — okay, so a letter was received by my deputy from the city manager on Friday. I haven't had a chance to discuss that in any depth with my good colleague to my left. The city has sent a letter to us on the recycling issue.

Again, we are working in tandem with our partners to make sure that there is a recycling solution in Whitehorse in the coming months. I am sure that we will find a solution to this because recycling is so important to the city, it is important to the Yukon government, and it is certainly important to the residents of Whitehorse.

Ms. McLeod: Can the minister tell us what the effect on rural Yukon communities will be as a result of Raven's reduced services and/or closures?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In all of the discussions that we have had with Raven over the last several months, the stream of recycling from the communities has never been an issue. The recycling that we obtain from the rural Yukon communities is going to continue to come into Whitehorse as it always has. We are talking about a drop-off location in Whitehorse for citizens of Whitehorse to drop off their garbage. Raven has said that in order to meet the goal of increasing from roughly 30 percent that we are now capturing in our recycling stream, they need a new model. We can't get beyond 30 percent — that is a rough number — and so they are looking to increase the amount of recycling to do it — the amount of recycling collected in Whitehorse. To do that, they are looking at having a new system in place. Perhaps curbside — I think that is sort of the model that everybody is looking at right now. But we are not talking about the stream from rural Yukon; that is going to continue to come in. Of course, we will have to see what that looks like when the new city-side recycling program is up and running.

Ms. McLeod: The Yukon government is supporting the city's bid to host the Arctic Winter Games in 2026. Often, of course, there is an expectation that some infrastructure projects are done to support these games. What projects is the Yukon government supporting and how much is budgeted?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Currently, there are no needed infrastructure projects to support our Arctic Winter Games bid. The existing infrastructure is more than enough to deal with the Arctic Winter Games. The budget for the financial in-kind contributions of up to \$4.35 million is what we have committed to as a government.

Ms. McLeod: I am going to move on now to some resolutions that AYC has passed. One of them calls on the Yukon government to provide sustainable and long-term funding for the humane society. What was the government's response to that resolution?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will say that the Department of Environment is actually leading the response to that specific resolution from AYC.

Ms. McLeod: Another resolution was to review the peripheral property tax rate. What was the government's response and what works have been done on this?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm curious — I would like to ask the member opposite what her position is on peripheral tax rates.

Ms. McLeod: I would be happy to answer that if I were the minister and I were the government, but I'm not, so I'm requesting that the minister provide a response.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I can say that, on this specific matter, it is Community Services, of course, leading the review and the review is currently underway. That is really all I have to say about that this afternoon.

Ms. McLeod: Can the minister tell us what the timeline for the review is?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have been consulting with my officials this afternoon. We don't have a timeline for that review, but it is underway. We were going to balance it alongside all the other reviews, emergency planning, and all the work of Community Services so it is part of the mix that we are currently working through.

Ms. McLeod: I feel that I need to point out that the resolution, as it was just pointed out to me, was actually from 2018. I am hoping that we can put a bit of gas in that tank, because it has obviously gone on for quite a while.

A resolution that was passed called for a more respectful and meaningful consultation with municipalities, so what was the minister's response to this resolution and what action has he taken?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: First of all, to the member's preamble, the motion in 2018 was responded to. This is a new resolution from the Association of Yukon Communities — the new executive there — so we are dealing with that.

As far as the respectful and meaningful relationships, I have asserted that we do have respectful and meaningful conversations with all of our municipal leaders, and I am going to continue that practice that was established by my predecessor in this role — the good Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes.

Ms. McLeod: I stand corrected on the previous resolution regarding the property tax rate.

I have a bit of a question as to — if the minister is having these great conversations with communities, why in the world would they pass a resolution saying otherwise?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I think that's a question the member opposite can have with the Association of Yukon Communities and its members.

Ms. McLeod: With regard to the resolution regarding a review of the *Municipal Act*, what is the government's position? What's the timing for this review? Who might be leading it?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We have asked the Association of Yukon Communities to share specific information and context on the issues that municipalities would like addressed in the *Municipal Act*. This will be informed through ongoing dialogue between the Yukon government officials, CAOs, and the executive director of the association.

Ms. McLeod: If the government has asked municipalities, including AYC, to provide their input into the

changes that they think need to be made to the *Municipal Act*, was there a timeline provided by the government?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have toured Yukon communities now every year that I've been in this role, and I will continue to do so. When I've been talking to municipalities, many have expressed how busy they are and how busy they have been post-COVID. We have asked, on this subject, for more information. I'm not going to further stress our municipalities. I'm waiting for information and I will assess that information once I get it from municipalities. I have not put a timeline or put a deadline on municipalities for this information. I'm waiting to hear back from them to hear what they have to say about the *Municipal Act*, and then we will assess the information we receive from municipalities and then make a decision on their concerns.

Ms. McLeod: With regard to a review of the CMG, the report by the consultant was completed this summer. It makes some longer term and shorter term suggestions. I have that document here. I will just briefly read from it to go over the short-term suggestions.

One is to: "Increase the per person and per property or dwelling value to reflect more updated values (such as the per person amount contemplated in the Regional Landfill Agreements) as these were created in 2012."

Point 2 is: "Increase the Asset Maintenance factor percentage to better reflect both the cost of aging infrastructure and new capital projects as well as to better align with the CPI over time."

Point 3 is: "Reduce the Property tax room calculator percentage further to reduce the penalty in the grant for growth and development."

If the minister would like me to go through those one at a time, I am happy to do so.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have also read the 23-page document, the comprehensive municipal grant review and analysis by the Association of Yukon Communities. I have thanked them for the information. The department has actually reached out to the association. They have put two members forward to work with us on this matter. We have put a team together, so those folks are working through the analysis that we were provided.

I am going to let the team that we have put together to work through this project do their work, so I'm not going to negotiate the analysis or the comprehensive municipal grant on the floor of the Legislature today.

I have the analysis, the team is looking at it, and we will deal with it with the Association of Yukon Communities in the manner in which they have prescribed, which is putting forward a couple of members to work with us.

Ms. McLeod: I thank the minister for that and we look forward to hearing further on those items.

I would like to turn to land development, including land development in rural Yukon. How many lots have hit the counter for sale this year, and where are they located? If the minister could provide a number for each community, that would be appreciated.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In the spring of 2023, we released 117 new lots in Whistle Bend and 17 new rural lots in the — this year, we are just finishing up on phase 7. The asphalt and concrete work has been done. We are waiting for the city to finish their inspections of said work. We are looking at getting 133 lots to tender this winter for the next construction season next year and up to 75 rural lots for release in 2024 as well — so, 133 in Whitehorse and 75 in rural Yukon.

Ms. McLeod: With all due respect to the minister, those are planned releases for next year. If I'm to understand the minister's numbers for this year, it was 117 for Whitehorse and 17 rural — if he could confirm that.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Those are the numbers that I have for what went out in the spring of this year — yes.

Ms. McLeod: Of the 17 rural lots, can the minister tell us what community that was in?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I'm looking through my notes here — three country residential lots in Carmacks, four infill lots in Dawson; so that's seven. We are looking at seven urban lots in Haines Junction — that takes us to 14 — two infill lots in Mayo, and five vacant infill lots released in the spring of 2023 in Watson Lake. That actually takes us to above 17.

Ms. McLeod: I didn't catch that last part, but those numbers are more than 17. I'm going to let that go.

Of the 117 lots released in Whitehorse in 2023 — this year — how many of those were in 6B of the Whistle Bend development? Do the residents have access to them?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In the spring, we let lots from phases 6 and 8.

Ms. McLeod: Can the minister repeat that, please?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Absolutely. The lots sold in Whitehorse this year were from phases 6 and 8.

Ms. McLeod: Was there a separation in different phases of lots for phase 6?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: There were phases 6A and 6B. The City of Whitehorse collected all those lots and issued development permits for the whole of phase 6, so 6A and 6B were rolled into the city's development permits.

Ms. McLeod: I am wondering if the minister can tell us: Since the spring of 2021, how many lots have been released?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: In answer to the question, there were, in the time frame provided by the member opposite, 214 lots in Whistle Bend and four at the end of my street on Logan.

Ms. McLeod: I would like to have a little discussion about the subdivision development in Watson Lake. The work for clearing started before the tender for development was awarded — and when I say "development", I mean the underground work. My question is: Was this a separate contract, and what was the value of the contract?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The Frances Avenue urban residential project — a long time in the making. It is actually a partnership with the Town of Watson Lake, the Liard First Nation, and the Government of Yukon. It involves some lands that were set aside by the federal government for the Liard First Nation.

The Frances Avenue civil and lift station work has started and is set for completion in the fall of 2024. The yield will be

43 serviced residential lots and a new water lift station for the community.

Under the Frances Avenue agreement, YG will provide up to 18 of the 43 lots to the Liard First Nation as well as contracting opportunities, including the clearing and preparation of all lots. I do not have any information on the cost of the clearing work. The bulk of the work has gone through procurement; we are looking for that information, as well, for the actual civil works and lift station. I am going to get that information from my officials, but that is where the bulk of the procurement was. The clearing work was done by the Liard First Nation and I am looking for information on that as well.

Ms. McLeod: The clearing was a sole-source contract to the Liard First Nation, if I understand it — or maybe more correctly First Kaska. Perhaps the minister could confirm that, but I would like to know what the value of that contract was.

By these agreements that the Yukon government has with Liard First Nation, I'll presume that this was not put out for public tender, of course.

The in-ground work for the subdivision was — I think it was awarded for \$4.8 million. That's kind of why I'm curious to know what these numbers are. But it's substantially higher than what has been in the capital budgets. I'm wondering how the government is going to handle this quite big increased cost and whether or not that's going to be passed on to the purchaser.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The member opposite is, of course, correct that First Kaska was contracted for land clearing. We are looking for the numbers for that contract. Under the civil tender, there were two contracts issued: One was for pipes and the other one was for the lift station. We are hoping to get that project underway in the 2024 season. We are seeing costs escalate in residential developments. For all of the infrastructure to support residential developments, we are seeing costs rise. That is partly because this housing is an issue in every single jurisdiction in the country and indeed in many across North America. We are seeing prices rise because everybody is trying to build houses and there is a lot of competition for resources to build houses — be it pipes, lift stations, the whole bit — so we are seeing increased costs on those things.

We do develop lots on a cost-recovery basis. We are seeing increased costs here, but we are going to work with the Town of Watson Lake, the Liard First Nation, and our partners to deliver lots as inexpensively as we possibly can to communities, including Watson Lake.

Ms. McLeod: Subsequent to the \$4.8 million for the underground work on this subdivision, the minister referenced the lift station that clearly must be in tandem with the subdivision work. There was a \$600,000 contract awarded for landscaping of the lift station, which is all well and good, except we have not seen an award for the lift station. When might we see that tender awarded?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We are looking into the landscaping contract. That's something I wasn't familiar with. As far as the actual contract for the lift station itself, I am led to believe that it has been awarded and we hope to have the whole project completed by the fall of 2024.

Ms. McLeod: Deputy Chair, did the minister say that contract has been awarded?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I am right now trying to confirm that information with my officials, so I will get back to the member opposite with a firm answer on whether or not it has been awarded yet.

Ms. McLeod: I would appreciate some kind of date on the award plus the tender amount.

The minister can maybe guess where I am going with this. If we add up the clearing costs — I don't know what that is at this point — the in-ground work was almost \$5 million; the landscaping for the lift station; the price of the lift station, which is some — who knows? — \$5 million to \$7 million — more than my allowance. Given that extreme high cost for the development of those lots and that it's the government's practice to recoup that money from the purchasers, I am wondering how in the world is anybody going to be able to afford one of those lots.

I do know that the Town of Watson Lake is contributing \$3 million to the lift station project. Of course, we are thankful for that; it does help to keep the price down, but I would still like the minister to comment on that.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Deputy Chair, the reality in the territory — indeed, the reality across the country — is that development costs for housing-related development are going through the roof. We have certainly seen increases in the territory. It varies depending on the contract, but the reality is that we are seeing increased costs for housing infrastructure. The government works to recover the costs of the land development through the lot sales. This has been a long-standing practice.

We realize that it is not always possible to do that in rural Yukon, because it is a much smaller scale development and costs can be higher, so we do everything we can to recover as much as we can from rural lot development. We have an option to go with either the market price or the development cost, depending on how that plays out. We are working very closely with our partners to keep lots as inexpensive as possible, which is why we have a procurement system to try to get the lowest and best price we can for the citizens of the territory when we put these lots on the ground.

I don't know what other options there are. The cost of developing these lots is the cost of developing these lots. We hear from the members opposite and from rural Yukon how important lot development is for their community growth and future, and we are working very, very hard to provide those lots in rural Yukon as cheaply as we possibly can. We are going to continue to do that.

The lot price will be the lot price once we know how much the whole development is. That's hypothetical right now. We will know more at the end of 2024 in the case of Watson Lake, and we will work with our partners, both the Liard First Nation and Watson Lake as a community, to keep those lots as inexpensive as possible. But in this time, we are seeing the cost of that infrastructure increase, and that's just the simple reality of contracting for houses here in the north these days.

Ms. McLeod: Well, interesting times is what I have to say about that; that doesn't provide too much comfort.

On the topic of lift stations, there was the government-built lift station in Haines Junction, and as I understand, there have been a lot of problems with it and it likely isn't working to this day. What discussions has the government had with the community to get this piece of infrastructure working?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I have not heard from the community of Haines Junction on the lift station; neither has my deputy. We are looking into this as we speak. I have a meeting with Haines Junction in the coming weeks. I'm sure that if it's an issue, I'll hear it there, but I haven't been made known of this issue personally of late. This is really the first I'm hearing it — from the member opposite.

Ms. McLeod: Deputy Chair, just for the minister's reference when he is having that discussion, it's the lift station that was built in the municipal yard.

So, let's move on. Earlier this Sitting, I asked the minister about the work to meet the government's commitment in *Our Clean Future* to create hazard identification and risk assessments for communities by 2022. Can the minister tell us what work has been done to complete hazard identification and risk assessments for all Yukon communities, and why is this work so behind schedule?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: What we are talking about this afternoon is our nation-leading *Our Clean Future* plan. So, realizing that the territory didn't have a plan, we actually drafted one, and it is one of the best in the country. It has performance measures that we have to meet. As the member opposite has identified, we were to have a complete hazard identification and risk assessment for all Yukon communities by 2022 that included climate change risks and we were to work with First Nations and municipalities to complete emergency management plans for all Yukon communities by 2022, informed by community hazard identification and risk assessments.

The member opposite is absolutely correct: We did not make that deadline. There was a little matter that hit the territory that we generally call "the great lockdown" or "the pandemic". So, yes, we are behind in our plans for doing these things. I will say, though, that the department has been extraordinary in its work on this file and continues to advance it.

The Emergency Measures Organization is, as I've said, tremendous. It has visited priority communities this winter to begin their hazard identification and risk assessments and to update their emergency management plans. They're encouraging neighbouring First Nations and municipalities to follow a joint approach to their risk assessments and emergency management plans. This joint approach will increase and improve coordination and resource-sharing between First Nations and municipalities during incidents.

Priority communities have been selected based on past incidents, future risk, and their interest — that is the community's interest, either First Nation or municipality. Current priority First Nations and communities for the winter of 2023 — and this is depending on community uptake — are:

the City of Dawson and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation; the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation; the Village of Teslin and Teslin Tlingit Council; the Village of Carmacks and Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation; Watson Lake and Liard First Nation; Ross River Dena Council and the Village of Faro; and the Village of Mayo and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun.

Yukon government is also engaged with the City of Whitehorse on joint emergency preparedness, including collaborating on the latest joint task force north operation.

Ms. McLeod: The department also committed to developing a territorial disaster financial assistance policy that will support recovery from natural disasters that result in expensive property damage or disruption to the delivery of essential goods and services.

Can the minister provide an update on this work? Will the new policy cover investments in long-term mitigation projects that have been requested by our municipalities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Deputy Chair, that work is underway and we hope to have a policy and program implemented in the spring of 2024. That's generally the target date that we're looking at.

Deputy Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. McLeod: I do have a considerable list of topics and questions for the minister, but I am going to turn it over to my colleagues from the NDP at this time. I do want to thank the officials for joining us here today. Thank you.

Ms. White: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I do thank my colleague for Watson Lake for sharing the floor today. Of course, I say hello to the officials who are here today.

My first question is: When we look in the capital budget of this supplementary budget, we see a cut of \$239,000 from Protective Services, we see a cut of \$5 million from the community investing in Canada infrastructure program, and we see a cut of \$1 million in the Property Assessment Taxation for the Better Buildings program. My first question is: Was the minister asked to find areas where there could be reductions in this budget?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The succinct answer is no. It is the regular run of government. We have budget targets. We spend what we can spend, and if we can't spend the money that we have been allocated, we return it to the pool, which is par for the course. This is how our government has operated since day one.

Ms. White: When we talk about the Better Buildings program, there has been lots of debate here previously around better buildings and different things. I know that, at this point in time, we have had little uptake in it. As we can see, there is \$1 million reduced from the \$1.517-million budget.

Can the minister again share with us in which communities those successful applications have been? We know that some are in the City of Whitehorse and we know there is one in the community of Haines Junction, but can he remind us again how many successful applications there have been to that program so far?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We have had applications for the Better Buildings program submitted from 47 homeowners from Whitehorse, Dawson, Faro, and Haines Junction as of September 30, 2023. There are six clients actively participating in the Better Buildings program, with funding agreements signed with the Department of Community Services for a total of \$253,000. Three new clients joined the program between July 1 and September 30. Five of the active clients are located in Whitehorse and one is in Haines Junction. As I said, 47 homeowners have put in eligibility applications, so the uptake is going from six to 47. There is a lot of interest. With interest rates coming up — as the member opposite knows from the discussion we had in Question Period, interest rates are having a dampening effect. Unfortunately, we weren't able to capture the lower interest rates in the debate that we had earlier.

Ms. White: Maybe the minister can tell us, then — because he is right that there have been some changes. Can the minister tell us how much now a municipality is able to get to run this program? How much, for example, is the City of Whitehorse able to collect on one of those five applications that has been successful? How much is the municipality of Haines Junction able to collect to be able to run this program through their property tax system?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We will get back to the member opposite with that information.

Ms. White: I am under the understanding that the bigger municipalities — Watson Lake, Whitehorse, and Dawson City — are going to get \$500 a year to be able to administer this, and the smaller municipalities, I believe, will get \$250 a year. Can the minister just confirm as to whether or not those numbers are accurate?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I said to the member opposite four minutes ago, I will get back to them with the answer.

Ms. White: I was just thinking that, with the officials here and the Internet, maybe we could get a response today before 5:30 when we rise. I will remain optimistic.

The reason I point this out is that initially the program that the minister brought forward without discussion with the municipalities meant that the City of Whitehorse, as an example, would get \$500 over 15 years to run the program — a total of \$33.30 a year to administer the Better Buildings program, which was not a great deal for the City of Whitehorse or the Town of Watson Lake or the City of Dawson. Those three are now able to get \$500 a year — and similar for the smaller municipalities. At the time, it was much smaller amounts over the length of those loans.

I appreciate that the interest rate has changed, but it was the difference between the program going forward or not going forward. I stand quite confidently here saying that it was a good decision.

I do look forward to the minister getting back to us because, again, we are here for the next hour. I am sure, with the power of the Internet and the entire department and communication — and I know that there is some policy person deep within the throes of Community Services having a listen to me right now, so I wish them all the speed to get that answer back.

One of the other things, moving away from the capital budget, is that the minister has really dug in with his belief that the Association of Yukon Communities is responsible for consultation on things like the waste transfer facility closures at Johnsons Crossing, Braeburn, Silver City, and Keno. I just want to give the minister an opportunity to let me know and clear this up for me: Does he believe that the AYC is responsible for the consultations with those communities?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The staff at Community Services work exceptionally hard to get answers and I think that they have already provided answers quickly to members opposite this afternoon. I know that they will work on this and get the answers as quickly as possible.

The agreement that we signed with the municipalities is fairly sophisticated. I think that it is a fair deal and certainly generous for the municipalities. When the member opposite was talking about the debate and everything else, we were in a climate emergency and still are. In a climate emergency, you take action and do things and then work out the details later. It's the most priority thing — and then you do it. That's the approach that I take when we're in an emergency. When an emergency is declared, you take action and you worry about the execution of such things in due time. That's where I come from.

As the member opposite was talking about the negotiations that we had, we did ask that we negotiate the terms for the municipality as we get the program going, in tandem. That didn't happen. We paused the whole project until we got the deal in place. We lost valuable time in a climate emergency and then actually lost the interest rates as well. It's something that I regret today and will continue to regret, because I believe that it was important that we take action and try to improve people's houses, make sure that they have the work done on their houses that would save them money in a time of inflation — and there are all sorts of things that stem from that. But that's looking back and I don't want to do that.

I want to continue to go forward. We will get the information for the member opposite and answer her questions to make sure that the municipalities are whole.

Now we are going to go to AYC and the report that was drafted in 2016 by the Association of Yukon Communities, which outlined the approach that they asked government to take when it came to improving our waste management in the territory.

If you will just give me a second, because I'm just going to use the Internet this afternoon just for a minute and get to the AYC report drafted in 2016. It had a few things that it wanted

to do, actually. It outlined a number of things that had to happen. The vision was to increase user responsibility for waste management costs, community landfills with sufficient resources and complementary standards, an integrated approach with communities and YG implementing changes in unison, and a phased approach with doable steps. That's exactly what my good colleague the MLA for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes undertook and then built on with the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste, which, again, also involved the AYC.

The whole project had its genesis with the Association of Yukon Communities, a very forward-looking organization trying to deal with the issues of waste management in the territory and improve it both for residents, for the territorial government, and for municipalities, and so we went down that road. It had some fairly specific questions and concerns.

The issue with the current system in 2016 was that we were spending tax dollars instead of having users pay for the garbage that they were producing. The plan that we are executing on addresses that. They had inconsistent staffing and tipping fees. The plan that we are moving ahead with deals with that. There was a problem with peripheral dumping where some rural landfills did not attempt to enforce tipping fees, which often led to peripheral dumping at YG-operated transfer sites where there are no fees, roadside pullouts, and even illegal dumping, for example — and then they give examples. So, we are addressing that. It says that the strategy is for communities and YG to implement staffing based on capacity and/or service requirements and tipping fees/user fees in unison to discourage peripheral dumping. We are doing that.

Then there were the liability costs: "All communities do not have the resources to shoulder the costs of closing a landfill at the end of its life, in keeping with PSAB requirements around liabilities for waste management. Further, it is..." — and then it goes on to say: "... not clear how communities and YG share responsibility for the liability of landfills. Some landfills pre-date the existence of municipal councils, and can include 'legacy waste' that is not fully known. This is a potentially huge cost to Yukon taxpayers, and the ability to divert waste and manage incoming waste is essential for lengthening the life landfills and preparing for closure." Again, we are addressing that with the plan that we are implementing right now.

So, this was a vision for a sustainable model for Yukon communities given to the government in 2016. It was provided to us in 2017 when we took office — in late 2016, early 2017. My good colleague did some amazing work, a lot of consultation, and carried it forward with his Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste, and I'm carrying the ball now. Yes, I believe in this. I believe in it for all the reasons that AYC laid out in 2016. I believe in it for the climate; I believe in it for the municipalities; I believe in it for user pay for the garbage that we're producing so we can have a trigger incentive to cut the amount of garbage that we're producing in the territory. I think this does all of those things. The Association of Yukon Communities speaks for the municipalities and some unincorporated communities, including Marsh Lake, Tagish, and several others.

Ms. White: Just following along on those comments, with the YESAB application that was done for the closure of the Silver City transfer facility, the contractors said that the AYC had done — when they were asked for further information, they said that AYC had done consultation on the closure. Maybe the minister can fill me in on what consultation he believes that AYC did around the closure of the Silver City transfer facility.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Better Buildings — the agreements outline a maintenance fee, which is annual. It's \$200 for smaller municipalities and \$500 for bigger municipalities. The annual fee remains until the local improvement charge is paid off. The municipalities agreed that this fee was not meant to generate revenue. Rather, it's a cost-recovery mechanism to collect the LC on taxes and rebate to the Yukon government. So, that is \$500 for bigger municipalities and \$200 for smaller municipalities. I want to thank the folks within the department who actually looked up and verified that information for me this afternoon.

As far as the consultations go, I know that AYC was involved in the initial solid-waste management. I know that AYC was involved with the Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste. I know that my good colleague the MLA for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes did enormous amounts of consultation when he was minister on this very subject. I know that, in terms of our consultation, we have had — specifically relating to the communities in question — four in-person meetings in Keno, Silver City, Braeburn, and Silver City. We have had three online meetings in Silver City, Braeburn, and Silver City. Again, we have had a final workshop in Silver City scheduled; it has been postponed at the request of residents. We will see when that happens; it should be later in November.

Yukon First Nations are not part of the required consultations, but we are engaging the Kluane First Nation. There is a public meeting on October 25 in Burwash. The Champagne and Aishihik First Nations — we are working with them to schedule a date. We are working with the Teslin Tlingit Council to schedule a date. We have had outreach on the website since mid-August.

Yukoners have been able to find information regarding household waste-disposal options on the government's public engagement site. Advertisements have been placed in the *Whitehorse Star* and in the *Yukon News*. Posters notifying residents of the meetings and the website were placed at the transfer stations in Silver City, Braeburn, and Johnsons Crossing. Johnsons Crossing Lodge and Braeburn Lodge — we have had e-mails to receive feedback from the engagement process, which is solidwasteconsultation@yukon.ca. We have communicated with residents and affected businesses by e-mail of the meetings.

I have met personally with residents of Silver City and I know that my colleagues have. As I said, the meetings have happened.

There has been plenty of consultation. The Association of Yukon Communities has been involved in this, as I have said in the House. They do represent some unincorporated communities, and I know that there is some tension with

unincorporated communities, with AYC asserting that they do not represent their interests.

Ms. White: I'm going to stay on the issue of transfer facilities — but I am going to go back to the Better Buildings program — but I figure we're here. Can the minister let me know which unincorporated communities the AYC represents?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The Association of Yukon Communities, of course, represents Tagish, Carcross, Mount Lorne, Marsh Lake, and Ibex local advisory councils. The Yukon government represents unincorporated Yukoners beyond that, so we have a role to play as well — my officials do. We have acted on that obligation, and I certainly have travelled the Yukon, travelled the north highway, and my colleague has as well. We have talked about this issue several times. We are continuing to work with the smaller communities that do not have a local advisory council — though, of course, communities that wish to have better representation can take that route as well. At the moment, those are the local advisory councils that AYC represents.

Ms. White: It's actually pretty easy to go on the Association of Yukon Communities' website to look at members. It's interesting because they list as associate members Mount Lorne, Marsh Lake, south Klondike, Tagish, and Ibex Valley. You will see that they don't list Destruction Bay, Silver City, Braeburn, Johnsons Crossing, or Keno. I was wondering how the minister thought that the AYC would consult with the communities that will be affected by the transfer station closures.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I will say that AYC has been working on the improvements to the regionalization of our landfills from the very outset. They do represent unincorporated communities through the local advisory councils. Outside of that, it's the Yukon government that represents residents in unincorporated communities that are not captured by the local advisory councils. As I have said — and my colleagues have said — we have consulted many times with all of the people affected by the closure of transfer stations that was first proposed by the AYC back in 2016, on which we have diligently worked to bring into being.

Ms. White: I am just seeking clarification. The minister is saying that it was not AYC that was responsible for consulting with citizens and residents in the Keno area, the Johnsons Crossing area, the Braeburn area, or the Silver City area.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: We have improved the landfills in Tagish, Mount Lorne, Marsh Lake, Ibex, and Carcross. They all have better landfills today because of the work of AYC in representing unincorporated communities. Part of the plan was to make sure that the peripheral dumping was closed. This affects the smaller communities, which is under the purview of the Yukon government — and which we have done. We have talked to residents in all of those areas — both my good colleague the MLA for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and I.

Ms. White: Just again for clarification, previously in the Assembly, the minister has insinuated that the Association of Yukon Communities was consulting again with the communities that I listed — so, just for clarification, does the

minister believe that AYC was responsible for doing consultations with residents of Johnsons Crossing, Keno, Silver City, and Braeburn?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I understand it, the AYC has put out a report, as I said, in 2016. The Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste put out a report in 2018. In both cases, they referenced peripheral sites, including the ones that we are talking about this afternoon. I have no doubt that they took information from those communities in the drafting of those reports. They certainly involved them.

As far as those four communities, we provide the services and we have continued to speak with them, but AYC, as an organization putting forward this report and the other one — working in tandem with that — would have funnelled any information they had from those communities into the plan itself. Currently, we have heard the Association of Yukon Communities talking about issues in Ross River, which it doesn't represent, and making those public claims. I have no doubt that they are collecting information and feeding it into the holistic approach that they have toward regionalization of our landfills.

Ms. White: On the YESAB site, in case anyone wants to follow along, in 2023-0060-0024, when there was a request for additional information, YESAB says: "What level of public engagement has already been conducted to prepare users for the closure of the site and if possible, please share the Community Engagement Plan ... for the Braeburn SWMF." And it says: "Response: Ongoing consultation has occurred with the community regarding closure activities for the Braeburn SWMF and will continue through as changes to the facility occur. Community Operations works closely with the Association of Yukon Communities as well as Community Affairs to ensure propose consultation and support for each community." It goes on and asks a couple more questions for clarification. I think the really interesting part is actually the response of the Association of Yukon Communities. In their letter dated July 26, 2023, they say — and I'm quoting from YESAB: "The Association of Yukon Communities (AYC) would like to provide clarification to information provided in this application that mischaracterizes our involvement and thus leaves an incorrect impression as to our role.

"In response to Information Request #1: IR Response (2023-0060-0024) the proponent makes claims about the AYC that we believe are improper. Specifically, with respect to the Solid Waste Management Facilities in Stewart Crossing, Pelly Crossing, Keno, and Braeburn the Mayo Designated Office asked the proponent about engagement with the communities and users impacted by the proposed closures or changes to operations at these facilities. In response the proponent makes three separate statements indicating that they worked with the AYC to ensure proper consultation with each of these impacted communities. These are incorrect and misleading statements.

"Our Association does not represent unincorporated communities in the Yukon. We do not have the jurisdiction or the authority to speak on behalf of, or to be consulted on the behalf of the communities impacted by these Yukon Government decisions. For greater clarity, we do not represent

or speak on behalf of Stewart Crossing, Pelly Crossing, Keno, or Braeburn. We cannot be considered the organization to consult with for Yukon Government decisions that impact these communities.”

I was hoping that maybe the minister can clarify, then. If the contractors hired by the Yukon government are saying that AYC is responsible for those consultations — because the minister says in 2016 that this is what the AYC said — hopefully, he can help me to understand what their July 26, 2023 letter means, then.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: The impetus for the closure of peripheral dumping sites, like the ones we are discussing, is the AYC and has been since 2016. They are the ones that came to this government in late 2016-17 after not seeing any progress previous to that. That was the impetus.

We are consulting with all of these places, as we have said we would do, and we are doing that under the confidence and supply agreement. I have outlined this afternoon all the consultations that we are doing. We want to make sure that waste management in the territory is sustainable from a cost and environmental perspective. We are pleased with the progress so far — pleased that so many municipalities have signed on to the waste plan as envisioned — and we are going to support community-focused solutions for household waste management.

We are all accountable for the garbage that we produce. Given the increased pressure to mitigate environmental risk, improve monitoring, and reduce waste management costs over the long term, it's essential that the number of waste management facilities are reduced and better managed so that we can continue investment in the remaining facilities.

The member opposite has mentioned the YESAB application that really wasn't tied to the waste transfer stations that we were talking about. It had to do with the application for landfill licence renewal — that's all landfills in the territory — which have to be renewed every 10 years. It just so happened that this renewal came up this year. It has to be done so we keep landfills open across the territory. That's what that YESAB screening is for.

The application, of course, had to include all potential activities contemplated over the 10-year period, which would be 2023 — this year — until 2033, including closures and landfilling of household waste. It was not a YESAB application for closures specifically.

Ms. White: I am sure the minister realizes that within a YESAB application, it includes a lot more. The scope often gets quite a bit bigger.

In the YESAB application, 2023-0060 — when it talks about the solid-waste management facilities at Braeburn, Keno, Pelly Crossing, and Stewart Crossing — particularly in relevance to the closure of the transfer station at Braeburn — I think it's important to note that, in point 5, it says: “Comments provided by the Ta'an Kwäch'an Council identified issues with the lack of consultation regarding the closure of the Braeburn site. Their comments states 'TKC was not provided with the opportunity to join in the development of a closure plan ... Our government does not support the closure of the Braeburn

Transfer Station without appropriate consultation. The YESAB process is not to be confused with government-to-government consultation.”

Can the minister let me know what government-to-government consultation happened with the Ta'an Kwäch'an Council around the closure of the Braeburn transfer facility?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: As I said in an earlier answer, first of all, none of these places have closed yet, with the exception of Keno, which has Hecla collecting residents' garbage and that is going down the road now. That's great. We found a solution there.

The consultation with the First Nations is continuing. I outlined in an earlier answer how some of those meetings have been scheduled and some are in the process of being scheduled. Currently, none of the sites are closed, though I have recently seen pictures of transmissions, engine blocks, old household waste and propane cans, and everything else being dumped illegally all over the Braeburn site. I have tens of thousands of dollars in cleaning up in Pelly because somebody dumped waste oil up in that site just recently — in the last three or four weeks — which is exactly the reason why we're contemplating closing this.

I was just alerted to a story in the *Yukon News*. In May 2019, they applaud the upcoming changes to waste management. “Municipalities are welcoming announced changes in how landfills and waste transfer stations will operate throughout the territory.” The AYC said in 2019: “‘It's something all the municipalities (have been) working towards,’ Association of Yukon Communities (AYC) president Tara Wheeler said in an interview May 13.”

Then — “Under the changes, tipping fees would be in place at all landfills and waste transfer stations, with fines for illegal dumping to rise to a maximum of \$10,000 from the current \$100.”

It's all there. If anybody wants to look it up, it's online. It is a good story and this is a good story for Yukoners and municipalities.

Ms. White: I don't know that I would say that this is a good news story at all.

Before I go — and I don't actually have an opportunity to say this to the public servants who were out at the Silver City waste transfer facility meeting that I attended in person with my colleague the Member for Kluane, who was also there, but there was a group of individuals who went out to represent the Department of Community Services and they did a great job in a really hard situation.

I want to commend them, because the truth of the matter is that those individuals who travelled out for that meeting in Silver City actually went out just after another news article had been published in which the minister was quoted as saying that they were going to be closed. A lot of the feelings around that meeting in Silver City were just like: Well, it's not consultation if you told us what the outcome is. It is not consultation.

So, I was curious if the minister has been paying attention to the comments and the feelings coming out of that area and if he is aware of or read through the 44 comments on the YESAB

page or, for example, if he read the letter that was sent to the Premier on the issue of the Silver City closure.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Yes, I have. This changing landscape — we bring more control to a relatively uncontrolled service and it is hard for residents for sure. We implement these changes to improve the lot of the whole territory, but in doing so, there are people who are certainly affected. I have heard from those people; I have met with them; I have talked to them on the phone; I have read their letters and read their comments.

I understand, but it is financially impossible to put the type of controls for a community, say, of 10 people or less that are needed to secure a site so that travellers from the highway or nearby communities don't decide to dump their propane tanks, their engine blocks, their construction waste, and their waste oils and other deleterious substances out of sight of prying eyes in an area that they consider to be a dump. We heard this from AYC in 2016 and 2018 and in 2019 when Tara Wheeler talked to the *Yukon News*. They are looking for these changes because these changes make sense for municipalities. So far, the municipalities are signing on to the plan and accepting the controls that we are putting in place in our landfills so that we will have landfills in rural Yukon, in Watson Lake, in Teslin, in Whitehorse, in Carmacks, in Dawson, in Faro, in Mayo, and between Burwash and Destruction Bay. We'll all have controlled landfills that citizens, when they go to pick up their groceries or go to get gas, can actually drop off and pay a small fee — about 20 percent of the cost of handling that garbage — and have it disposed of. That will allow us to do all the things that the AYC asked us to do back then — to have controls to make sure that our landfills are managed and have as long a life as humanly possible — and we can separate out the compost to help reduce greenhouse gas production. All of those things are part of the plan, and yes, it is going to require an adjustment for some citizens and that is very difficult, which is why the good folks at Community Services are working so hard.

I appreciate the member opposite — because that was a very tough meeting for those civil servants to go into. There is a lot of emotion there. They were there for several hours dealing with that and didn't actually get to the substantive meat of their presentation — the proposals that they had for folks out that way.

So, we are now doing that and getting through that, and we are working with them on solutions that may help residents — not necessarily businesses but residents in that area — who are looking for ways to handle the garbage that they produce in these sorts of remote communities.

Ms. White: I am not going to find the article that was circulating the night of that meeting, but let's say that the minister didn't make it any easier for his officials at that meeting, based on the article that was released that day. I will try to find it, because maybe it's good to remind the minister.

One of the challenges that the folks around the Silver City area are finding is that the minister's understanding of the situation is very different from their understanding. I tabled this letter in the House. It is from the community of Silver City and it's regarding the proposed closure of the Silver City transfer station. I am going to read a pretty solid excerpt from this and

then just confirm with the minister as to whether or not this was his understanding of the situation. Maybe we will go over the number of people who signed the letter, and then I would like to get into some of the YESAB comments.

The letter reads as follows: “We, the residents of Silver City and the surrounding area, are writing to you today in the hope that you may find time to personally consider our situation here and move towards a reconsideration of your government's ill advised determination to shut down our deeply needed transfer station, and thereby avoid doing grievous damage to our community.

“It's painful to recount, but the Minister of Community Services has stubbornly and consistently refused to engage with us on this issue. At the one meeting he attended, in Destruction Bay, he opened the meeting by announcing that he was NOT there to discuss that issue, so vital to us all, but was there merely as part of ‘a previous planned tour of the communities’. It was a very well attended gathering and everyone who was there can testify to the fact that he responded to our concerns in an arrogant and condescending manner with a demeanor wholly inappropriate for a public servant. Sad to say, he was dismissive and disrespectful towards the assembled community members.

“Your desk, as the saying goes, is ‘where the buck stops’, and bears the ultimate responsibility for the impact of government decisions on the people of the Yukon. Thus, it is directly to you that we now appeal.

“We have heard a lot of nebulous justifications wrapped around phrases such as ‘global warming concerns’ and ‘modernization’, issues which carry no rational, direct bearing on our predicament here. For a decision that will do no less than devastate our community, we deserve to be provided with some concrete and practical reasoning. What we have not heard is even one good, intelligible reason for the govt. to harm us in this way. If you are aware of such a reason, please convey it to us.

“We are a growing community, with new residents coming in and new businesses taking shape. Year by year, tourism is constantly on the increase. Please tell us ... How can our government aggressively promote tourism on the one hand, while, on the other hand, dismantling the infrastructure which rural residents desperately need in order to cope with expanding tourism??

“It should be self evident that the Govt. of Yukon should not be in the business of pulling the rug out from under such places and thus strangling fledgeling communities in their infancy. Astonishingly, this policy is redolent of a callous disdain towards rural residents. Is our govt. simply unaware of what is like outside of the city limits of Whitehorse? To us, it comes as outright hostility towards our way of life.

“Government handouts we've received begin by saying that the closing of rural transfer stations will ‘save taxpayers money and reduce emissions’. Both assertions are demonstrably untrue. It is inarguable that requiring our residents to drive hundreds of km. several times a week will both greatly increase overall emissions and incur thousands of dollars in additional expenses for taxpayers here.

“At this time we will not go into listing all the reasons why this policy is a disastrously counterproductive mistake. Suffice it to say, the reasons are there, and they are good, sensible reasons. They have been communicated over and over, to government representatives and in the media. Constantly having to reiterate our case is tiresome; we would rather be focussing our attentions elsewhere. The thing is; We love this community and will not give up defending its viability.

“Of course, government is not expected to be infallible. Mistakes are made. However, one hallmark of good government is that when mistakes are made they can be recognized, retracted and reworked, in order to better serve the public interest.”

So, Deputy Chair, this letter was directed to the Premier, and the Member for Kluane and I were cc'd on it. It was directed to the Premier. The interesting thing, I think, for the minister's point, is the number of signatures. This letter has 119 signatures from surrounding residents on it, which is quite a few more residents than the government insists use that transfer facility. I guess I am just looking for the minister's thoughts on this letter and the 119 people who signed it.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: There is an awful lot to unpack there. I applaud the member opposite for reading the letter that I received into the record. We look forward to the next community meeting and any recommendations that come from the workshop that we're having with experts up in the Silver City area.

We know and, as I said, I know very well how the households in the area do not want the proposed change. My officials are going to go up as part of a workshop and listen to residents and hopefully come out with some constructive solutions like we did in Keno.

As far as the hundred-odd signatures, I will have more to say about that at a future time.

But seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Whitehorse West that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following document was filed October 23, 2023:

35-1-157

Supporting the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter and calling for leadership on territorial housing policy, letter re (dated October 20, 2023) from Allison Camenzuli, Chair, Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, and Ben Pereira, Chair, Housing, Lodging and Lot Development Committee, Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce, to Hon. Ranj Pillai, Premier (Dixon)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 146

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Tuesday, October 24, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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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Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, October 24, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motion has been removed from the Order Paper as it is now outdated: Motion No. 782, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we have a few folks here this afternoon for our tribute on Operation Nanook-Tatigiit. I would like the House to join me in welcoming: from the Canadian Armed Forces, Captain (Navy) Doug Layton, Deputy Commander of Joint Task Force North; Chief Warrant Officer Terrence Wolaniuk, Formation Sergeant Major; and Major Greg Theriau, who is the Yukon Detachment Commander.

We also have, from the Yukon government, Greg Blackjack, who is the director of the Emergency Measures Organization. Please join me in welcoming them.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Silver: I would like to ask my colleagues to help me in welcoming to the gallery today for the Breast Cancer Awareness Month tribute: Mary Ann Krockner, mammography technician; Kelly Cozens, manager of chemotherapy; and also Heather Milford, Yukon representative on the national breast cancer screening committee.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Operation Nanook-Tatigiit

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today to mark the beginning of Operation Nanook-Tatigiit. This is an inter-agency, territorial exercise organized by the Canadian Armed Forces. Operation Nanook-Tatigiit is happening in Whitehorse this week.

Yukon government is taking part alongside our partner agencies, including several municipal and First Nation governments, federal departments, Yukon utilities, the RCMP, and the Canadian Armed Forces. This year's tabletop exercise will simulate a prolonged winter power outage affecting Whitehorse and Carmacks. This is an important opportunity to

test emergency preparedness and coordination among all levels of government with the goal of improving our response during a real emergency. We learn a lot from tabletop exercises, without the disruption associated with actual emergency responses.

During this week, local authorities will work with Yukon and federal agencies on tasks such as evacuating people at risk, establishing reception centres, procuring and delivering fuel, and providing emergency social services and communications.

After a busy wildfire season, the Klondike spring floods, and power outages last winter, I know that many Yukoners are thinking about emergency preparedness. It is also top of mind for this government. We are proud to participate in Operation Nanook-Tatigiit to exercise our skills, demonstrate the lessons that we have learned as a government, and learn about what we can improve, because we can always improve, Mr. Speaker. When we prepare for likely risks such as a power outage, we will also be more prepared for unlikely or unusual hazards.

"Tatigiit" means "together" in Inuktitut and that's what emergency planning is all about — coming together to prepare for the worst. As climate disasters become more frequent and more extreme, we know that the Yukon is counting on us to pull together, plan, and prepare to improve emergency outcomes each year. The more we work together before an emergency happens, the better the outcomes will be for Yukon communities. Beyond this operation, I know that Yukon government emergency planners have already begun reaching out to Yukon communities to continue working with municipal and First Nation governments on hazard assessment and joint emergency planning. But, for this week, we welcome our partners to the Yukon, extend our thanks to all those who are taking part in this exercise, and I look forward to incorporating what we learn from Operation Nanook-Tatigiit into our emergency response procedures and plans.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition and the Third Party, the NDP, to tribute Operation Nanook, the Canadian Armed Forces signature northern operation designed to exercise the defence of Canada and to ensure security for our northern regions.

These operations take place each year across the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Labrador. It features up to four deployments a year and, of course, this year's tabletop Operation Nanook-Tatigiit exercise is taking place right now between Whitehorse and Carmacks. This exercise will involve response to a simulated winter storm causing a power outage in the territory.

These exercises are crucial to allow for training in challenging environments and improving coordination with all levels of government as well as responding effectively to safety and security issues in the north. One of the key components in Operation Nanook is a Canadian Rangers full-on Canadian Ranger Patrol Group. The ranger concept is important for the north and for the Canadian Armed Forces as it utilizes and develops the special skills of northerners — skills such as the ability to survive on the land and assist the military to operate

in harsh and extreme northern environments. Such local skills and knowledge are essential to the success of Operation Nanook.

Mr. Speaker, as many of you know, I am the Ranger patrol commander in my community and have participated in many multi-government and military operations across the north, including Operation Nanook. Getting all organizations working together is the key to the success.

I just came back from Ranger leadership in Yellowknife with all the other Ranger patrol commanders, and we debriefed on local emergencies that happened in the Northwest Territories this year due to wildfires. The evacuation of Yellowknife and Hay River highlighted how important the military members who are here today and our Rangers are to these northern communities.

Working with and assisting the local government agencies — municipal, territorial, and federal — is key to ensuring safe evacuations of these communities and it was key in Yellowknife and Hay River. Thank you to all who are here working on Operation Nanook-Tatigiit.

Applause

In recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. In Canada, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death for women. One out of every eight women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. With this statistic, many of us have been touched personally or know someone who has been diagnosed with this deadly cancer. That is why awareness is so important and early detection, treatment, and support are so imperative. The rate of successful treatment improves when breast cancer is detected and treated early. Awareness leads to noticing changes in your breasts and getting checked, which is critical. Awareness leads to better outcomes.

We have many initiatives in the territory that work to raise awareness of breast cancer and that support breast health here at home. Run for Mom is a brilliant local initiative to raise awareness and funds for breast health. It's held every Mother's Day in Whitehorse and other northern communities. Run for Mom has made significant contributions to the territory by continuously raising funds for breast health in Yukon for over 25 years. Dedicated organizers, volunteers, and participants deserve our thanks.

The Karen J. Wiederkehr Memorial Fund provides amazing support for people diagnosed with breast cancer since 2000, when she lost her battle at the age of 37. Thank you to everyone involved in fundraising and who are working to preserve Karen's memory.

The cancer care program at the Yukon Hospital Corporation is dedicated to supporting Yukoners through their unique cancer journey. Program staff provide devoted support to each and every patient. Although we don't have a big population here in the Yukon, we have huge hearts and passion.

I feel proud of our community dedication to raising awareness and supporting Yukoners who are impacted by breast cancer.

I encourage all Yukoners to get screened by your health care provider, to have routine mammography appointments, and to doing monthly self-exams. Research shows that there isn't a right or wrong way to do a self-exam; you just need to know the whole area of the breast tissue well enough to notice any changes. If you are over 40 years old, you can self-refer for a mammogram at Whitehorse General Hospital.

Please consider donating to our great local initiatives to support awareness, treatment, and support. Early detection can save a life.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Each October, we rise to talk about the symptoms, impact, statistics, survivors, and those we have lost to this horrible disease. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer in women, with one in eight being diagnosed in their lifetime and approximately 28,000 Canadians each year.

How does one end up with cancer? While it's safe to say that most people will never be able to pinpoint an exact cause of their cancer, it is known that breast cancer is always caused by damage to a cell's DNA, leading to cell mutations that grow from there. There are a number of factors that increase one's risk for breast cancer. Genetic risk factors include gender, age, race, family history and genetics, personal health history, reproductive history, certain genome changes, and having dense breast material.

Environmental risk factors include a lack of physical activity, poor diet, obesity, alcohol and cigarettes, or history of combined hormone replacement or radiation therapy. However, according to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, 60 to 70 percent of people with breast cancer have no connection to these risk factors at all and others with risk factors will never develop cancer. In other words, you never really know if and when it will affect you, your family member, your friend, your co-worker, or your neighbour, but there is hope as routine breast self-exams often catch breast cancer in its early stages and advances in early detection and treatment methods have significantly increased breast cancer survival rates in recent years.

So, please take time to check yourselves for changes in the breast. Talk to your physician or schedule a mammography for peace of mind. Screening mammograms can be ordered by a physician or by self-referral if you are over the age of 40.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to recognize Breast Cancer Awareness Month. When I think of breast cancer, I think of how many people have been affected by it. I think of the people whose lives have been changed by a diagnosis. I think of all the people in their lives — their family, friends, co-workers, neighbours, and community members. I think of all the people we have lost and whom we miss so much. I am also grateful for everyone who provides support and care

to people who have breast cancer. I thank all the health care providers who go above and beyond for their patients. I thank all the groups who raise funds for the Yukoners cancer care fund and Karen's Room. I thank Run for Mom, Stix Together, Paddlers Abreast, and many more. I thank everyone who supports the fund to assist Yukoners living with cancer, and I thank everyone who looks out for their family, friends, and neighbours. Your actions provide compassion and care to people at a very difficult time. Thank you for everything that you do.

To all the people who are struggling right now, who are living with breast cancer, or who have been touched by breast cancer, we are thinking of you and we support you.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have for tabling the Yukon Hospital Corporation annual report for 2022-23 and audited financial statements, which are tabled pursuant to section 13(3) of the *Hospital Act*.

Hon. Mr. Silver: I have a legislative return answering some questions from Committee of the Whole in the Public Service Commission.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, the Members' Services Board has considered Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, and directed me to report the bill with amendment.

Speaker: Are there any further 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. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT the Members' Services Board's first report, presented to the House on October 24, 2023, reporting Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, with amendment, be concurred in; and

THAT Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, proceed to Third Reading.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Gavin McKenna on being named to Team Canada's red roster for the 2023 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge.

Speaker: Is there a ministerial statement?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Minto mine closure and reclamation

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I would like to provide an update on our reclamation and closure activities at the Minto mine site. One of our next steps involves closing the underground mine workings. This work is underway and should be complete by early November. We are closely engaged with the Selkirk First Nation on this work.

We are applying lessons learned from the abandonment of the Wolverine mine in 2015 about taking required action and effective communication and decision-making. For example, we worked hard to mobilize a contractor within 24 hours of abandonment of the Minto site to ensure that water treatment and environmental protection activities at the site were maintained. We are actively advancing reclamation and closure planning and execution. Contractors on-site are in regular communication with Energy, Mines and Resources senior staff to inform effective, timely decision-making.

The Government of Yukon holds \$75.2 million in financial security and is accessing this money to cover the costs of reclaiming and closing the site. We hold financial security at all quartz mines in the Yukon to cover environmental liabilities and closure costs.

We have spent \$9.7 million to date on reclamation and closure contracts at Minto mine since the site was abandoned in May. Earlier this month, we received our first payment from the security bond holder. Last week, we were reimbursed in full for the expenses incurred during our first billing cycle — \$5.5 million. We have now signed \$20.7 million worth of contracts for reclamation and closure work at the mine site up to May 2024.

Now that the former mine owner, Minto Metals Corporation, is under receivership, there is a legal process in place to sell the company's assets and distribute any proceeds to creditors. Through the July 24 settlement order from the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Selkirk First Nation received \$1.7 million in royalties. There are no outstanding royalties owed. Former Minto mine workers are also now eligible to enrol in a federal government wage support program.

Mining continues to be an important part of the Yukon economy. In recent years, we have seen investments from major companies such as Rio Tinto, Teck, Mitsubishi Materials, Agnico Eagle, and Newmont.

Thanks to the Yukon's rich mineral resources, we are well positioned to provide critical minerals to support the ongoing clean energy transition. The Yukon has known deposits for nine critical minerals and documented occurrences for 16 critical minerals, including copper.

We are also developing new minerals legislation with First Nation governments. Our aim is to improve the management of the Yukon's mineral resources in a way that respects First Nation relationships with the land and supports a modern and sustainable mining industry. We know that there will be some key lessons learned from our work at Minto mine that can be applied to development of new minerals legislation.

The situation at Minto has been difficult for many. Mining remains critical for the Yukon and it is critical that we get mining right.

Mr. Kent: I appreciate the statement from the minister today regarding the Minto mine and what is happening on the site.

Much of this has been covered in recent media reports and at the briefing provided to opposition members by officials a couple of weeks ago. We also had the opportunity to ask a series of questions of the minister on this topic during Committee debate on Energy, Mines and Resources earlier in this Sitting.

There are, however, some follow-up questions we do have for the minister. We understand that there is a project execution plan that is being developed. Can the minister tell us when that plan will be complete? Will it include detailed cost estimates for the remaining reclamation and closure? Can the minister tell us how much money is still owed to private contractors and what portion of that is for Yukon-based companies?

After the initial direct-award contract was given to manage the site, the next phase of site management was also sole-sourced to a different contractor, so can the minister tell us the value of that contract and does it conclude in May 2024, as he mentioned in his statement?

And, of course, why was it necessary to sole-source that contract?

We also have some questions regarding the sale process. What role does YG have in the process and when do we expect it to be concluded?

Finally, I have some licensing questions for the minister. Can the minister confirm that Minto had all necessary permits and licences in place when they closed? Did they have a water licence in place and, if so, why is the Yukon government not using that licence to operate and is instead using emergency provisions in the *Waters Act*? Can the minister provide us with a copy of Minto's current licence?

I thank the minister and look forward to his responses to my questions.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the update on the Minto mine saga, and I say "saga" because this really is a long, involved story and a series of missteps. From changes of ownership, shutdowns, reopenings, warnings, water licence infractions and non-compliance, the spilling of thousands of litres of diesel directly into the environment, and, most recently, a straight-up walking away from this site, quickly followed by a declaration of bankruptcy, the Minto story is like a bad soap opera with lots of plot twists. There are many lessons to learn from the legacies of both Faro and Wolverine, and it seems that maybe we have learned some but not all.

It's important to note that the Liberals were a majority government between November 2016 and the spring of 2021. In all that time, they never once started the decades-delayed process of developing successor resource legislation. That all started with the signing of the 2021 confidence and supply agreement with the Yukon NDP. So, it's a relief that following

a nearly 30-year wait, the new minerals legislation is on the horizon. This is great news, but there is a lesson that I'm concerned that the government missed with the closure of the Wolverine mine and that's the need to update the *Miners Lien Act*.

I appreciate that current ministers or my colleagues from the Yukon Party weren't sitting in that room with contractors as they were told that they would only be able to collect pennies on the dollar, but I was. Yukon Zinc agreed to pay 100 percent of the debt to all companies owed \$5,000 or less. Companies owed in excess of \$5,000 could opt to reduce their claim to \$5,000 and be paid the \$5,000 or elect to receive 11.5 cents on the dollar. In that meeting, the receiver said that companies owed \$43,500 or less would be best to take \$5,000 and companies owed more would be better off taking the 11.5 cents on the dollar.

As examples, one Yukon company lost nearly \$480,000, while another lost \$113,000, while two others were owed nearly \$3 million. There were approximately 52 Yukon companies owed a total of more than \$4.2 million when the mine owner walked away from Yukon Zinc. These numbers are just part of a saga of what is a really bad deal for Yukon companies, and this is all relevant because Yukon companies are, once again, left holding the bag.

My questions for the minister today are as follows: How many Yukon companies have filed liens against the Minto minerals site? How much money are they owed? And when will this government do a comprehensive review of the *Miners Lien Act*?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I thank the members opposite for their comments and questions. I am just going through some of them. First of all, because I already had the question on the creditors — that's how much money is owed and how many of them are Yukon companies — I had been preparing a legislative return, so I will happily get that for the members opposite.

With respect to how much money was in the contract for — I believe the question was around Boreal Engineering. That is for \$11.6 million and, yes, that takes us up to May 2024. The next question was around why we used sole-sourcing. The answer has been, in both instances, because we wanted to make sure, to protect the environment, that we acted quickly. In the first instance, it was within 24 hours, but in the next instance, it was to make sure that we continued to have Yukoners there ensuring that water treatment was happening so that we could start down the path of reclamation and closure.

I will look through Hansard to get at the other questions.

I will also just say that the path to successor legislation, I believe, began with the Premier when he was in the role of Energy, Mines and Resources and signed a memorandum of understanding with the chiefs of the Yukon to talk about how we would move down that together. Next was to bring forward the mineral development strategy. It came into place and had as one of its recommendations — we had a suite of recommendations. I believe that report has been tabled here and I think we have even had them here as witnesses in this

Assembly. But then we agreed that we would focus on new minerals legislation as one of the key elements of the mineral development strategy.

I agree that there are lessons to be learned, but I also want to note that, in this instance, we are moving on the right path, using the dollars that we collected for security to reclaim and close the mine in an environmentally responsible way. We will continue to do that work.

There were a couple of reasons that I stood today. First was to emphasize the reclamation and closure. Second was to emphasize that we have a timeline for the underground — that it will be closed by the end of November. Those were the updates — and that we had begun to collect on the security.

Those were the elements that I shared today as new information. I will fulfill my commitment to continue to inform Yukoners and members opposite on this important subject.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health care services in rural communities

Mr. Hassard: It's no secret that the Liberal government has been systematically cutting services in rural Yukon. We have seen cuts to services that affect things like solid-waste management, highway maintenance, and even rest stops in rural Yukon, but the worst of these reductions in services in rural Yukon has been in health care. The most recent health centre to face closure or a reduction in services has been in Faro.

I would like to start by asking the Minister of Health and Social Services: What are the steps that the government is taking to ensure that citizens in rural Yukon don't have to face service reductions like the one affecting the Faro Health Centre this week, and how is the minister working with the community of Faro to restore full access to health care services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I think that we should be clear that the reduction in service in Faro meant that the Faro Health Centre went from two nurses to one who would be there and have the health centre open. That is a reduction in service, but I know that the members opposite are fond of using the word "closure" all the time. The health centres have not been closing.

We are working to engage agency nursing groups when necessary and working to explore other opportunities to enhance nursing coverage to fill gaps when possible. When we are aware that there is going to be a gap, we communicate with the community and with the First Nation to let them know that this will be happening. We also work continuously up to and including the time of a gap to see if that can be filled. We recently were able to do that when there was going to be a shortage of service in Ross River, I believe. During that period of time, which others have been calling a lengthy period of time — any time with a service reduction is of concern to us and of interest as we go forward. We were able to fill that position for coverage during the middle of that —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I will just remind the minister that, in fact, health centres in rural Yukon have been closing — for up to a month, in fact. Throughout the pandemic, the Yukon government told Yukoners over and over that they should be going to yukon.ca to get the most recent and accurate public health information. Despite this, during the frequent health care closures and service reductions that have been implemented throughout rural Yukon over the past summer, the Yukon government has been relatively quiet in communicating about them. In fact, they usually only do a simple post on Facebook to inform Yukoners that they will need to make other arrangements for health care. I continue to hear from citizens in rural Yukon that these Facebook posts are not sufficient.

What is the Yukon government doing to improve communications with Yukoners about the ongoing and frequent closure of health centres in rural Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate that the member opposite is trying to write a story that is not exactly accurate. I appreciate the political point of view in trying to do so, but it is important that we speak to Yukoners with accurate information. Community nursing is currently experiencing a vacancy rate of approximately 19 percent for primary health care nurses, which is an improvement of approximately 29 percent since the fall of 2022.

We recognize that there is more work to be done to recruit new nurses to reduce service disruptions at community health centres and to support the existing staff to take time off that they need for their own health and well-being. Communication occurs in Facebook posts but also in direct communication with the health centres and direct communication, of course, with the community leaders, First Nation governments, and their health directors. We are committed to hearing feedback about all concerns from local representatives.

Mr. Hassard: Just for the minister's information, health centres have been closed and services have been reduced. That's a fact, Mr. Speaker.

In 2020, the Yukon government launched the *Aging in Place Action Plan* to encourage Yukoners living in rural communities to stay in their homes and communities longer. However, despite the promise made in that strategy, Yukoners who want to stay in their communities as they age are finding this increasingly challenging.

When the Yukon government cuts or reduces health care services in a community or closes a health centre altogether, it makes it even harder for seniors who want to stay in their communities. The unfortunate reality for seniors in many rural Yukon areas is that these service reductions make it very hard to age in place.

How can the minister tell rural Yukoners that they want them to stay in their homes and age in place while cutting these services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I think that it should be made clear to Yukoners — and that is who I am speaking to today — that we are not cutting services to any community health centres. We do, on occasion, have service reductions — none of which we are happy about, none of which we are

supporting, all of which we are working diligently to fill at every occasion.

Community health centres are an integral part of each and every community. Our response to service disruptions includes the fact that we continue to be guided by the recommendations of *Putting People First*. We have integrated Emergency Medical Services into the Department of Health and Social Services, we are working to recruit more nurse practitioners across the Yukon, and we have increased access to preventive treatments. Emergency Medical Services expand their coverage to help mitigate any impacts of nursing staff shortages at community health centres, and we encourage Yukoners who need emergency service to contact 911 or to contact 811, a nurses' helpline for Yukon patients.

Question re: Rural emergency services

Mr. Istchenko: So, in response to the ongoing EMS reductions throughout rural Yukon this summer, the minister issued a statement on July 28 that said that part of the solution is to lean more on EMS in the communities. The statement said that during periods when health centres are closed or have reduced services, EMS staff will expand their services.

However, we continue to hear from Yukoners that EMS is facing challenges in the Yukon communities as well. This summer, several communities raised concerns over the gaps in local service and the lack of available ambulance or paramedic support.

Can the Minister of Health and Social Services tell Yukoners what changes have been made since EMS moved to her department that will actually help to ensure that rural communities are fully supported?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: On our side of the Legislature, in the government, we applaud the hard work of EMS, the volunteers, the dispatchers, and the folks who work for Yukon government.

Our government is committed to improving our health care system so that it is seamless, integrated, and person-centred — all of the goals set out in *Putting People First*. While EMS coverage has a goal of 100-percent coverage, gaps do sometimes occur. To offset coverage gaps, EMS has introduced a system where staff proactively travel to communities to cover when EMS personnel are not available in that community. There has always been a contingency plan in place to reposition people and ambulances. Calls go to nearby units. There is the opportunity to use medevac or to work with clients and patients to figure out alternative transport.

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I can sure tell you that we applaud those EMS staff too.

We have heard from several communities that the Yukon government has tried to fill the gaps in coverage for EMS by pulling staff from Yukon's medevac services to go into communities. Unfortunately, this means that medevac services can also be affected. When there are serious medical emergencies in a rural community, we often rely on medevac to transport patients to Whitehorse. We continue to hear that the wait times for medevac in rural Yukon have been growing and getting worse.

What is the minister doing to ensure that Yukoners in rural communities don't face unreasonable wait times for medevac flights?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the members opposite — I appreciate them bringing forward the concerns that we hear also from communities and we are working diligently every day to reduce any gaps or impacts on Yukon communities with respect to health care, but this country, this territory, and the world, in fact, are in one of the greatest challenges facing it with respect to health care. The health care system and health and human resources concerns present the greatest challenges we have ever seen with respect to providing health care. The system is also in the middle of a shift to how health care is provided and how we will, as a society, respond to the issues that have been challenged.

In 2023-24, our government budgeted \$12.5 million for the Emergency Medical Services to help them deliver a wide scope of pre-hospital care, including medical interventions, treatments, and critical care. Sadly, the Yukon Party voted against those funds.

Mr. Istchenko: Throughout the summer, we have heard a lot about municipal governments having to step up to fill any EMS service gaps. This has been frustrating for many municipal fire fighters who have been called out on EMS calls. In September, a *Whitehorse Star* article reported that a Yukon government official stated that the MOUs were being negotiated with some municipalities that would help alleviate the problem with paramedic services in the communities.

Can the minister update us on the status of those MOUs? Which communities is the government negotiating with? What is the timeline for their conclusion? And, most importantly, how will these arrangements help to address gaps in rural EMS services?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, we are working with Emergency Medical Services — having them now be a part of the Department of Health and Social Services — to change the gaps in services that existed before. There is now seamless work together between EMS and our community health centres and the Whitehorse General Hospital and the community hospitals which will support better patient care.

EMS workers continue to be recruited, increasing the numbers of EMS staff across the territory. Over 200 team members work out of 17 ambulance stations in 17 communities. We are actively recruiting four emergency medical responders who operate on a part-time or on-call basis in the communities, as well as at least one critical care paramedic and at least one primary care paramedic who will be based here in Whitehorse. We look forward to the expansion and support of those services.

Question re: Teacher recruitment and retention

Ms. White: Yesterday, the Holy Family school council hosted a meeting where they called Selkirk Elementary and government officials about the critical shortage of teachers on call. These two councils echoed all of the concerns we've brought to this government and many more. We know that recruitment is an issue. Educators' salaries in the Yukon are not

competitive enough anymore to attract educators from outside the territory, and teacher-on-call salaries have stagnated for so long it's embarrassing. Educators are left struggling to make do while all trying to avoid burnout.

Here is what this government needs to do to provide schools with immediate relief: Step 1, streamline the long and complicated application process for teachers on call; step 2, offer concrete resources to school councils who want to recruit community members as teachers on call; and step 3, provide onboarding and actual training for new recruits.

There is more to do, but these steps will help to stabilize the situation until this government makes systemic changes. So, when will this government act?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, effective teachers are one of the most important factors in our student success at school and we work very hard to attract and retain the best educators. I know that the member opposite is aware, of course, that there is a national labour shortage, much like what we are seeing with health care professionals, and a lot of factors that factor into this.

In terms of what we are doing as a department, we have taken many steps. I understand that the meeting went very well last night with the Holy Family school council. They were also joined by Selkirk, and we also had our senior officials there as well.

In the 2023 school year, we were able to take many strategic recruitment actions. We are continuing, of course, to build on that. I understand there were some very practical measures that were talked about last night and we will be acting on those as well, working closely in collaboration with the school communities.

We posted positions earlier this year to be more competitive with other jurisdictions, and there are many other steps that have been taken, which I will continue to discuss in the Assembly.

Ms. White: Well, that is a rather unfortunate answer because all of those suggestions came from that meeting last night. One way to solve the labour shortage is to pay people for the work that they do. Some teachers on call have told us that they haven't been paid since late August, so that is eight weeks or four paycheques.

Holy Family is regularly running their school at a 15- to 25-percent deficit of full-time teachers and educational assistants without enough teachers on call available to replace them. Administrators are teaching full time instead of doing their designated jobs, and they have students who can't attend school because there aren't enough educational assistants to go around. This crisis goes well beyond Holy Family; it's in every school across the territory. These shortages put a huge stress on everyone in the Yukon. Parents are concerned that the teacher shortage is hurting their children's education and their well-being.

Can the minister tell this House what concrete steps she is taking now to resolve the ongoing shortage of substitute teachers in every Yukon school?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, as of October 18, we have 151 registered teachers on call, most of them being in Whitehorse and 25 in rural communities. We have a number of pending applications that continue to be processed.

Of course, we are wanting to work closely with our school communities. We continue to evolve our recruitment efforts to attract candidates for teacher-on-call roles and to support staff in accepting assignments as they are available. We will be holding an information session at Employment Central on October 26, and we will follow with sessions in communities in the coming weeks. We have increased advertising on Facebook, in universities, on YuWIN, Employment Central, and other recruitment sites.

There were a lot of really great ideas discussed last night. That meeting was attended by our school council coordinator, our superintendent, the assistant deputy minister of schools, and our deputy minister. I can assure Yukoners that we are taking this matter very seriously and working closely with our school communities.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I think that this bears repeating: Holy Family is regularly running their school at a 15- to 25-percent deficit of full-time teachers and educational assistants and they cannot get the TOCs. One school council has even written the minister to say — and I quote: “The snowball of stress is gaining speed and strength at unprecedented levels.”

This crisis has been getting worse for a long time now. The fact is that, in six years, the Liberals have failed to plug the holes that the Yukon Party sunk into our education system. The alarm has been ringing the whole time, but this government insists day after day, year after year, that everything is fine. This has to stop. The school community was very clear yesterday. This government's persistent refusal to acknowledge the issues that we bring forward is disrespectful to educators, parents, and students. The Liberals can't build respectful relationships with Yukon educators without first admitting that there is a problem.

When will this government respect the school communities and acknowledge that Yukon schools are in crisis?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I certainly know that there are many pressures in our education system; all of those pressures, we have been working to resolve. We have been actively working toward addressing the Auditor General report, which, really at the heart of it, has pointed to all of the pressures that were in our education system and that continue to be in our education system. We are working very hard to reshape education in our territory and that is what we are focused on.

We know that there are pressures in terms of recruitment and retention of teachers on call. We are working very closely with our school communities and we value all of our educators in the Yukon. We know that last night there were some really great ideas that were put forward, and we will work directly on them with the school communities and expand those ideas to other school communities throughout the Yukon.

Mr. Speaker, our government believes in education. We believe in treating our staff in the best possible way.

Speaker: Order, please.

Question re: Nurse recruitment and retention

Ms. Clarke: The Minister of Health and Social Services has told us that part of the solution to recruitment and retention of nurses is the bonus package that was provided to all Yukon government nurses last year. The intent of that package was retaining the nurses that we currently have; however, it was notable to many nurses that some of their colleagues were not able to access the bonus package because they were on maternity leave.

Why did the minister's retention bonus package not include nurses on maternity leave?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that is a question that we answered several times in the spring session. I guess we are cycling through those again, which is fine.

This was a very small number of nurses who were not eligible for the retention allowances as they were on maternity leave. It was authorized and regulated by the union collective agreement with respect to how those kinds of retention bonuses and allowances could be paid and, as a result, those matters were, as I understand, appealed to the Public Service Commission and were either resolved individually or are still through that process.

Ms. Clarke: Some nurses who received the benefit were unhappy to learn that their colleagues were not eligible for the bonuses because they are on maternity leave. Some of them think that this is discriminatory.

What impact does the minister expect to achieve by excluding nurses who work for the Government of Yukon and are perfectly qualified, but just happened to have had a baby at the wrong time?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate the repetition in the question, I am happy to also repeat the answer that the small number of nurses — my recollection is certainly less than 10 and I have four as a memory; I will try to confirm that number as we go forward.

The Yukon Employees' Union has a collective agreement that did speak to this particular issue, that talked about the ability to receive these kinds of retention allowances if you are on maternity leave. The decision was made as a result of the impact and the operation of that collective agreement.

Ms. Clarke: We have heard that because the minister was unwilling to make this retention bonus available to nurses who had recently had babies and were on maternity leave, that several grievances have been filed with the Public Service Commission.

Can the minister tell us how many nurses filed grievances with the Yukon government over the minister's decision to exclude nurses who are on maternity leave from receiving the retention bonus that was made available to every other nurse? What is the status of those grievances and when will they be resolved?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I'm the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission on this one.

As you know, we have been dealing with this issue with the Minister of Health and Social Services as well. I am just concurring with my colleague that the administration of these bonuses is consistent with the delivery of our compensation

allowances outlined in the collective agreement, not the way that the member opposite would categorize it as an individual minister trying their best to do something in any other different sense.

Like other compensation allowances for nurses, the recruitment and retention bonuses are based upon work performed. Employees who are on leave without pay but return during the specified period of time to qualify for any bonuses will receive a pro-rated amount for the time that they are actively performing in a position that requires a nursing designation. The minister is correct that there were four grievances associated with the bonuses and they will be managed through the normal grievance process.

Again, we have been working extremely diligently with all agencies involved here. The new bonus package serves to address the wage gap that we face with other Canadian jurisdictions and it is helping very much so with the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges that we have been speaking about here on the floor of the Legislative Assembly, which are happening right across the nation.

Question re: Bail system reform

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, we have heard from the RCMP and the public that the current bail system isn't working, and too often, repeat offenders are quickly released back on the streets where they re-offend. Part of the problem comes from changes that the Trudeau Liberal government made in Bill C-75 which led to all 13 premiers signing a letter urging the federal government to take "immediate action" to strengthen Canada's bail system. Federal action is needed, but so, too, is action by provinces and territories.

The National Police Federation which represents RCMP members said, "All levels of government, especially provinces, territories, need to work together to move towards a 21st century, evidence-based, intelligence-driven bail system."

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what this government has done to tighten up our system and keep repeat offenders off the streets?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am going to assume that the member opposite, who I understand was a former Minister of Justice, understands that the bail reform issue is one that is the authority of the federal government, as is the *Criminal Code of Canada*, where those rules exist.

He is, however, correct that this is an issue that is being spoken about at the federal-provincial-territorial meetings that we have with the ministers of Justice and the ministers of Public Safety. In March 2023, we had such a meeting. It occurred to discuss the bail system in particular and its treatment of repeat violent offenders. The Government of Canada agreed to take action as soon as possible to strengthen public safety through amendments to the *Criminal Code*. On May 16, 2023, they tabled Bill C-48 to target repeat offenders and serious offences committed with firearms and other dangerous weapons.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, urgent action by the Trudeau Liberals to fix the problems they caused with Bill C-75 is needed, but the National Police Federation, the union representing RCMP members, in its recommendations entitled

“Smart Bail Initiatives” was very clear that provinces and territories also need to act. The NPF said: “All governments, in particular provincial and territorial governments, must be willing to commit to smarter bail reforms that go *beyond* legislative measures. Simple policy reforms and better resourcing could have a significant impact.”

They issued seven recommendations for implementing smart bail initiatives. All of those recommendations involve provincial and territorial governments and some clearly need to be led by provinces and territories. The recommendations include more resources to the collection and sharing of data and improving community bail enforcement monitoring.

The question is: What, if anything, is this government doing in response to the National Police Federation’s calls for action to fix the catch-and-release bail system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Our government is, as are all governments in Canada, interested in a safe and effective bail system. To have such a thing requires post-collaboration across jurisdictions. Bill C-48, which is progressing through Parliament, was developed to address these concerns. At the highest level, a ministerial table was struck in order to have such conversations and dialogue between the provinces and territories, and then the federal government acted in bringing forward Bill C-48. It addresses concerns about public safety and increased confidence in the justice system of Canada that is related to repeat violent offending.

At a very recent meeting of the ministers of Justice, the ministers agreed to continue to work on the enhancements to bail data. We also agreed to monitor the effectiveness and the impacts of Bill C-48 after it becomes law.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the National Police Federation said: “The current ‘catch and release’ system and lack of data-informed processes, supports and monitoring compromises public safety across Canada...” They also said: “Without serious wholesale reform jurisdictions across Canada are at risk of a bail system that is broken beyond repair.” They specifically call on provinces and territories to take action to implement smart bail initiatives. All seven of their calls to action involve action by the Yukon government.

The Premier has signed a joint letter to the Prime Minister about this, but the National Police Federation is clear that the provinces and territories also need to take action themselves to fix the system. Will the Minister of Justice commit to acting on all seven National Police Federation recommendations to fix the catch-and-release bail system, and will she provide us with a timeline for when her government will act on those recommendations and implement them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I hope I have been clear, and if not, I am happy to repeat that this is a topic that is of the utmost concern to the ministers of Justice and the ministers of public safety across the country.

In March 2023, we held a specific meeting to discuss the bail system and, in particular, its treatment of repeat violent offenders. It is critical that the solutions to repeat violent offending and random violent acts lie in addressing the root causes of crime. This includes improving access to mental

health services, substance use treatment, and social supports such as supportive housing.

As the members opposite know, and I am certainly happy to repeat for Yukoners, these are all top priorities for our government: the declaration of the substance use health emergency, the implementation of the strategy going forward, the funding that we have put in place in the budget this year to support the substance use health emergency, to improve mental health services, to continue social supports and improve social housing. One great example might be Car 867 and the work being done by both departments of Health and Social Services and Justice.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of opposition private members’ business

Mr. Kent: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, October 25, 2023. They are Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge, and Motion No. 793, standing in the name of the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Third Party to be called on Wednesday, October 25, 2023. They are Motion No. 798, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, and Motion No. 761, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request unanimous consent of the House to proceed at this time with debate on the motion for concurrence in the Members’ Services Board’s report on Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1) and Standing Order 13(3).

Unanimous consent to move, notwithstanding Standing Orders 27(1) and 13(3), Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7

Speaker: The Government House Leader has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of the House to proceed at this time with debate on the motion for concurrence in the Members’ Services Board’s report on Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, notwithstanding Standing Order 27(1) and Standing Order 13(3).

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has been granted.

MOTIONS RESPECTING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7

Clerk: Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Streicker.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Government House Leader:

THAT the Members' Services Board's first report, presented to the House on October 24, 2023, reporting Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, with amendment, be concurred in; and

THAT Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, proceed to Third Reading.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I will be fairly brief.

First of all, it was my pleasure to take part in the Members' Services Board meeting this past Friday. What we were debating at that time was around Bill No. 29 at the Committee stage, and we agreed that we would bring a partial report of the minutes that referenced that debate here to the House so that all members could hear that or be part of that.

I would characterize the debate as being about how we could possibly move the electoral boundaries commission forward as quickly as possible. In doing so, one of the differences between how government had drafted the bill and when we were at that Committee stage was that we now knew what the end date was for this Sitting, which is November 23, and so we worked to count ahead a period of 60 days. That was what led to the amendment that we all agreed on to try to keep the process moving as quickly as possible.

I note that the reason we are bringing it here today is because this is when the Acting Chair tabled the report. I appreciate all members in helping us to bring this motion forward so that we can pass, I hope, the concurrence of the report and thus move the bill on to third reading.

Mr. Cathers: My colleagues and I will be supporting the motion. As we have been clear on the record, we support moving forward with having a new electoral boundaries commission as soon as possible. We recognize, as do others, that the current number of people in certain ridings is well out of line with the Canadian standard regarding the level above which the population of any riding should be in comparison to the average.

I will again note that this legislation should have gone through an all-party committee process in the first place, which would have saved the time and the debate that we have had so far in this House regarding the approach that the Liberal government chose to take.

Mr. Speaker, I do have to remind all Yukoners that the Liberals are the first government in Yukon history to amend elections legislation unilaterally and to seek to do it again, as they have with this legislation. It is simply a bad approach and departing from the long-standing practice of going through an all-party process where there is an attempt to reach consensus on any amendments dealing with our elections system is not a step in the right direction. I would remind all members that in 2015, for example — the last time elections legislation was

changed when the Yukon Party was in government — the draft of that legislation went to Members' Services Board before tabling. There was a walk-through of that legislation by all members, along with the assistance of the legislative drafter and the Chief Electoral Officer. All members indicated that they were comfortable with that legislation and, in fact, all three political party leaders signed off on a joint press release regarding the tabling of that legislation and supported that legislation when it came forward to the House. That is the type of approach that has been taken in the past and should be taken in the future.

The Liberals, unfortunately, have, on more than one occasion, chosen the unilateral path, which leads to needless conflict. I would remind members that they voted against the motion to send this bill to Members' Services Board. That being said, I would note that we will be supporting the motion here today.

I would also just note that, as the excerpts from the minutes of the meetings of Members' Services Board tabled today note, my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, and I felt that an earlier date of December 15 would have been best through compromise. The date of January 22 was chosen. I would also note, though, that government could have provided more assistance during that process by giving the officials who were there at the briefing the ability to provide legal advice to the committee, which they unfortunately did not choose to authorize.

That being said, we will support this compromise amendment that has been arrived at, with the date of January 22, 2024, in this legislation. We do feel that it is important that the commission begin its work as quickly as possible in order to hear from Yukoners and to consult with them on any proposed changes of significance and ultimately table a final report in the Legislative Assembly.

Ms. White: Today, in speaking to the motion on the floor, there are a couple of factors — and I do appreciate that in Members' Services Board, we agreed to make the minutes public so that we could talk about it and it doesn't turn into a fight club, which you are not supposed to talk about.

It is important to note that on this floor, in this space, we have talked before about how we believe that the *Elections Act* should be at arm's length from government — arm's length from politicians or people who stand to benefit from changes to the *Elections Act*. Partially the desire to have it go to Members' Services Board is that Members' Services Board is an all-party committee that works pretty hard, I would say, to reach consensus or at least agreement on issues. So, when that came to Members' Services Board, we had the opportunity to be briefed by not only officials but to actually have the Chief Electoral Officer come and present and to actually answer questions that we had, based on a letter that he sent to both the chair and to the Premier. With those questions and the briefing from the officials, there were a couple of things that were brought to light.

Within the *Elections Act*, there are numerous references to "60 days" between one action and the other — 60 days — so

when we were talking about the day for the report to come forward, it is important to know that it is the absolutely last day that an order-in-council can come from the government to say that the committee will be struck. It is the last day. I would like to think that, at this point in time, all members in this House have talked about how important having a boundaries commission is, and how we all believe that it should happen sooner than later. My real belief is that all leaders, myself included, will submit the paper with our chosen person to go forward and that we will see this actually start sooner and see an order-in-council sooner than that date.

But I will say that the compromise was actually making sure that the date that has been chosen — January 22 — is 60 days after the final day of the Legislative Assembly. Not knowing when this was going to be passed, not wanting to cut those days short, it was chosen from the last possible date that it could go forward.

So, there are going to be, I'm sure, lots of conversations in the future about where the *Elections Act* should be. I believe that it should be at arm's length from government. I stand there and I will continue to say that, but I do think that this was an important process, taking it to Members' Services Board, made up with each political party and with the ability to have frank and honest conversations both with officials and then also together. What we see here is that working together. It is a minor change, but it is an important change because it was one that was decided by all three political parties together — and that ability after having both the briefing and questions answered.

The Yukon NDP will be supporting this motion and we look forward to getting started on the boundaries commission.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to the motion for concurrence in reporting Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, with amendment to be concurred in and to proceed to third reading.

This bill amends the *Elections Act* to establish an electoral district boundaries commission in advance of the next scheduled territorial election on November 3, 2025.

Under the current legislation, the next commission would be appointed after the next general election in November 2025, and the proposed bill enables a commission to be appointed no later than January 31, 2024. However, on Monday, October 16, 2023, during second reading of the bill, the Leader of the NDP made a motion, which was carried, to refer the bill to Members' Services Board.

It is on the record that our government did not support that motion as we feel the bill put before the Legislative Assembly is a good piece of legislation, and we stand by that.

We felt, and still feel, the urgency to start this work and we are hearing it from across the floor. We have just lost over a week in progressing this bill and enabling the new electoral district boundaries commission to be established and start its work.

The Members' Services Board reviewed the bill, and the only amendment made is to the date of January 31, 2024, as

being the latest that a commission will be appointed — or proposed, as it now reads.

I hear the Member for Lake Laberge saying that we are wasting time, but I think putting our comments on the record is not wasting time.

I do want to commend the Member for Lake Laberge because, although there were some comments today about process and our Liberal government, I want to point out and put on the record that we commend the Member for Lake Laberge because he stood on his own, outside of all the Yukon Party members, with our government in 2018. He committed to the view that we had, and I think that this should be noted and I thank the Member for Lake Laberge for also aligning his beliefs and thoughts and vision with what we thought at that time. Though he critiqued some of our work, it will be noted historically that he stood alone with us and came to the same conclusion.

With that being said, our government is committed to seeing a commission struck to make recommendations on electoral boundaries.

The past week, in my opinion, did not enhance that process, but we did delay it a bit. Our government will support the amendment so that this important work can commence. This will allow for the tabling of the bill to amend the *Electoral District Boundaries Act* prior to the next territorial general election. Without this change, Yukoners will again be going to the polls with the same electoral boundaries in place from 2009 — almost a decade and a half ago.

There has been significant growth and movement in Yukon's population since the last adjustments to the electoral district boundaries were enacted in 2008. Yukoners, whether living in urban or rural settings or in new or existing neighbourhoods, need to know that their voice is being heard and their interests are being represented.

Let's not forget that the bill also corrects two technical deficiencies in the act: one regarding the time frames for appointing commissions, and the other for implementing amendments to electoral district boundaries. The bill ensures that such errors are corrected and that the legislation is in place to protect the principle that Yukon citizens have the fair and effective representation that they are entitled to.

I want to thank the officials at the Executive Council Office and the Department of Justice for their help in preparing the bill before us and also the electoral officer for the comments. Again, once we start this, we will have opportunity for input from all Yukoners and, as well, opportunity for input here for the Members of the Legislative Assembly.

We look forward to seeing this bill proceed through the Yukon Legislative Assembly and receive assent as quickly as possible.

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.

Ms. Clarke: 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.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 7 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: Second Appropriation Act 2023-24 — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Tourism and Culture

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: To begin with, I would like to welcome back officials: Deputy Minister Sierra Van der Meer and Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services Kate Olynyk. Deputy Chair, I am rising today to introduce the first supplementary estimates for the Department of Tourism and Culture for the 2023-24 fiscal year. It has been a very busy year for the department and I would like to take just a moment to recognize a few highlights.

In terms of tourism, thanks in no small part to the Tourism branch's ongoing support of COVID recovery, through marketing, research, and advocacy — and also thanks to the industry itself — the Yukon's tourism sector continued its strong rebound in 2023 with further gains expected next year. The rugged apprentices program brought 49 volunteers to five different communities to complete infrastructure improvement projects while being immersed in local cultural experiences. The community tourism destination development fund distributed funding to facilitate sustainable and innovative destination development, including staff housing in Dawson City and enhanced infrastructure and tourism experiences across our Yukon communities.

There was one really big highlight that was pretty recent and that was the Tr'ondëk-Klondike receiving its long-awaited and well-deserved inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the first cultural heritage site. The Yukon has Kluane as a geographic heritage site, but this is the first cultural heritage site north of 60 in Canada.

The Yukon also is marking its 125th anniversary since joining Confederation. That happened this summer, as you know, Deputy Chair. Together with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association, the department distributed about \$400,000 toward 67 projects across Yukon communities through its Yukon 125 fund.

There was a whole range of projects, including community barbecues, mural painting, special anniversary events, and the refurbishment of the iconic Yukon Theatre neon sign downtown.

The other thing I will mention is that the most recent 125 event I went to was TIA's 50th anniversary meetings last week. I thank the deputy minister for being there to talk with me to industry. This is just a quick sizzle reel of the important work and accomplishments of the passionate and dedicated group at Tourism and Culture.

The mandate of the Department of Tourism and Culture comprises of living histories, creative expression, and pride of place. Through its work, the Yukon's stunning, natural beauty, extraordinary heritage, and artistic talent is honoured, showcased, preserved, and enriched. By diversifying our economy, strengthening our communities, and reaffirming our commitment to reconciliation, tourism and our cultural assets keep our territory and its citizens healthy and prosperous.

I am privileged to represent the dedicated staff who bring their ingenuity and enthusiasm to this portfolio. I look forward

to answering any Tourism and Culture questions for the supplementary estimates. I look forward to the dialogue today.

Ms. Van Bibber: I also welcome the staff members to the House today.

I think, as the minister said, that the summer season was certainly better than we have seen in the past few years, with more visitors arriving. I know that the road traffic was definitely up, as were bus tours, and I noticed several caravans. This is getting to be good news for our second biggest industry in Yukon.

I am going to start with something that is kind of important to me and I think my caucus is getting tired of listening to me talk about it. As we all, as locals, travel up the highway — my particular hike is usually up the Klondike Highway — and we all have our habits and routines, the rest stops have been changing. Along the Klondike Highway, washroom facilities are closed and boarded up or taken away, as well as the garbage barrels. I understand now that these rest stops are managed by Tourism, so can the minister explain the decision to close several rest stops along the Klondike Highway? Can he also tell me if there was a cost-benefit analysis done and also whether the Department of Highways and Public Works was involved or if it was just strictly the Department of Tourism and Culture?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I hope to get this correct. I will check in with my colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I heard him speaking about this the other day in Committee of the Whole as well.

There is an overall approach to try to make sure that we have the right number of rest stops across the territory. Highways and Public Works is the lead in coordinating all of the departments involved. That includes, I believe, Tourism and Culture, Highways and Public Works, and Environment. There is some cost involved, but I think the bigger challenge is that there are almost always issues with rest stops. The issues are around making sure that they are well kept and going to be receptive for visitors or Yukoners when they arrive there. I know that, within my own riding, I get lots of calls. I'm sure that other members get lots of these calls all of the time about our outhouses, rest stops, and the condition of them.

Part of the work that Highways and Public Works is leading, working with Tourism and Culture and with Environment, will be looking at those rest stops and identify if there are ones that are very close to other rest stops and are not providing other services, such as being at points of interest or things like that, and making sure that we have a good distribution of rest stops across the territory. There have been a handful that have closed, which were Tourism and Culture's responsibility, but they were nearby other rest stops.

I know that the Minister of Highways and Public Works talked about the distances to the other stops in his remarks at Committee of the Whole, and I can look to echo those remarks, if needed, for the member opposite.

Ms. Van Bibber: It would seem that if it were at a point of interest, that would be where we would keep facilities because you are asking people to stop and take pictures and be part of the area.

As numbers are going down, I am hoping that whoever is responsible — going back to “they are a problem” — that now an effort will be made to clean them a little more often and be on top of that.

The Department of Tourism and Culture, as you mentioned, is intertwined with Highways and Public Works and with Environment. Highway maintenance was a topic of many discussions with many people this summer on how it was difficult to navigate anywhere without damage to vehicles. If it's happening to locals, I am sure it is happening to our visitors as well.

What is being done, working with Highways and Public Works, to identify the problem areas? How can the Department of Tourism and Culture help in mitigating some of the potholes and fixing things earlier in the season rather than waiting until August or September?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: A couple of points — first of all, I want to acknowledge all of the people who clean those outhouses and those facilities. Can I just give a shout-out to them on behalf of all members of this Assembly? I know it's not glamorous work and it is much appreciated. It can be challenging, let's say that, because not everybody is clean in how they leave those facilities and that makes it hard for people who are cleaning them up. Secondly, if we are talking about the state of our highways, I want to just begin by noting that the Yukon is second only to Saskatchewan in the amount of road per person that we have here in Canada, so a lot of road. The highways crews do, overall, a really outstanding job. This spring, there was this huge challenge with the Klondike floods and they got pulled in to do that work to try to deal with the floods on those roads, and I think that set them back against what would be their normal maintenance schedule on the north Klondike Highway. It was a bit of an anomaly year, given that.

Now, for Tourism and Culture, how do we work with Highways and Public Works? Of course, we stay in touch with them. The main way that we feed information to them is through our visitor information centres. It's a two-way street, our visitor information centres. That's where visitors, and sometimes Yukoners, come in and talk about concerns that they have. We relay that information to Highways and Public Works so that they are aware. But I'm sure that Highways and Public Works is getting lots of calls from Yukoners as well. Second of all, we relay information to visitors about the conditions of the roads, so it works in both directions.

One of the interesting things that the department let me know is that, while we are well on our way to recovery, we are not quite to 2019 levels for tourism and visitors yet in terms of the number of people who are coming, but the post-COVID visitors are travelling differently. One of the ways in which they are travelling differently is that they are more digital and more online, and they are coming less often to our visitor information centres. So, it's not that the numbers of visitors to the Yukon are down; it's that they don't use our visitor information centres as often. We will look for other ways in which to get information to travellers. For example, Highways and Public Works uses some of their information signs. We will continue

to look for ways to try to make sure that the feedback loop is working in both of those directions.

Ms. Van Bibber: It wasn't just the highway going north; it was also the Alaska Highway that was in pretty rough shape, too, and there was no flooding over there.

Going back to the information centres, they are a wealth of information for visitors, but they also, as you say, gather information. I know that, during our briefing, I asked whether some of this was retrieved. They said that a lot of it was repetitive so it wasn't really of much value. Is there some program that could possibly track actual major concerns, such as that there is a good stop or bad signage or about road conditions? Perhaps problems could be addressed much more quickly instead of waiting until the end of the season.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We do use our visitor information centres to gather information. We have a report that we produce annually about the performance of the visitor information centres. We ask a lot of questions and do exit surveys and things like that, but we are really not hearing a lot of criticism raised about our roads.

It's not that there isn't some of that, but it certainly isn't anything that is overwhelming. We also ask them about their experience at the visitor information centres just to understand whether they are enjoying it and getting the information that they want. It is 80-plus percent who say that their experience is excellent; just over 15 percent rate their experience as good; two percent rate their experience as average; and close to zero percent rate it as poor or terrible. It's actually pretty darn good.

Because there is this trend where people are moving to more digital ways, we are starting to also look at expanding that access. For example, we had a digital kiosk this year in Skagway where we could provide information for visitors who are interested in coming to the Yukon or are coming to the Yukon. There could be ways through that where we gather and aggregate information as well, but we are just starting to move down that path.

The answer is, yes, we do gather information at our visitor information centres, but the information about those specific concerns are not what we have been hearing at the VICs.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you to the minister for that answer.

There was a decrease of about \$200,000 in the supplementary through the Historic Sites branch for the new border signs. Apparently, that is being deferred to next year. Can the minister tell us what the reason was for those not being completed this year, and will that be budgeted for next year?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer to the second question is yes. Are we planning to do this next year? Yes.

There are sort of two reasons why we pushed it out a little bit further. The first one is that we put a lot of focus on other 125th anniversary things that were happening.

The Yukon 125 funding program, which I mentioned in my opening remarks, where we had community events and things like that, and then we also have the 125 prize where we have now seen these great two-minute videos that are out there now over the next little while for Yukoners to look at. We will have a selection committee make decisions on them. There were a

couple of other things that we were doing, so we were starting to run out of time.

The other reason was because we wanted more time. The design of the signs, its overall layout, is done. What we are looking for is how to engage with communities, especially our border communities, because there is a way to customize them or add some, let's say, art or design to the signs. We need to do that work with communities. We didn't have enough time to do that so we will take that time now. We just moved it to next year in terms of our timing.

Ms. Van Bibber: On that same idea of visual, "Welcome to the Yukon" border signs, we also have the amazing tourism banners that are up in most towns and villages as we come along the highway, even around Whitehorse. Some of them are in pretty rough shape. Are those going to be renewed? Is it an annual thing? Are there new artists? Are they replaced on request or do you just get what you get?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I don't know that they are replaced annually but I do know that they are replaced over time. My deputy minister is just letting me know that there will be a new set coming this spring and she has seen the new artwork. I have not, so as soon as I get done here, I'll find a way to go check out that new artwork. They get replaced every couple of years. I will check in with the department. Sometimes they are damaged by wind and things like that, and if they are, whether we can replace those on an interim basis. But I can say that we should expect new banners coming this spring.

Ms. Van Bibber: I don't know who is responsible for the flags. There was an article in the paper the other day about the border flags and that our Canadian area was looking pretty awful. Who is responsible for replacing flags at our borders?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The responsibility of those flags in those areas is the Canada Border Services Agency. We have reached out to them to try to recommend that they keep the flags in — I have a British phrase in my head — good nick. They should be well kept. They are our national symbol.

Ms. Van Bibber: My colleague is whispering "Junction 37" in my ear — so also flags along the other entrances into Yukon.

Can the minister tell me what the overall budget for the Yukon 125 project or program is with the signage and all of the things that went with that?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We will follow up about the flags in the Town of Watson Lake. Are we thinking of the ones right in town and that series? No, they are further on. I will follow up with the MLA and figure out which one it is, and we will try to follow up.

With respect to the Yukon 125th anniversary initiatives, the total budget, I believe, is \$460,000. Of that, \$400,000 went to projects across the territory. We engaged with the Yukon Historical and Museums Association to do that work for us, and we gave them a small transfer payment agreement to carry out that work of \$60,000. I would really like to thank them for their work. When I have gone to the events, I have seen them there doing things like passing out the buttons, postcards, and things like that. I know that they work very closely with all of the projects. I have heard their representative on the radio, once or

twice over the summer, talking about the projects. I think that they have done a really great job.

Ms. Van Bibber: Along those same lines, the airport is an amazing entry into Yukon. I was just wondering if there was any thought of renewing the signage or videos in that area, again with Yukon 125 in mind.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The responsibility within the airport is Highways and Public Works, but we work with them to provide material. For example, we are working with them to provide them with renewed, or new digital images and video, and things like that. Tourism and Culture always keeps a library of materials that we use to help promote the Yukon, so we share that. I just will acknowledge that, when we update the signs around the territory, we will also be updating signage that is there, outside of the airport, or just outside the airport, at the same time.

Ms. Van Bibber: The talk about our new input into Skagway and building a dock, and we haven't really talked about the Skagway cruise market much lately. I do know that Holland America is back in Yukon and active as can be. So, the Skagway cruise market — does the department do much advertising and endeavour to get them to visit Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The basic answer is yes, we are working very collaboratively with Skagway; I will give several examples. Before I do, let me just back up to the Whitehorse Erik Nielsen International Airport. You know, I was talking about one of those digital kiosks that we put down in Skagway. Well, it turns out that we put one up in the Whitehorse airport just last week. I haven't seen it yet, but I just found out, so Yukoners can get a sense of what we are talking about today. The digital kiosk that we put in Skagway is at the White Pass Building. A lot of travellers pass through there; it's a good spot for it, and thanks to White Pass for working with us on that.

We ran a "tourism connects" day, where we actually took the folks from our VIC and Carcross, sort of tourism operators, and we went down to Skagway and did a day of engaging with them to exchange what is happening with the Skagway operators and what is happening with our operators. We have a specific \$50,000 joint marketing partnership with Holland America. So, there are ways in which we are working with Skagway and the cruise ship industry.

I should note that the August border crossings this year, 2023, were now back up above 2019's border crossings. That is one of those areas where we have rebounded now, so that is good news. Again, we are working with the folks in Skagway directly.

Ms. Van Bibber: I am going to switch to work that is being done on the Dawson City Museum. Phase 2 was to have been completed this summer, and then immediately moving into phase 3. Can the minister give an update on this particular project, and is it on time?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Dawson City Museum, where we held our one-day Special Sitting this summer, has been getting renovations, but the building is operated and managed by Highways and Public Works, so the renovation work that is happening is with Highways and Public Works; so, I would have to defer to my colleague to get that information.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you, that's good to know. In the spring budget, there was an allocation of \$50,000 each for three artists under the creative and cultural career advancement fund. Can you let the House know what the response from the artist community was? Is this a fund that is going to be repeated?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, we have had a really strong response from our creative industry folks and our cultural practitioners. Yes, the intention is to repeat the award. The feedback was very positive on it.

Ms. Van Bibber: There is also something I hadn't heard of before that I was reading, and it's called the "Yukon sustainable tourism dashboard." This was supposed to be launched in the spring of 2023 and was used to update information to measure and monitor tourism in the Yukon. Has this dashboard been launched? If so, has anything been discovered in the new data?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Yukon sustainable tourism framework is very close, and we will have our first report out shortly — this fall is what we are anticipating. Part of that will be the dashboard.

I think something else worth mentioning is that we have become a member of the United Nations International Network of Sustainable Tourism Observatories. We are only the second place in Canada to do so, and that will also be reported on.

I have seen drafts of the report. I know that they are just working on finalizing things, so it shouldn't be too much longer before that comes out.

Ms. Van Bibber: Could the minister tell me what information they are actually gathering? The dashboard launches something — and also, how much is the cost of this particular endeavour?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Deputy Chair, I was just trying to peruse through the draft report, just to try to get a feel of some of things that will be in the dashboard. So, there will be a measure of 17 elements of tourism, and they will range from resource management, governance, economy, environment, people and culture, but if we are trying to drill down to specific things — some of them include, for example, greenhouse gas emissions and solid waste, things like that, but it will also include many of the metrics of tourism, like numbers of visitors, length of stay, et cetera.

The member opposite asked about the cost. It is just built into the ongoing workplan of the department. It is just a way of reporting back differently and looking at sustainability as a lens. You will recall, Deputy Chair, that under the *Yukon Tourism Development Strategy*, sustainability was one of the main pillars of that. It has been in the planning stages for quite a while, so there is no new cost that we are anticipating. It is just a lens that we are using to communicate back out with the public, or operators, for that matter.

Anyway, that is sort of a rough idea and, as I say, we are anticipating having that report out this year, later this calendar year, and I think that people will get a feel for it once they see it.

Ms. Van Bibber: I know that, in the tourism marketing industry, you are always planning years out, trying to figure out where the next wave of visitors is going to come from, and we

do that nationally, as well as locally, with our tourism associations.

Can the minister tell us if there are any new markets being considered? We know that, with the visit with Japan and India, it was noted that the Minister of Tourism and Culture went to talk about tourism initiatives that could work with Yukon, so could he also tell us a little bit about what he felt about the trip and drawing this particular market?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, the trip that we made was to Japan. We didn't go on with the Premier to India. The portion of the trip that the deputy minister and I were focusing on was Japan. While we were there, we met with a half dozen tourism operators. We met with Destination Canada. We signed a letter of intent with Hankyu Travel and Maple Fun Tours. Hankyu is one of Japan's largest tourism operators.

By the way, after we got back to Canada — not long after that, we met with Hankyu and Maple Fun here in Whitehorse, as they brought one of their first tours to do an aurora flight, partnering with Air North. We met the Japanese travellers who were on that trip. It was very exciting.

We do see that there is potentially an opportunity with the Japanese market. I think that it is not isolated, though, just to Japan. For example, just a week or two ago, I met with the Consul General from Korea. We discussed the potential of the Yukon as a tourism destination. I think that the other market we have seen emerging — and I think I have said it in the Assembly before — is Mexico. In particular, with interline agreements between Air North and Aeromexico, we have seen an increase in visitors from Mexico so that becomes another focus for us.

I think that one of the things we are looking at, in terms of travellers, is not just where they are from, but where and when, because it matters whether people want to come in the summer, on the shoulders, or in the winter. So, part of how we think about developing the Yukon and promoting the Yukon includes that notion of timing, because the more we can help our operators to have a revenue stream throughout different parts of the year, then the better off they are going to be as well.

Ms. Van Bibber: You pretty well answered my next question, which was that we know that the Japanese come for our winter tourism, so we are encouraging them to try to come for year-round attractions. Is there a planned return trip to Japan to firm up some of these letters of intent?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We have someone in Japan right now. First of all, we have some staff from Tourism and Culture who are responsible for different markets, and they do lots of work back and forth with those markets. We also have — they are called “general sales agents” or “in-market sales contractors”, who we work with in various jurisdictions or various other countries, you know, ranging from the US, Canada, Japan, Mexico, many European countries. There are ways in which we keep a presence at all times.

I think it's important to note that, in our experience in meeting with the folks in Japan, they do love the northern lights. They see it as really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for them to get a chance to see northern lights. I think they think of it as quite spiritual. They were very keen to talk to us about First Nation culture and how they engage with it when they're here.

They are also pretty keen on the midnight sun, the mountains, and getting out into the outdoors where there aren't a lot of people, because it's pretty crowded with people where we were — in Tokyo, anyway. So, I think they loved that aspect of the Yukon, too.

Again, all I will say is that we look all around, trying to expand the seasons and promote travellers to come to the Yukon from a range of areas, and, yes, we are doing follow-up with Japan.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thanks to the minister for that answer. Going on to service industry jobs, as we know, it really hasn't rebounded since COVID hit us; especially, the work in the tourism service industry is really difficult for many employers, and I am often asked, where do all these workers go?

So, has there been any research done on what happened to so many of our front-line workers who seem to have moved away from our industry since the pandemic? I know that the department is trying to encourage different programs to help employers, but has there been any research, or reports, undertaken to study this problem?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, there is analysis being done. I think that we can start off by sort of acknowledging that, coming out of COVID, tourism was one of the last sectors to start to repopulate and get back up on its feet. Meanwhile, we had a labour crunch coming. There are all sorts of reasons.

During Question Period today, I think that we had some of that dialogue, just about our aging workforce and people retiring, and suddenly, there was very, very low unemployment. As a result, if you were in the tourism industry as a sector, you know, there were other jobs, and I think that some people did migrate to other jobs.

Have we been doing analysis? Sure, and not just us. The deputy minister was recently at the federal-provincial-territorial tourism meetings. They were in St. John's, Newfoundland, last week. I got up — because they are four and a half hours different, I was up pretty early. There was one day that I was up at 4:30 a.m. or 5:00 a.m. to get on some of those calls to participate. But one of the things that happened was that Destination Canada is doing work, along with some other agencies, to try to identify the details on a subsector-by-subsector basis around tourism — food, beverage, accommodation, et cetera.

Here within the Yukon, our own Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon has set up a recruitment and retention task force. They have a report that is available online right now, I think. They have been working with our Department of Economic Development and the labour market on this. With us as well but, in particular, with Economic Development dealing with the labour questions.

Ms. Van Bibber: Yes, the labour shortage is certainly being felt throughout Yukon, especially in Dawson City where, as far as I could see, there were many “help wanted” signs and they were closing earlier. It was very difficult to get a meal some evenings. Part of the problem with the communities and seasonal workers, of course, is housing and accommodation.

The project with the Klondike Visitors Association and — with some help from others on the Village off King project.

This was to put up 20 wall tents, washrooms, and a cook shack between King and York streets. How did the Department of Tourism and Culture help with this project and did it actually begin this summer?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, we did help out. I think we gave over \$200,000, maybe \$230,000, to the project. We were trying to facilitate the project to come in. For example, it turns out that there was a bylaw or something that was a challenge within the City of Dawson so we met with city council and the city manager. We talked to them about it and tried to assist them in navigating through that. I think there might have also been an order-in-council that we needed to do in order to help them to do that. There were some steps. We worked to facilitate it. It was sort of piloted this year with the intention to get it up and running very early next year, but the pilot was a success. One of the differences, I think — and it is worth noting — is that, in the past when there was a tent city in Dawson, it was really individual workers who were staying there and doing their thing, and then it became challenging for the city now and then because of noise and other issues. In this instance, in the Village off King, the seasonal housing project, what we are doing is working with the employers. They are the people who have the wall tents that then go to their staff, so there is a responsibility back that those staff have that accommodation through their work, even though it's co-located together. We think that this is going to make it more successful overall and thus more sustainable over time. The project, we are looking forward to it next year and we have been supportive throughout.

Ms. Van Bibber: That's very interesting. If it's employer-assisted, are they renting a tent for their employees, or do they own the tent? How does the system work that you just described?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The employers rent the tents from the Klondike Visitors Association. What they choose to do or how they deal with that with respect to their employees might be very different. It might be that they provide that as part of their employment or maybe there is a rent back. What then happens is that — well, it's twofold. First of all, if that employee decides to move on from their employment, that space then goes back into the pool for other potential employees, so it's really about making sure that it is housing for labour. The second thing is that there is a responsibility to make sure that the other sort of noise bylaws and issues around Dawson City are upheld because you are there with the support of your employer. Those are the two ways in which we think it's going to be successful, and the early indications from the project this year were positive.

Ms. Van Bibber: That is very interesting — for an employer to rent a tent. Are these tents electrified? Are they brought up to a certain code? Is there a manager on-site who would be monitoring — sort of like a campground where you would have somebody on-site who would assist people should they need it?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, as part of the whole project, the Klondike Visitors Association is managing the site. I don't know whether that means there is someone on-site all of

the time, but there is someone who is responsible to make sure that things are happening and going well.

Everything is to code — let's make that clear, to begin with — but I don't know that it means there is electricity running into each tent. There is a central washhouse and things like that, and, of course, there would be power there. I would have to check in with the Klondike Visitors Association to know what kind of amenities there are within each individual wall tent, but it is meant to be seasonal housing. It is rustic and Yukon, so I am just not sure of exactly everything that is in there, but I think probably most of us have stayed in a wall tent, so I am thinking that it is pretty standard.

Ms. Van Bibber: I look forward to seeing how it eventually evolves within that community.

I know that with the evacuations due to the flooding and the wildfire further down the line, many of the businesses in that area were impacted, and especially the hotels. Does the Government of Yukon — or Tourism, in particular — keep track of how many people use the hotels? Was there communication to tourist and tour groups regarding the situation? How was this information given to the tour groups? Because they would have to cancel, reschedule, and cause a whole domino effect down the line. If the minister could give me a bit of an update on what the communication was like with various groups?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Just moving back for a second, what I will offer to do for the member opposite — next summer when we have the seasonal Village off King Street up and running again, I will reach out to the Klondike Visitors Association and get an opportunity for her, when she's in Dawson, to have a tour of the village so she can see it, and I will go check it out too. I will just make that offer.

Second of all, how do we get information to visitors? I have already mentioned one of the ways that we talk to them is through our visitor information centres. If we have alerts and updates, we are passing them out there.

There are sort of standard and stock ways happening. For example, 511 is something that is maintained by Highways and Public Works at all times. Tourism operators are using it pretty often, so they are talking to their clients.

We also have the Emergency Measures Organization. If there is some sort of closure, evacuation, or alert or something, those are put out broadly. Then there is often conversation, for example, with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, and the Klondike Visitors Association is one of their members — that's just for Dawson, but we could talk about any region of the territory — and then they talk to their operators. We are always there to answer specific questions if they arise. What do we do about X? Then we reach back into the departments, but those are sort of the pathways that are there.

The other thing worth noting is that even when we had evacuations — Old Crow and Mayo evacuated this year — according to the data that we got from the hotels in Dawson, they were still full during those times.

There are issues, and we do have conversations ongoing. In our last quarterly meeting with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, we talked about emergencies, how

we can plan for these things, in consideration of both — how they would impact our tourism sector, but how the tourism sector could support the Yukon during those times, so a two-way conversation, but that is just in its initial stages.

I think we recognize, for example, our wildfire season, which was significant here this year, was nothing like the Northwest Territories' or even British Columbia's. So, we recognize that there is an impact. We are looking to have deeper dialogue with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon about that over time.

Ms. Van Bibber: Thank you for that answer, and for the invite to the tent city in Dawson.

I think the last exit survey held in the Yukon was in 2017-18, so I'm sure we are due for another. Can the minister tell us when the next exit survey will happen, or are we on hold due to the pandemic years?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: They are out there doing the survey right now. I think they are up at the airport. The deputy minister saw them up at the airport. Now, the survey will take place this fall; we will get a report next fall; so, it takes some time. Not to take away from all of the other metrics that we try to use to get a sense of where we are with tourism, but we do have a new exit survey happening right now.

Ms. Van Bibber: I always found those very interesting, and I appreciate the length of time they do take.

Deputy Chair, I am going to end on a note of congratulations to Air North on their new venture of opening the restaurant at the airport. I couldn't think of a better company and a more wonderful addition to that specific space. It has been long overdue. On that note, I will pass it over.

Deputy Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

Ms. White: I thank my colleague for her questions today and, of course, welcome the officials into the Assembly.

I am just going to start off general debate here by saying that I have lived in staff accommodation all over the world, and wall tents sound pretty luxurious to me, in some of the places that I have stayed. Knowing that the Klondike Visitors Association really wants there to be staff and employees, I am sure that the wall tents they have put together are glorious, and, in some cases, you can see wall tents on short-term rentals for upward of \$300 a night. So, this is quite luxurious to be able to stay in a place like that. So, I do appreciate that they have looked outside the box in trying to find staff accommodation, because we know that is one real challenge in the Klondike.

Speaking of the Klondike, I note that the minister visited with KIAC earlier this year, and indicated that there may be additional funding this fall, looking toward art funding. I wanted to know if there is going to be additional funding for that organization. The Klondike Institute of Art and — I just drew a blank, and I am terrified of getting the acronym wrong. KIAC, I am just going to say KIAC for now.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Ms. White: It is the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture; thank you. Just a big pause there.

You know, they had core funding for a long time — \$425,000 a year, and there was COVID financing of \$25,000 a year. The minister made that permanent, which is great, and then there was a percentage increase that brought it up to \$459,000 a year, and that is a good way of closing the gap, but for the community of Dawson City, that organization is a lifeline. It is really important, especially in the long winter months — the events that they put on. So, I just wanted to know if that organization could expect an increase to their funding?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, let me begin by echoing the Member for Takhini-Kopper King's remarks that the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture, KIAC — the society behind it is called the Dawson City Arts Society, DCAS — they are an important group. I think they are our second highest funded group under arts in the Yukon — just acknowledging that importance.

We have made the increases permanent. We were not considering, inside of this budget, increasing arts funding, but we have been working with KIAC on other avenues to try to support them or their financial initiatives. I know I'm blanking on the name of the artist residence that they use, but that lot and the building on it is owned by Parks Canada. I think Parks Canada is considering whether to divest themselves of that, so we have been exploring potential options. I just wrote back to them — I don't know — a week or so ago, talking about that ongoing dialogue. You know, we are watching how Parks Canada is working with that property right now. That's the way in which we are trying to support the society: How to assist them in other ways to either be able to increase revenue or to decrease their costs. I will just give a shout-out to them for all the work they do.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I know that the Dawson City Arts Society did send a letter to the minister in February indicating that they are looking for an increase. It was \$425,000, and now it's \$450,000 plus the percentage increase to get to \$459,000, but what they are looking for is core funding of \$500,000. Again, this is an organization that does a lot of good in that community, and it does a lot of work.

I just wanted to know if, toward the budgeting year next year, is the minister looking toward that increase?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: We will be entering into the budget exercise this fall to get toward next spring. I don't have any information to share today. I just looked up the name of the house. It's called the Macaulay House. That's the one that we have been working with them on.

I appreciate that, when I met with KIAC, they talked to me about the importance of the funding, and I agreed with them

and have been working with them to find other avenues to try to improve their financial situation.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. Fingers crossed that they get to see at least that gap closed.

The 2022-23 tourism industry report identified timely access to class 4 driver's licences as being an issue for tourism operators. I just wanted to know if the minister could provide us with an update, and to let us know whether or not that issue has been resolved.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: When I rose to speak earlier, I mentioned that we just recently had a quarterly meeting with the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, TIAY, and this was one of our topics that we have been discussing. TIAY has been working with Highways and Public Works and has been getting an expedited process for the class 4s. I don't want to say that the problem is solved; I would say that it is being improved and we have talked about further improvements that we could work on. We also had some conversation at our last meeting about timing. There are seasons when a lot of workers are coming in and they all need that class 4 at the same time, so that's one issue. Then there is also the issue that you get those high points but, if there is any staff turnover, you have to have the ability to try to get someone back into the system. So, TIAY spoke about the working arrangement with Highways and Public Works. I know that the Deputy Minister of Tourism and Culture has also been speaking directly with the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works on this issue.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that, and that is a lovely example of removing the silos, or the walls between departments, when we are looking at trying to help one where it's across departments, so I do really appreciate that.

Another issue that they identified was with carrier compliance and weigh-scale reporting regulations and their potential effects on the tourism operators. I know that they sent a joint letter to both you and the Minister of Highways and Public Works. I am just hoping that the minister can let us know how these concerns are being addressed.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: It will be a similar response to my previous response. Again, on this issue, I know that TIAY is working directly with Highways and Public Works. I know that the issue that they are addressing, the weigh-scale permit redesign, — is not unique to the tourism sector but it is important to the tourism sector. We understand that they are working it through, and we have just asked that we be kept apprised of it. The Deputy Minister of Tourism and Culture has also been in contact with the Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works to make sure that we are supportive of that dialogue happening between the industry association and the Department of Highways and Public Works.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that.

Earlier in the Sitting — I am actually not sure if we had the conversation here or if I was having a conversation with my friend from Skagway who let me know that the last cruise ship was originally timed for tomorrow, October 25. Can the minister let me know if that is the last cruise ship and if they are going to be going into Carcross?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The answer is yes. We are anticipating that the last cruise ship is tomorrow. Yes, we are anticipating that there is a bus coming to Carcross. We actually kept the visitor information centre open an extra 11 days, not just for tomorrow on the last day, but for the last week and a half of cruise ship bus travel to Carcross. We had some challenges with the washroom. We have had ongoing challenges with the washroom there and we actually installed some porta-potties to try to support, which aren't the best solution but they are a solution.

We are watching to try to see what that extra traffic means. We are monitoring what kinds of traffic we are getting through Carcross. So, VICs are open longer. The folks at Carcross Commons have been staying open longer to accommodate the last cruise ship. My wife happened to be down with her cousin from England who stopped in the Assembly last week. They went down to Skagway last week and she also let me know that the cruise ships are finishing tomorrow.

Ms. White: I think that this is an example of an industry that continues to kind of astound at different times. My previous colleague in the Assembly, actually in the same seat — well, different seat and different title as well. But the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes back in the day, Kevin Barr, was the one who advocated for it being open earlier — the Art House bathrooms, because we were seeing the cruise ships starting to come earlier and now we are seeing them later.

A funny anecdotal story, because not everyone is used to outhouses. I was there riding my bike a couple of weeks ago and the absolute look of horror on the faces of the people as they tried to navigate their way into the outhouse was actually quite humorous. I think for some people who have never seen porta-potties, it is really not as self-explanatory as that. I appreciate that it is a way that we need to bridge it, but we might have to look at signage to explain what exactly it is and how one goes about it, because it wasn't until I came out of the porta-potty that they looked a bit more confident about going into the thing.

As we think about tourists visiting us from other locations and knowing that what might be normal for us is not normal for them, we may have to look at a way of gently explaining what those are. But I do appreciate that they were there. I just can't imagine a cruise into Alaska at the end of October, so I think that is really something else.

Deputy Chair, I am sure that there are a lot more questions that I could be asking, but I actually think that, for now, I am going to stop. I thank the minister for the time and his officials for being here. I look forward to signage on those outhouses next year to help explain the process. With that, I will sit down.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I just want to note that our first question today started with outhouses, and our last question — well, maybe not our last question, but the most recent question today ended with outhouses.

We have tried to open the Art House early and we have had success now and then, but we have also had frozen pipes burst water and there are all the challenges of water delivery in Carcross. We have tried to open them later, as well, and we have had similar problems, so it is an ongoing challenge. I do

note that there is one sign on those outhouses. It is the sort of droopy dog with the clothes peg on the nose. It was a start to infographics.

Anyway, I thank the member opposite for her suggestions.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate on Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture?

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

Ms. Van Bibber: Deputy Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried

Deputy Chair: The Member for Porter Creek North has, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 54, Department of Tourism and Culture, cleared or carried, as required.

Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Deputy Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$804,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$200,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$604,000 agreed to Department of Tourism and Culture agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Executive Council Office

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Deputy Chair, I am pleased to introduce the supplementary estimates for the Executive Council Office today for 2023-24

I would like to thank the officials for being here today and supporting me. We have our deputy minister, Justin Ferbey, as well as our assistant deputy minister, Kate Durand, with us today.

The Executive Council Office provides guidance and leadership across the Government of Yukon and directly supports the Cabinet Office. Through its day-to-day activities, the department supports the Cabinet decision-making process by ensuring that government policy and planning are coordinated and effective.

Demonstrating strategic corporate leadership, the department builds respectful and enduring relationships with other governments. As well, the Executive Council Office takes the lead role in promoting the effective and timely communication of information to the public.

Here is a brief overview of the items in our supplementary budget for 2023-24. The Government of Yukon is committed to reconciliation and building strong relationships with First Nation and Indigenous peoples. Much of our work is led by the Aboriginal Relations division. Through consultation and policy support, fostering relationships, and negotiating and implementing agreements, the division aims to achieve environmental, social and economic benefits for all Yukoners.

The 2023-24 supplementary budget includes a net increase of \$1.35 million to support the work of the Aboriginal Relations division. This includes just over \$1 million to meet legal obligations and commitments to reconciliation with First Nation governments, including capacity funding for consultation and engagement, bilateral negotiations, and meeting final and self-government agreement obligations. This also covers a one-time transfer of \$330,000 to the Council of Yukon First Nations for their 50th anniversary of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow*. This funding, carried over from last year, supported the Council of Yukon First Nations in organizing anniversary celebrations and developing a commemorative book.

Also, under the Yukon Employees' Union collective agreement increases, in June 2023, the Yukon Employees' Union ratified a new collective agreement that will apply to over 3,500 employees. This agreement will be in effect until December 31, 2024. The 2023-24 supplementary budget includes an increase of \$609,000 for department union staff resulting from the new agreement. We value the work of our Yukon public service and are pleased to have these changes in place.

Lastly, we have some adjustments resulting from the ongoing COVID-19 activities. In 2020, with support from the Government of Canada, we announced \$1 million in funding for the COVID-19 recovery research project. Through the department's office of the science advisor, we supported 10 research teams conducting projects that examined the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic. These projects examined themes such as First Nation emergency response, women's livelihoods, the health and well-being of Yukon educators, housing, recreation, and more. The budget for this research program was split evenly over two fiscal years.

Due to unforeseeable circumstances, not all of the funding was spent in those fiscal years, and the Government of Canada allowed the balance of \$189,000 to continue into 2023-24 to complete the project. The recovery research project concluded this past June with a public summit where researchers shared

the results of their work and discussed how to apply the learning to programs and decisions.

The research outcomes will support the territory's recovery from the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic and will help the Government of Yukon, the Government of Canada, and Yukon First Nation governments, and other sectors plan for future health-related emergencies. This funding is 100-percent recoverable from the Government of Canada, and any unspent funds will be returned.

I look forward to answering any questions that the members may have about the 2023-24 supplementary budget for the Executive Council Office.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the opportunity to ask the Premier some questions about the department of the Executive Council Office. We learned in the briefing a little bit about the role that ECO and IGR played in the Premier's trip to India, and I would like to just follow up on some questions that we have on that. Can I ask the Premier: Whose idea, or where did the idea come from to go to India? Was it something that was generated by IGR, or did it come from the Department of Economic Development, or another department like Health and Social Services, to visit India as a part of this trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think this has been a topic that has been the focus for the member opposite over the last while. First of all, there are a number of invites that we constantly get, and usually, it's from consul generals, sometimes it's from high commissioners or ambassadors, where they see an opportunity for the Yukon to do that work, or to look at opportunities.

Going into this last year, I think, probably, first and foremost, our focus was invites that came from the Philippines, and over the last year, we have tried to take on those invites, and we have tried to plan some work trips around that, but it has been difficult with that particular file because we had a federal election, a national election in the Philippines last year, in the first quarter of the calendar year. We had been working on a memorandum of understanding with the Philippines from March of the previous year. So, we were in a position where we really were trying to ensure that there was an opportunity to travel there.

That was one of the locations that we were looking at, so we know, what are some of the reasons? Well, with the Philippines specifically — the Philippines has been primarily the number-one location for individuals who are applying to our nominee program, or using the nominee program with employers, and that has been pretty consistent over the last number of years. The other country of origin that has also been a key area has been India. The Philippines and India have been sort of number one and number two, going back and forth, when it comes to the nominee program.

What is important is that we know the pressures that we have under housing, and we understand that we have to be very strategic when it comes to our ability to use our nominee program and to support opportunities for these individuals to become — they inevitably become Yukoners — but also, in many cases, we want families to support other family members to come over. So, if we have people from the Philippines, or they are coming from India, it is quite important, because they

then can come to the Yukon, and in some cases, they are very well-supported by family members. It also, in many cases, gives them an initial place to live.

First of all, I think that it is really important to highlight the fact that there is a diaspora, both from the Philippines and India, that is pretty significant here in the Yukon.

When it came to looking at some of our goals and objectives, I was pretty clear in my statements, upon taking this job, that I wanted to support a number of departments and ministers in their work. The three areas that I really wanted to focus on were housing, which is the reason I kept the housing portfolio; the next was education; and the other one was health.

We are not in a position to look internationally, when it comes to educators, even though there is pressure across Canada, but when it comes to health and human resources, and the work that we are doing, we are looking for different jurisdictions to find, specifically, nurses. What we are hearing and being educated about, from the Philippines, is that there was an area where a lot of provinces and territories were focusing on, but we are hearing now from the Philippines that they are having their own challenges with capacity; whereas with India, it is a bit of a different conversation. There has been an interest, across the country, from a number of provincial leaders. I know that Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, and Saskatchewan do a lot of trade in India, but primarily, it would be those other provinces that are looking to go there.

The Department of Health and Social Services has been working on an agreement with the University of New Brunswick, and that has been a focus of partnering with the university, and then also looking at some recruitment methods with India.

When it comes to critical minerals and mining, I think our initial meeting with officials from India was, I believe, in 2018. I can go back and check. And I know there was a discussion, and there is at least one local company that I have reflected on that has done work in India. They have some individuals who moved from India and now live in Whitehorse who work for them, at least, one of the lead individuals in their business. In many cases, we had officials say that there could be more opportunity around these areas.

When we think about investment attraction, we are seeing a tremendous amount of investment from Canada, as well, going into India. We see Alberta, which I believe now has full-time representatives in India. We see Saskatchewan has opened, I think, either one or maybe multiple offices in India. We are hearing, as well, from colleagues that this is an area that we should be looking at.

Japan is another one, which was part of that same trip, where there is a bit of history of looking at going to Japan from the Yukon government. It has previously been, I believe, a focus on tourism, but now we are seeing at least two Japanese companies that have made investments in the Yukon — one that has been here for quite a while and another that has been doing some due diligence on another project. Again, we are seeing those opportunities.

In both cases, you know — look, I think that we get information, and we talk about where there are opportunities for international investment, partnership — those types of things — and departments will come and say that this is a place that might be an opportunity. IGR and Economic Development — or Economic Development and — or, sorry, Executive Council Office really has helped to facilitate some of the things that, as Premier, I have wanted to do. I guess what it comes down to is — I will just put on the record that, as a Premier and minister, inevitably, if the question is: Who made a decision to go on this trip? That's me who has made the decision, if that's what we're trying to get at. I see all of the information; I read my briefings; I inevitably have to make a decision based on this information, and I made a decision, and I stand by that decision. So, if that is the line of questioning we want to get into, I am excited to get into that. We will leave it to the Leader of the Official Opposition to carry on.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that. That was all very interesting, but my question was simply whose idea was it to go to India? The Premier, at the end of his speaking, just said that departments will often come to ECO and suggest going to a location for various reasons. So, did any department recommend that the Premier go to India? Did Economic Development recommend it? Did Health and Social Services recommend it? Who recommended that the Premier go to India?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think, over the last number of years, probably more in my work with Economic Development, I have had discussions with officials when we have talked about different places for opportunity, that said, hey, this is location that may work.

Again, if this question is — I think, at the end of the day, when the member opposite went to China, when the member opposite went to Hong Kong, when the member opposite made all those different trips, and went out — I can share a quote right now about those decisions. Inevitably, the member opposite made that decision. I would hope that the member opposite would stand by it.

Look, I understand it's trying to turn into this line of questioning — if there's something that is believed that was done wrong, then, please, let's get into it. Inevitably, this decision is my decision at the end of the day — my decision. Again, we have lots of information that is provided to us. There are a number of different places, within dialogue, where we identify opportunities to look at investment attraction. I could go through another four or five right now. At the end of the day, this decision falls on me. Who, at the end of the day, says, yes, we should do this? That's me.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the opportunity to respond to that. The reason I am asking is simply that we have heard from a variety of people that the reason why this trade mission was undertaken was it was specifically chosen by the Premier himself. The Premier referenced my trip to Japan and Hong Kong from 10 years ago or so. That was an initiative of the Department of Economic Development. They came to me with a proposal. As the Premier has done in this particular case, I

accepted that proposal and ended up going, based on the advice of the department.

I was just curious if the Department of Health and Social Services actually identified India as a place that the Premier ought to go, because I don't believe that to be the case.

I will move on, and I will ask the Premier then about the total cost of the trip. Can he give us a sense of the total cost of the trip? He told us in the Economic Development debate that there were 18 individuals who attended — five from the private sector, two ministers, and the remainder were public servants.

Do we have a total sense of the cost of this trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: The total cost of the trip right now — and I say right now, because I want to make sure of all of the numbers, and if there is anything outstanding — is \$170,899.54.

Mr. Dixon: Does that include the funding that was provided to the non-governmental folks who attended the trip as well?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That also includes the advance, which was questioned the other day. We had two officials — one official plus another individual who went along. I do apologize. To that second question, I think it was about other individuals who might have been there. Sorry, I just want to get the question one more time, and I will do my best to answer.

Mr. Dixon: The Premier listed a number there, and I asked him if included in that number was the amount provided to non-government attendees of this trip.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: No, I think that the number is five business organizations that used their existing agreements with the Department of Economic Development. I am more than comfortable to come back and provide that number as well. What we are looking at, again, is \$170,899.54, which includes officials going. It also includes, again, the entire group and the early advance.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the Premier's clarity on that. I guess that, when we return to Economic Development, we can inquire further about the amount of funding that came from Economic Development.

I will follow up on the question about the advance trip, because what the Premier just said is new to what we heard, both at the briefing and previously in Economic Development. Previously, we have been told that there was only one individual who attended the advance trip to India. Can the Premier clarify if there were two people who attended, and if so, who were they? Did they work for IGR or for Economic Development? Who were these folks?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I hope that's not new. We had one individual who travelled from Intergovernmental who also went to the Philippines, because, at that point, we were trying to see if there was going to be that opportunity. So, one was from IGR, and one was a cultural liaison, an individual who does work for the Yukon government and speaks fluent Malayalam and travelled just for the India portion of the trip in southern India to help make some of the connections with some of the different health care groups and investment groups.

I will note that, since we are talking dollars, I thought \$170,000, when we think about the cost of some of the health

care challenges we have — when I went back and reviewed, the member opposite — I think that it was about \$100,000 spent in a year on international travel by the Leader of the Official Opposition. I think that \$170,000 for us, collectively, is a pretty good return on the investment.

Mr. Dixon: Again, my question was about the people who went on the advance team. So, if I am understanding this correctly, an official from IGR travelled as a part of the advance team to India, and if that is correct, I would just like some clarification. Also, what was the date of that trip — the advance trip?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, one of the individuals in Intergovernmental travelled to Japan, the Philippines, and India to do an advance trip, which we think is a prudent thing to do. For the India portion, there was one individual who works for the Yukon government who was asked to go to help liaise. Part of the Indo-Canadian community here, which is primarily from Kerala — the member opposite attended an event, as well as me, this year, their Onam event — so, that organization supports a group of people from Kerala. There was an individual from that community who helped as a liaison and with logistics, the individual who was there from Intergovernmental.

I can go through the total — the trip timing was from July 21 to August 5. That was the prior mission, officials' level — doing some of the groundwork for September. This trip included Tokyo, Thiruvananthapuram, New Delhi, Manila, and the Philippines, because, of course, as I said, it was an area that we had originally planned to go.

Mr. Dixon: Deputy Chair, I appreciate the information from the Premier. I would like to turn now to the subject of the lack of communication from the federal government to the Yukon government about the ongoing diplomatic issues between the two countries. The Premier has spoken publicly on national television about his disappointment with the federal government for not providing more information about what was going on, and expressed that he raised this concern with ministers in Ottawa. I think he noted that at least one minister apologized for what happened, but I would like to just clarify.

Did the Yukon government never receive any information from the Government of Canada that would lead them to believe that the timing that they chose for the trip to India was not the best timing, and that there was a low likelihood of success between the Yukon government and the people on the other end of the trip, given the fact that we were in the midst of an otherwise engaging diplomatic incident? So, ultimately, my question is about the lack of communication: Can the Premier just simply confirm that the Government of Canada never communicated to the Government of Yukon anything about any sort of concerns that they might have with the Yukon government attending a trip in India?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: On the first question, that is correct, and I think on the latter part of the question, which was around — that would lead to your success — it's important to — it's one thing for us to politically debate. I think it's important, though — and what I have shared — is to ensure that the current situation doesn't also lead for Indo-Canadians to feel

uncomfortable in this territory — in this country — and what is really the state of this situation.

From a government-to-government standpoint, we all know clearly that there is a tremendous amount of pressure around this situation, and we can dig into that, and we can talk about how this country is a country of rule of law, and if somebody sends something they shouldn't, that's absolutely inappropriate and needs to be dealt with. But I think, over the last couple of weeks, there have been a lot of individuals who have felt that, because of the comments and some rhetoric that has gone on — not here in the House; I'm not saying that, but just in general, there is a lack of comfort, because of what has happened, and there is a tremendous amount of government-to-government stress right now, but when it comes to community-to-community, in many ways, that continues on as it did before September.

We have the biggest pension funds in this country that have invested greatly into India. When you think about the Canadian CPP pension, or you think about Ontario Teachers', or you think about OMERS — all of these different organizations are going to continue to do business — provinces like Saskatchewan, who do a tremendous amount of their trade, will continue on, and there will be success in all of those things.

I met with officials from Health and Social Services today, and we talked about all of this ongoing work that is happening, which they are going to be focused on, which is making sure that we continue to build on the success that we saw there.

I think the biggest pressure will be what happens with visas. We all know that. Some people have existing visas, and they will travel back and forth. We sat with Air Canada in India. They are continuing to look at expansion to do more. They will have to work through the pressures that are in place right now.

We are getting information coming back where people still want to look at opportunities, in many cases, in hospitality. They want to be able to come to the Yukon and work in the hospitality field — whether it is in hotels or restaurants. That's something I think, even probably from our last line of questioning today, that continues to be an area that we want to support.

I think this will go back and forth. I look at the information that was provided to us right from April, and then through to the subsequent time. I look at the conversation that happened internationally, where leaving from Japan and going to India, where we saw vocally out there, that there was a stall in trade, but that's because this is a trade conversation that has been going on for a decade. Folks wanted to go back — as it was characterized in the media — and consult with business, and it was a pause.

All of these things that were said — we were getting the same information. We ended up with all the data we had, and the briefings we had, whether it was from Global Affairs, the conversations with Global Affairs, or even being — which I won't get into deeper detail — but even having security officials meet with our officials, all the while ensuring that people were safe and that we were taking care of good business on behalf of Yukoners.

That has been our experience, and, yes, I have spoken publicly. I feel that we should have had as much information to make great decisions on behalf of our team. I have said publicly I understand that the conversation that I was privy to at 12:00 at night on a news cycle, I would have liked to have known before. I did say publicly, and I will say again, I can understand where, something of that nature, we may not get a phone call until later. I feel there could have been more outreach during our last hours there. I do.

I do, and I chaired the western premiers meeting last week, and I brought to the table, with my counterparts, the fact that I think that we need to collectively — and I will wait to see from my colleagues — you have Premier Moe, Premier Smith, Premier Eby — who spoke publicly about his discomfort with information at a subnational level — and others who were there. It was Premier Kinew's first meeting. I said that we have to look at — I believe it's the *CSIS Act*, and the *CSIS Act* needs to be amended. We have to see — that act has to be amended. I have spoken to the Senator for the Yukon on this topic, that it has to be changed so that leaders at a subnational level have the ability to get the information that they need, so you are not put in this position. I know we might get into this dialogue back and forth, trying to get an "I gotcha", but the reality is that, if anything, we took all of the information we had, and we had really good meetings.

I think it's important, because this is something that can positively affect, specifically the Yukon health care, for decades to come. This is an opportunity for us to get extremely talented individuals to come here. So, no, it wasn't — we saw success in our bilateral meetings in all of the areas where we had them.

The member opposite is correct — I believe there should have been a better flow of information. Right until the Monday morning — you know, our first meeting after we left south India, when we were in New Delhi, we had a meeting in the morning, and we met with the High Commissioner. The term that was used was "things coming out of the G20 were frosty" — that's it — and go and have your meetings, and you will likely have good meetings, because you are subnational government, and there is lots of interest in working with Canadian provinces and territories.

Mr. Dixon: In speaking to the total cost spent on the trip, the Premier said he thought that this was a good return on investment. What is the return? How should Yukoners look at this trip and judge its return? How many new health care professionals have we received from this trip? What is the return that Yukoners receive for this investment, to use the Premier's term?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: That is a very good question. When I said it, I got ahead of myself. What I have to state is that I believe that \$170,000 — and then we will come back with the other additional opportunities — money that we spent supporting the business sector to travel. I know right now — you have heard individuals from the business sector who were on that trip speak publicly about how they think there is value, and there is a trade mission that is coming up between Canada and Japan. I know that there are folks who want to be on that

because they see opportunity. I think that we are facilitating that. There are no elected officials on that trade mission over here in the House.

When I think about where we are at, we are under this pressure, especially with agency nurses. I think that the member opposite will appropriately question me in the spring on this one, and over the next number of months — whenever there is an opportunity to question it. We know that we have an obligation to take the relationships that we built and bring value. I agree with that. I will just say this in the House: That will be our goal and focus. I think that we can continue to report back on the value that we think is created. We can debate if that's value, but I think it is, first and foremost, the health care professionals. We are probably going to need a few months now to get things in place. We have to see what is going to happen with visas back and forth for individuals.

Today, we spoke about how one of the organizations has representation in North America. It's about them working closely with the Department of Health and Social Services. Some folks will be coming over to do some bridging work academically outside of here. We will hopefully have the opportunity to facilitate some of that here in the Yukon. Then we will be able to see those folks come into the pipeline of health care professionals.

I want to be able to reach out as well, and hopefully, we will have that success with people getting visas, specifically over the next 24 months, when it comes to supporting our hospitality and tourism industry, because folks are highly trained, and I think that we can bring some folks back. I will come back. I asked Health and Social Services before we went, and I will sit with our officials and say, what does an agency nurse cost the Yukon? If we had people who moved and made the Yukon their home, what would that look like, if you had two or three people who are Yukoners, are union members, have moved here, so we're offsetting that extra cost? I will come back, and we can do it in Question Period or another time. I know that we have kind of run those numbers.

When you start looking at this, you probably have a small number of nurses who you have gone out and been able to recruit, and then you offset that cost. You will see some good return on the investment, but I think that it is bigger than that. I do. I think that, on the tech side, there seems to be a lot of interest on the IT side to look at ways to collaborate. On the film side, there were multiple organizations that want to come, work with our film people, and spend money here.

Can we get to a place where, over the next while, we are \$170,000 into an expenditure or something where I believe that we are going to see a return on our investment? Yes, I do.

I think we are going to have to watch as some of our business people, such as SPYA, which had all the meetings with the film sector, to see if they are going to be able to attract investment. But also, even from the standpoint of people not travelling — post-production costs are 35 cents on the dollar for some of our companies. They can shoot here and hire people, but then when they go to post-production, they can have post-production done essentially there in a partnership and they can stretch their money much further, especially here where we

don't have that same breadth of post-production but we still want to see the above-the-line opportunities in the film industry.

Those are some of the pieces. I think it's important to illustrate that today. We start to track what opportunities come and certainly look forward to those conversations again with the Leader of the Official Opposition over the next while.

Mr. Dixon: I will move on.

I have a question related to the Yukon Forum. Earlier this year — just a few weeks ago, following the meeting in Dawson — there was a press release put out by the Yukon government and it included quotes by the Premier and two chiefs. One of the quotes was from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Chief, and a number of folks from the mining industry raised this with us as a point of concern. I think that some folks in the industry found the quote from the chief a bit unsettling with regard to some of the comments that were made about the need to stop or pause all exploration and staking, period. That was raised with us as a concern — that this sort of language would show up in a Yukon government press release.

Perhaps the Premier could respond to that and just address the concerns that have been brought to us by the folks in the industry around quotes like that appearing in a Yukon government press release and concerns that have been raised, and what folks in the industry should think about those kinds of comments — if the Premier can offer some reassurances about the future of the industry.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that we should still have an opportunity to go out and explore the industry and to look at being able to find new areas to do exploration. That would be the same sentiment from the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. I continue to commit to supporting our industry.

Concerning that quote, these are all independent governments and it was put out — the comments. There were lots of comments that were made as well in the press conference — not that I would agree with all of the comments that were made, and probably the individuals who were at the table would not agree with all the comments that I made.

Getting down to it, I would never speak on behalf of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, but I think, reflecting on comments from the Leader of the Official Opposition, the member opposite — that is a comment. Those statements and feelings are very alive, and that is probably not the only First Nation leader whom you would hear it from. You are asking me: What do I think that we should tell the industry? I think that the industry, depending on where you are working, you need to engage with those First Nation leaders and understand exactly what their perspective is, and also share with them what that means to your work, your industry, and your contribution to that community and to this economy.

Yesterday, I spoke with members from industry in the afternoon and said that we all have a role. Going back to those community leaders and talking about what you think about those statements is an appropriate, professional course of communication. I also think that it is important for individuals, as I stated yesterday. We have talked a lot about Skagway here and I said that it is really important. It is not just Yukon

government, but it is leaders in that industry who are spending time in Skagway and meeting with officials to help them understand what that infrastructure means there.

As the member opposite knows, they are independent governments sitting at the table. I have had the Grand Chief — I spoke with him this week and there were lots of challenging conversations that occur in a Yukon Forum.

There were lots of challenging conversations that occurred at that Yukon Forum but, at the same time, I had the Grand Chief say in a dialogue with me on Friday — I think he actually said it on air. He said that it was probably the best Yukon Forum — that he felt — because you are in a position where you are digging into — there is enough of a trust at the table to have disagreements and hear them back and forth, but also understand that we all have different constituencies and roles to play and work to do and that we're not going to always be in line, but there is enough respect to be able to have that discussion where, going back in time, it just didn't happen. People did not walk into the room together, they wouldn't meet, or, when they did, people would leave or cut it short. I think that you have to be into those real conversations. The other key is that, when you are doing it, you have to ensure that you keep the level of respect. You will respect what the other person is saying — the other level of government — and you have to, and there are reasons why, of course, they are getting to where they are in their perspective. That was reflected in the government of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's comments. Our comments in that press release were reflective of our view as a government within those comments.

Seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled October 24, 2023:

35-1-116

Yukon Hospitals Year in Review 2022-2023 and Yukon Hospital Corporation Consolidated Financial Statements March 31, 2023 (McPhee)

35-1-117

First Report of the Members' Services Board (October 24, 2023) (Clarke, N.)

The following legislative returns were tabled October 24, 2023:

35-1-103

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. White related to general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — COVID-19 leave (Silver)

35-1-104

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. Clarke related to general debate on Vote 10, Public Service Commission, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — *Interview and Relocation Expense Directive* (Silver)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 147

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

LEGISLATIVE STAFF

Clerk of the Assembly	Dan Cable
Deputy Clerk	Linda Kolody
Clerk of Committees	Allison Lloyd
Sergeant-at-Arms	Karina Watson
Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms	Joseph Mewett
Hansard Administrator	Deana Lemke

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, October 25, 2023 — 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.

Are there any visitors to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to please help me in welcoming a number of very special guests here today for the anniversary tribute to the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle. First, I would like to acknowledge Adeline Webber, Commissioner of the Yukon and founding member of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Alex Oakley, Deputy Chief of the Teslin Tlingit Council; Natalie Taylor, executive director of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Georgianna Low, the director of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Sharon Shadow, elder director of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Michelle Friesen, youth director of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle and also a City of Whitehorse council member; Susan Power, admin and project coordinator for the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Emersyne Sias, cultural support youth apprentice of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Jess Dorward, project manager for the Yukon Status of Women Council; Jasmin Marie, peer facilitator of the Yukon Status of Women Council; Sigourney Whipple-Grantham, project coordinator of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle; Aura-Leigh Birss, financial administrative assistant for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate; and Lori Duncan, senior advisor on Indigenous Women's Equality for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate.

Thank you all so much for being here.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, for the end-of-season *George Black* ferry and Pelly barge tribute, I have a number of people to introduce in the gallery. We have Jim Regimbal, the northern area superintendent; Scott Mueller, the eastern area superintendent; David Hutton, who is a ferry captain; Mike Dunbar, Ross River foreperson; and Heidi Bliedung, who is a Dawson resident and the spouse of Jim Regimbal.

Welcome to the Assembly.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, joining us today from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Vancouver — and I'll be meeting with them tomorrow — is the director general Angel Liu; director Peter Chiou; and Sam Tsay, who is visiting from Dallas, Texas. Welcome.

We also have some documents that we will be tabling today, so we have with us, from the Yukon Heritage Resources Board, Tim Green and Red Grossinger, board members. We have the CEO of the Yukon Arts Centre, Casey Prescott. We also have Gary Njootli from Tourism and Culture, who is a Yukon — I hope that I say this right — toponymist, which I think is about naming places and is such a cool name — and if we could also welcome Heather Ashthorn, who is the executive director of Raven ReCentre. Welcome to all to the Assembly today.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask members to join me in welcoming one of my constituents, Peter Wojtowicz, to the gallery here today.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle's 20th anniversary

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, today, I rise on behalf of our Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle on their 20th anniversary. For several generations, Indigenous women in Canada were left without a voice. The colonial legal system stripped us of our traditional matriarchal roles and social status and, for a long time, denied us fundamental civil and human rights. Indigenous women and girls have inherited a legacy of discrimination and we continue to suffer from the impacts.

Today, we are celebrating an organization started by and for Indigenous women that has been changing these narratives for the last 20 years. The Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, also known as "WAWC", was founded to provide all Indigenous women in Whitehorse, regardless of their origin, with a safe and culturally relevant space, programs, and supports.

The WAWC has been actively involved in advocacy efforts aimed at raising awareness about the unique challenges faced by Indigenous women in Yukon and across Canada. Over the last two decades, this organization has become the centre of an amazing community built on the circle's guiding principles of connection, growth, diversity, compassion, and equality. Their space has become one of healing, empowerment, and cultural revitalization.

Over the years, the programming and workshops have been supported by elders and traditional knowledge-keepers whose contributions must also be acknowledged. They have generously shared their wisdom, skills, and experience — helping Indigenous women reconnect with our roots and our culture.

To highlight a few relatively recent projects, *Finding Our Faces* is a 60-page book of photos, stories, and memories from the Indigenous residential school known as the Whitehorse Baptist Mission school. There are now two volumes of this book and, of course, the monument project, which honours

survivors of the Indian Mission School in Whitehorse. This monument is located at the intersection of Main and Front streets, along the river by the healing totem, which features the work of Tlingit artist Ken Anderson. I would be remiss if I did not speak about their steadfast advocacy for Yukon's missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit-plus people, which ultimately led to a whole-of-Yukon strategy that is now leading the nation.

None of this would be possible without the tireless work of many amazing, resilient Indigenous women who have been the backbone of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle. I am looking forward to watching the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle and its community grow and continue to uplift and empower Indigenous women.

I want to hold my hands up to all of the staff and both the past and present boards of directors. Thank you so much.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle as they celebrate their 20th anniversary. The founding meeting of this incredible organization was marked 21 years ago when 11 individuals came together with a shared interest of making a difference in Whitehorse as aboriginal women.

They incorporated in the next year, in 2003, and this year marks 20 years since the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle was formally established. This organization grew over the years and has become a voice and advocate for women in the community and feet on the ground at community events, campaigns, and summits.

They work alongside other strong, local organizations in our community on different projects and collaborations. The work and direction of the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle is based on priorities identified among women in the community and helps to meet a number of needs and fill identified gaps in support. The organization puts on incredible workshops, providing an atmosphere for Indigenous women to come together to develop and share their traditional skills. These include drum-making, traditional medicine, beading, and other crafting.

Last night, I came by the open house and was so delighted to see women sitting at this big, oval table beading, sewing, sharing stories, and laughing with one another. It reminded me of my culture back in Philippines. Filipino women sit together, relax, and laugh with each other. This is how we update and connect with each other in the community. It was our social media before smartphones. Last night brought me back and I was so happy. I want to give executive director Natalie Taylor and the whole Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle team and all board members a huge shout-out for their hard work and dedication. Thank you to all those who have been a huge part of the organization over the last two decades.

Salamat po.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to pay tribute to the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle's 20th anniversary. It's amazing to see the growth and direction that this organization has taken in providing support, programming, and a safe place for Indigenous women of the territory. The Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle brings together women from all walks of life to be on their board to coordinate programming, to bring forward new ideas, and to be the voice of aboriginal women throughout the Yukon.

I have taken part in a drum-making workshop that was hosted in their space. It was so inspiring to see the power of cultural programming bringing women together in a safe, trusting, respectful, supportive, and encouraging space. During the workshop, I witnessed new-found friendships being made, old friends reconnecting, and women of all ages making healthy connections with each other. This space was filled with laughter and such good energy throughout the workshop. Each day, the workshop began and ended with a circle, unifying the participants as equal learners who all had a sacred space held for them in our time together.

The Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle is active in doing the emotionally hard work of bringing forward voices on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in the Yukon. They work on collaborating with families and communities in a safe, respectful way to ensure that their services and supports can not only bring forward the lived experience of the families but can also ensure that their programming meets the needs of those who attend.

I found it so powerful to witness how this small organization has the strength and influence to bring together aboriginal women in Whitehorse from all parts of the Yukon and Canada who call Whitehorse "home" — much respect to this incredible organization for creating a safe space for women to gather from all walks of life to share their stories, participate in training and workshops, and be made to feel a part of this growing community.

Incredible things happen when women gather, and this space has shown me the power and possibilities that can flourish when Indigenous women gather to support each other and work together. Congratulations to the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle and the many women who have been and continue to be a part of this beautiful organization.

Mahsi' cho.

Applause

Speaker: Order, please.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: I would like to introduce a special guest, Alex Oakley, Deputy Chief of the Teslin Tlingit Council. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly, Alex.

Applause

In recognition of *George Black* ferry and Pelly barge staff

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government of Yukon, I rise today to say thank you to the members of the public service who maintain and operate the *George Black* ferry and the Pelly barge. Thank you to our guests for making the time to be here today and for the work that you do on our ferry crossings. These crossings are essential for Yukoners, industry, and visitors from around the world.

The *George Black* ferry crosses the Yukon River to reach west Dawson and the Top of the World Highway. The Pelly barge crosses the Pelly River at Ross River to access the North Canol Road. It takes a whole crew of workers to make these crossings possible. That includes the captains, first mates, deckhands, labourers, engineers, mechanics, and many others.

In Dawson City during the operational season, the *George Black* ferry crosses the Yukon River 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This ferry is used for so many different reasons. Residents rely on the ferry for things like groceries or visits with family and friends. Miners use it to access their claims, haul goods to their site, and bring heavy equipment across the river. Tourists and travellers use it to access the Top of the World Highway, which allows them to continue into Alaska. I have heard first-hand that our crews and their orange hats are very popular with the tourists. I want to thank them for keeping people safe and sending travellers on their way with a friendly wave.

In Dawson City, the season ended on October 15 this year, one day earlier than last year. In those last days of the season, the crew had to navigate through darkness, snowfall, and icy conditions, but the crews always rise to the challenge and provide the highest quality of service.

The crews of the Pelly barge also deserve recognition. The Pelly barge is an essential link to the North Canol Road. People rely on this area for mining, hunting, tourism, and recreation. To open the North Canol Road in the early spring, our maintenance workers haul equipment using the Pelly barge. Once the North Canol Road is open, our crews maintain and run the barge for people to use all summer.

Mr. Speaker, this year we saw high water levels because of rapid snowmelt in Ross River, which made it difficult to navigate the crossing. I want to give special thanks to the crews, as they did an excellent job of dealing with conditions and ensuring that passengers remained safe.

I hope that all residents and visitors had a good experience this year and enjoyed their travels on the water. To the crews in the orange hats, I tip my metaphorical hat to you and say thank you for your efforts again this year.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to pay tribute to the operators of the *George Black* ferry in Dawson City and the Pelly barge in Ross River.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure again this season to travel on both of those vessels and certainly appreciate the professionalism of the staff on all of my trips. I would like to particularly thank the crew of the Pelly barge for going the extra

mile in August when the Ross River Dena Council was holding their general assembly on the far side of the river and the crew kept the barge running late for several days in a row. I appreciate that and thank them.

I would also like to give a special shout-out to Mike Dunbar for everything that he has done in his time as acting foreman in Ross River as well.

Applause

MLA Tredger: I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to all the staff who run the *George Black* ferry and the Pelly barge. These essential pieces of infrastructure don't stay afloat on their own, so thank you to all the people who keep them running — from the captains to the mechanics to the logistics folks back at the office. Your work is very appreciated, and congratulations on a successful season.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I have several returns for tabling today. First of all, tabled pursuant to section 12(3) of the *Arts Centre Act*, I have the Yukon Arts Centre Corporation's annual report for 2022.

Tabled pursuant to section 7(7) of the *Historic Resources Act*, I have the Yukon Heritage Resources Board annual report. I also have the Yukon Geographical Place Names Board annual report, and I have a document for all members of the Assembly listing ministerial statements for the 35th Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling here today a document issued by the National Police Federation entitled *Smart Bail Initiatives: A Progressive Approach to Reforming Canada's Bail System*, which was issued in July 2023, as well as the press release that they provided with it entitled "National Police Federation Recommends Progressive, Data-Driven Approach to Bail Reform in Canada".

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 29: Reprinted Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling the reprinted version of Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*. The reprinted version incorporates the amendment to clause 2 agreed to by the Members' Services Board on October 20, 2023, as reported by that committee to the House yesterday and concurred in by the House yesterday. The bill also contains what I believe to be true translation into the French of the English text of the amendment to clause 2.

Speaker: Are there any further bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Official Opposition and the Third Party to halt efforts to gatekeep free speech by withdrawing their proposal to block the use of ministerial statements in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House wishes Ione Christensen, Yukon female trailblazer — first female Commissioner of Yukon, first female Mayor of Whitehorse, first female named Justice of the Peace for the Government of Yukon, and first female appointed judge of juvenile court, former senator, and member of both the Order of Canada and the Order of Yukon — a happy 90th birthday.

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

THAT this House urges the Official Opposition and the Third Party to take the following actions with regard to the use of ministerial statements in the Yukon Legislative Assembly:

(1) halt efforts to gatekeep free speech by the Government of Yukon;

(2) respond to ministerial statements as a way to remain accountable to Yukoners; and

(3) acknowledge that their efforts to date to control what statements the Government of Yukon can and cannot deliver is wrong.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ministerial statements

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart for the state of our democracy. The Member for Lake Laberge has brought forward a motion that would let the Yukon Party caucus and the Yukon NDP gatekeep speech in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Ministerial statements serve an important purpose. They provide important information to Yukoners that is recorded in Hansard, serving as a historical record for future generations about the most important issues of today.

In April 2022, the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections, and Privileges reaffirmed its support for ministerial statements. Opposition parties requested that they receive a copy of ministerial statements two hours before delivery so that they would have time to write a response. This had been the practice for years, but we are happy to formalize it in the Standing Orders. After all, the opposition plays an important role in our democracy as checks and balances to the government.

Our government has used ministerial statements to provide updates to Yukoners and to the Yukon Legislative Assembly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic about vaccine availability, vaccine uptake, and safety measures. It's too bad

that the Yukon Party and NDP are working together to prevent the government's ability to provide important information to Yukoners during times of crisis.

Our government has used ministerial statements to deliver information about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and about the search for children who disappeared after being kidnapped and sent to residential schools. It is sad that the Yukon NDP and the Yukon Party will limit our ability to provide this information to Yukoners about our efforts to find out what happened to friends, family, and loved ones.

Our government has used ministerial statements to update Yukoners on actions taken to protect the environment, to limit the impacts of climate change, and to protect vulnerable wildlife. Thinking back to some of their previous statements, it is not clear where the Yukon Party stands on protecting the environment, but I expect better from the Yukon NDP.

Legislative assemblies in Alberta, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, Nunavut, New Brunswick, PEI, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador all allow for ministerial statements in their Standing Orders. In Newfoundland and Labrador, ministerial statements are seen to be so important for communicating with the public that they are posted on separate sections of the House of Assembly's website in addition to Hansard.

Mr. Speaker, I am again running short on time, but I look forward to hearing the rebuttal and how the opposition justifies their gatekeeping.

Mr. Kent: So, it has come to this — a ministerial statement on ministerial statements.

Mr. Speaker, this ministerial statement makes me wonder if the Premier even bothered to read the proposed new rules. Thank you to the Premier for completely justifying the position of the opposition parties. It's pretty rich for an MLA who didn't get a single vote to become the leader of his party, nor a single vote in the 2021 election to be Premier of the Yukon, to lecture this House about the state of our democracy.

During the snap election that the Liberals called in 2021, the makeup of the House changed. The Liberals lost their majority, as they were reduced to eight seats in this House, with 11 in the opposition benches — eight Yukon Party and three NDP. They also finished a distant second to the Yukon Party in the popular vote.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals do not own the Yukon Legislative Assembly. They do not get to dictate the House rules. That is the privilege of all members in this Assembly and it is done at the all-party Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges. That committee made the decision by majority vote to adopt the new rules surrounding ministerial statements. The Liberals will have every opportunity to provide ministerial statements moving forward but will simply need to cooperate with others to do so.

I can say that this topic, which already has a motion scheduled for debate later this afternoon, would not be one that we, in the Official Opposition, would approve as a good use of valuable House time. The Liberals' gratuitous misuse of

ministerial statements has led us to this point and we look forward to the debate later this afternoon.

Ms. White: Today, I ground all of my thoughts around the finite amount of time available to us in this Chamber for the important work that gets done here; however, I am going to use some of that time right now to share my thoughts.

First, let's remember that the government sets the order of the day on all days except for one Wednesday afternoon every two weeks. Time in this Assembly is valuable. We sit in this Chamber for 60 days a year, from 1:00 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. That is 270 hours per year. If we take these hours and put them back to back, this equals 11.25 solid days a year. Honestly, it's not that long. As a comparison, it is far less than the average amount of time that an individual spends scrolling on social media in a year.

Question Period averages just over 30 minutes. The very last question from the opposition needs to start on or before 28 minutes and 30 seconds, and this works out to just about 30 hours a year. I wish this were longer.

Question Period is the only time, except for opposition Wednesdays, when the opposition controls the topic that is being discussed. During the 33rd Assembly, the Yukon Party really liked tributes. They liked tributes so much so that on Opposition debate days — which you could really call “Tribute Wednesdays” — it wasn't unusual to have tributes from government nearing double digits. On May 7, 2015, they may have set a new high-water mark with nine tributes, taking up six entire pages in Hansard. For those who didn't sit through this, it was pretty awful.

Fast-forward to the November 2016 election, which saw a change in government and the Liberals come in as a majority. There was recognition that tributes had been abused, and a decision in an all-party committee was made to limit tributes — great. We now have a maximum number of tributes and a maximum amount of time — 20 valuable minutes a day, which is still a heck of a lot of minutes. We spend nearly 20 hours a year on saying nice things about people, places, and days. It's nice, but honestly, I wish it were shorter.

Spring forward to the spring of 2017. That was the first time we saw a new kind of tribute — the ministerial statement — when the government did five ministerial statements covering a handful of topics. They were new to us. The government would send us their statements so that we would know what we were responding to. The minister first speaks for a maximum of four minutes, reading the statement we have seen. Opposition parties respond for up to four minutes, and then we get the closing four minutes from the minister. In the closing, the ministers are supposed to answer the questions that the opposition has highlighted, but we know this is seldom the case. On the contrary, this is typically where the Liberals tell either the Yukon Party or the Yukon NDP or both of us why and how we are both wrong.

Since that first fateful spring, there have been approximately 240 ministerial statements. For anyone who is curious, that's 3,840 minutes of statements — 64 hours of

statements or 2.6 entire days' worth of ministerial statements. Half of that time is used directly by the government.

In a year with 60 sitting days and out of the 270 hours available to all of us, ministerial statements take 16 hours. Keep in mind that the government decides on the topic — and over the years, there have been doozies — and often these statements are just regurgitating press releases.

I know that we have heard why these statements are so important, and at times, we would agree, but the use of ministerial statements has been abused by the Liberal government and this abuse has brought us to this point today, so much so that the very same all-party committee that addressed the issue of tributes has come forward with a recommendation to limit ministerial statements.

With glee, I look forward to seeing the use of ministerial statements being limited to important and time-sensitive topics only, and I look forward to representatives of all three parties making the decision as to if a statement comes to the floor, because if a majority of those leaders say yes, we will respond to a ministerial statement.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, again, it is a sad day for democracy. Normally, the Yukon Party criticizes us for working with the Yukon NDP to support the most vulnerable Yukoners, build affordable housing, and protect seniors and students — especially 2SLGBTQIA students. But today, we will see the unholy alliance of the Yukon Party and the NDP working together to limit Yukoners' ability to access information about their government.

The conspirators of the Yukon Party and NDP have used their majority on the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges to try to amend the Standing Orders in this House to limit an important mechanism of this Legislature to provide information to Yukoners. What, one might ask, does the Member for Whitehorse Centre have in common with the Member for Lake Laberge when it comes to perspective on policy debated in this Legislative Assembly? Before today, I would say, “Not much”, but now, we have an unstoppable desire to gatekeep information from Yukoners and cancel free speech in the Legislative Assembly.

We all expect the Yukon Party to operate in the shadows, hoping that Yukoners won't notice as they try to roll back our rights and obfuscate with the media. It is how they governed when they were in office, and today, based on those comments and the personal attacks — different face, same old. Conservatives talk a big game about not limiting free speech, but we all know that, once in power, they have always been there and revert back to their most basic instincts.

What about the NDP? Based on the Yukon NDP's willingness to work with the Yukon Party to limit Yukoners' access to information, one can only assume that they, too, revel in their newfound ability to silence speech, keep Yukoners in the dark, and limit future generations' ability to gain important information from the records of Hansard. Under new rules proposed by this unholy opposition alliance, the Yukon NDP and the Yukon Party would have the ability to veto ministerial statements based on the topic alone. They aren't even interested

in hearing the information contained in the ministerial statement before making a decision to gatekeep information from Yukoners.

I hope that tomorrow we will be able to deliver a ministerial statement. We are hoping to deliver an update on the status of vaccines for COVID-19 and flu. I hope that the opposition parties will deem this to be important information for Yukoners and will find it within themselves to allow the government to communicate with Yukoners, but I wouldn't be surprised if they don't.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Whistle Bend development

Ms. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, this summer, we warned the Liberal government that the early release of lots in phase 6B of Whistle Bend was going to cause issues. In the lottery package for the lots, there was a specific note that said that while the lots would not be accessible immediately upon purchase, final construction work would be complete in the spring or early summer. Well, unfortunately, that didn't happen. Yukoners who purchased these lots were forced to wait well into the fall before they had access to the lots in phase 6B. This means that they effectively lost the building season.

Why did the government rush these lots out in the spring rather than wait for them to be finished?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The reason that we will always work to try to get lots out as quickly as we can is because we are working to get them in the hands of Yukoners. There is lots of work that those Yukoners can do while the last work is being done to complete the lots — work such as getting development permits in place and doing their planning. That is the reason why we went forward. We deemed that it would be best to get them into the hands of Yukoners.

What I can say is that, once again, all the lots were taken up. We did let Yukoners know that there was this challenge. The last word I had is that the lots have now been released — I think the last ones were happening just in the last couple of weeks — so it is about trying to make sure that we get lots into the hands of Yukoners as quickly as possible.

Ms. Clarke: The decision to rush these lots out in the spring before they were even completed has had real implications for Yukoners and the homebuilders who bought them. First of all, they were told that the lots would be ready in the spring or early summer, which proved to be incorrect. Next, these lots have been accruing interest since they were sold, despite the fact that the owners couldn't even access them.

It makes no sense for a home builder to pay interest on a lot that they haven't been able to access for almost half a year. This is a cost that will simply be passed on and will only serve to make the houses built on these lots even more expensive.

Why is the minister making housing more expensive by allowing interest to accrue on inaccessible lots?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the Land Management branch is working with those lot owners — or the ones who have come through on the lottery — and we are

dedicated to increasing the development of housing for Yukoners. We recently revised our land title transfer process to change the stage at which title can be transferred. You will remember those conversations that we had here in the House this past spring where we worked with the City of Whitehorse on that.

There is an issue around the interest. When I dug into it with the department, it is there in a legislated capacity, so I couldn't just automatically refund the money, but I have talked to the department and have asked them to find a solution for those lot owners. I hope that is being communicated as well to the owners, but the department is working to find a solution to make sure that we are not charging interest for the time in which those lot owners couldn't get on their lot to start developing.

Ms. Clarke: Another implication of the Liberals' mishandling of these lots is that the people who bought these lots have effectively lost the building season. They didn't get access to the lots that they purchased and paid for in the spring until this fall when it was too late to get any work done.

Would the government reconsider the three-year building commitment that these lots have imposed on them since they have already lost a building season?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, I have asked the department to look into that as well. By the way, these are not political decisions; these are things that were happening with the department and they were happening because of delays in construction. I will take the responsibility for it, but for the members opposite to suggest that it has to do with us as Liberals is kind of like saying that those folks don't know what they are doing. Honestly, they are doing really good work; we have pressed them to work hard to try to make sure that we get as many lots into Yukoners' hands as quickly as possible and we will do our best to make sure that those lot owners are made whole. We always strive to make sure that they can get to lot development.

Question re: Parent advisory committee

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, last week, I asked the Minister of Education about the establishment of a permanent parent advisory committee following the Ombudsman's report on sexual abuse at Hidden Valley Elementary School. In response, the minister felt that the question was — quote: "... 'I got you' kind of politics..."

However, I have to remind the minister that she herself announced this on CBC Yukon during a September 8 interview. The minister told the host that she — quote: "... asked the department to make a permanent parent advisory committee..."", later saying that it would be for all schools, not just Hidden Valley.

Last week, the minister indicated that this would be one committee for all of the Yukon. However, many questions remain.

When did she direct the department to establish a permanent parent advisory committee for all schools? Have the terms of reference been developed and are they available publicly?

Hon. Ms. McLean: I am happy to rise again to speak about the work that we've done — to begin with, to go back in time a bit to talk about the safer schools action plan, which resulted from the review as a result of incidents that happened at Hidden Valley Elementary School. Part of the recommendations that were given through that review — there were seven — resulted in a 23-action-item plan that we've recently completed.

One of the actions was to establish a parent advisory committee for Hidden Valley. I have worked closely with that committee over the period of time in implementing the action plan and felt it to be very useful. I have had discussions with them about the need to continue as we continue to dig into other safer schools actions. I have advised, of course, our department, through the advisory committee, to begin the work on establishing such a committee that would —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Kent: My questions were: When did she direct the department to establish the committee for all schools? Have those terms of reference been developed? Are they available publicly? None of these were answered by the minister.

So, a number of school committees have been asking us about this new committee that the minister announced in early September. As far as we can tell, there has been no consultation about it with school councils that we have heard directly from. When can education partners — including school boards and councils — expect to be consulted on the establishment of the permanent parent advisory committee?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I think that it is important to build context around the questions that are being asked and where this advisory committee came from, why it was established, and how it has served Yukoners. I believe that it is a great committee that has certainly provided the Department of Education and myself good guidance as we have worked to implement the safer schools action plan. Under the incidents that happened at Hidden Valley, there were a number of other reports — one of them from the Child and Youth Advocate; another one that we recently received is from the Ombudsman, and we expect to receive a second report with possible recommendations from the Ombudsman's office.

Again, we intend to continue to work with the parent advisory committee. Last week, I had a great meeting with the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees. One of the topics that we discussed was the establishment of a permanent parent advisory committee.

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, my questions are about this new distinct committee. The minister made clear in her announcement on CBC Yukon in early September that there would be a new, distinct committee created for all Yukon schools. There has been no public announcement since then. Last week, the minister defiantly said in this House: "... it is completely within my authority to establish such a committee..." Even though she believes she can unilaterally establish this committee, we would have hoped that consultation with education partners would take place beforehand, and obviously, that didn't happen.

So, when will the committee or committees be set up? How many members will be on it, and how will they be chosen to be representative of all of the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, again, this is, I think, a very important group of folks who have come together. These are Yukoners, parents who have come together to advise the Department of Education and myself on matters that have resulted from the safer schools action plan.

This has been a very useful body. I intend to establish a permanent parent advisory committee. The Department of Education is, of course, working with folks to establish terms of reference that will include other members in the Yukon and will continue to work with, as we discussed, the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees last week. We still have time, of course, to work with our partners around any advice that they may have with such a committee.

It is within my authority to establish such a committee to advise on areas that are of concern to Yukoners, and of course, the safer schools action plan is one of those areas.

Question re: Minto mine reclamation

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the minister gave a ministerial statement on how well this government is doing when it comes to handling the fiasco that is Minto mine. He said — and I quote: "We are actively advancing reclamation and closure planning and execution. Contractors on-site are in regular communication with Energy, Mines and Resources senior staff to inform effective, timely decision-making."

What the minister failed to mention is that, in the short time since the Liberals put JDS Mining in charge of the site, they have already been under investigation for violating their water licence. In August, a Yukon government inspector found that the contractor was dredging the Yukon River without authorization, without notifying the Water Board, and without implementing any monitoring or mitigation. This seems like it might have been worth mentioning in his statement yesterday.

Does the minister believe that water licence violations are consistent with the environmental protections that he promised Yukoners at the Minto site?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: First of all, JDS is not working at the Minto site. We did utilize a contract with them right away, and I want to thank them for their work. They came in — they were part of that ability to move in within 24 hours and keep that mine site safe, keep us treating water, making sure that we protected the environment, and I thank them for that work. As I said in the response giving answers to the questions that were given in the ministerial statement yesterday, I talked about Boreal Engineering. They are the group that is doing the work now.

There are companies from time to time throughout the Yukon that do make mistakes, and that's why we have compliance monitoring and inspections. We work to hold all companies to account to make sure that we protect our environment. I will stand up and reiterate that I believe that the work at Minto has been going very well, and I would like to thank the crews who have been doing that work to protect our environment.

Ms. White: So, the Liberals talk a lot about how they want to do mining differently. When Minto collapsed, they promised that this time it would be okay, that this time they would protect the environment.

In a May press release, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said — and I quote: “We are working closely with the contractor and the Selkirk First Nation to make sure the environment is protected at all times.” But it wasn’t, and this is getting harder and harder to believe. Instead, this government put a contractor in charge of the site, and within months, the company violated three conditions of their water licence.

So, why should Yukoners trust the Liberals when they have failed over and over again to protect the environment?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, this is a very difficult question in the sense that I try to understand — if the NDP were in power, would they hire no companies? Or would they just say, “Let’s pull away from all of this”?

Part of it for me, when I think about copper — we need it, as well, to deal with climate change. This is one of those challenges. Yes, I think we need mining. I said yesterday that mining is critical. It’s critical that we get it right.

Will there be mistakes made? Yes. What I look for is to see how the system corrects those mistakes as quickly as possible. That’s exactly the same work that I used to do as an engineer. You don’t say that you are never going to have mistakes. What you ask is, “How will we deal with them?”

I will go back and look at this file to see exactly how quickly the issues were dealt with.

What I can say is that, overall — and I visited the Minto site just in the last couple of weeks to see how the work was going. It is going well. It is moving in the right direction. I believe strongly that we have taken the right decisions, learning from Wolverine that we should go to reclamation and closure.

Ms. White: So, this mistake matters, and it matters even more because it was a salmon-bearing river. The unauthorized dredging happened during the salmon run when it is critically important that sediment isn’t going into the river. The collapse of the salmon run is a devastating tragedy that has deeply damaged cultural practices, ways of life, and ecosystems throughout the Yukon, and here we have a government patting itself on the back for hiring a company that dredged the Yukon River in the middle of the salmon run.

How can the minister claim that the management of Minto mine is successful when protections for salmon have already been violated?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: You know, Mr. Speaker, I hope that I am not patting myself on the back. I will say that this file has caused me a lot of time agonizing about how to make sure to protect the Yukon environment, and to do this in a way where we have learned from past missteps, including Faro and Wolverine. I sat down with experts to talk through what the situation was and how to make it better. I have been in contact with Selkirk First Nation often. I have directed my department to be talking with them all the time around the work that is happening.

Will there be mistakes that are made? Yes. Will we correct them? Yes. What I think the test is, is how quickly we can

correct those mistakes and how quickly we can limit them, but I don’t want to stand up here and suggest that there never will be mistakes. I just don’t believe in that. I know that some politicians will say it, but I won’t.

So, from my perspective, this site is moving in the right direction. I have worked very closely with Selkirk First Nation, and I appreciate their advice, and I have been taking it.

Question re: Public Accounts

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of Finance issued a statement indicating that he intended to violate section 8 of the *Financial Administration Act* regarding Public Accounts. The Public Accounts of Yukon is one of the most important ways that Yukoners can hold the government accountable for their spending.

So, can the minister confirm that he intends to violate the Yukon’s most important financial accountability law?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The 2022-23 Public Accounts will include the adoption of five new public sector accounting standards, which will have a significant impact on the presentation of and the values of the government’s financial statements. So, due to those complexities and the magnitude of the impact of these new standards, the preparation and the review of the revised and restated statements will take longer than usual, which may result in the government tabling its financial statements later than its legislated deadline of October 31.

It is not the first time in Yukon history that this has happened. The Department of Finance is working diligently with the Office of the Auditor General of Canada to complete the audit this year with the level of accuracy that our Public Accounts traditionally provide.

Mr. Hassard: On October 19, the Auditor General of Canada wrote to the Legislative Assembly to indicate that, as of that time, they still had not received the final consolidated financial statements from the Government of Yukon. They further stated that delays from the Yukon Housing Corporation were also creating issues.

Section 8(2) of the *Financial Administration Act* says that the Minister of Finance shall table the Public Accounts on or before October 31. If this does not happen, who should Yukoners hold accountable for this violation of Yukon’s most important financial accountability and transparency law?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance, this is my ultimate responsibility, absolutely. Tabling of the Public Accounts after the legislative deadline does not reflect an issue with financial statements themselves, nor does it imply a problem with the government’s finances.

Should it be necessary to table the Public Accounts after the deadline, it would be the result of these new added complexities. Working with the federal government with 3280, specifically — one of these new requirements — is very difficult for a government — and this has happened right across Canada — to give numbers that we didn’t, decades ago, keep. So, there has been a lot of back-and-forth with the Office of the Auditor General and us to make sure that we get these in as accurately as possible and as quickly as possible.

Question re: School busing

Ms. Van Bibber: Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear that the shortage of school bus drivers is causing issues for many families. Last week, my colleague asked what the government is doing to help the busing contractor recruit school bus drivers. This week, we learned that the school bus company has recruited some new drivers, but they are facing significant delays in accessing the driver's test from the Department of Highways and Public Works. Apparently, the earliest these new school bus drivers can do their test is in early December.

Why isn't the Yukon government fast-tracking drivers' tests for school bus drivers so that we can limit the disruption for families who have been impacted by the constant disruptions of bus routes?

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education provides school busing, city transit passes, and transportation subsidies to families to support students. Transportation is a very big part of a child's education. We thank you for the acknowledgement of the work that has been done. Today, in this question, it points to the good work that is happening between the Department of Education and the contractor, Standard Bus.

We have worked hard to support them in terms of mitigating some of the issues that they have had. I think that I would like to just point out that there are so many complexities, really, with providing services in the City of Whitehorse, for instance. There are 43 routes, and there have been a lot of cancellations and we know that. Much of it has been due to a shortage of bus drivers and we are working hard to assist and mitigate this issue.

Question re: Bail system reform

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I asked the Minister of Justice questions about her government's response to recommendations by the union representing RCMP members, the National Police Federation, about reforming the bail system. She didn't answer any of my questions and it sounded like she hadn't read the NPF recommendations issued months ago, even though every single one of them requires action by territorial governments. The current bail system isn't working. Too often, repeat offenders are quickly released back on the streets where they reoffend. We know that RCMP members are frustrated. The president of their union called it a "catch-and-release system."

The National Police Federation said that all levels of government, especially provinces and territories, need to work together to move toward a 21st century, evidence-based, intelligence-driven bail system.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what, if anything, this government is doing in response to the NPF recommendations aimed at fixing the bail system and keeping repeat offenders off the streets?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am happy to speak again to Yukoners about this important issue. Again, to put it in context, the form of the bail system is part of the Canadian *Criminal Code*, which, of course, requires cooperation and collaboration with the Government of Canada. I said yesterday, and I am

happy to say again, that in March 2023, meetings with other federal, provincial, and territorial ministers of justice and public safety occurred to specifically discuss the bail system issues and, in particular, its treatment of repeat violent offenders.

The Government of Canada agreed to take action as soon as possible to strengthen public safety through amendments to the *Criminal Code*. On May 16, 2023, in fact, they tabled Bill C-48, which is currently working its way through Parliament. This continues to be a very important issue. It was spoken about recently at the federal-provincial-territorial ministers meeting.

Mr. Cathers: Again, the minister didn't answer my question. Urgent actions by the Trudeau Liberals to fix the problems that they caused with Bill C-75 are needed, but the NPF, which represents RCMP members, in its recommendations entitled *Smart Bail Initiatives*, was very clear that provinces and territories also need to act.

Yesterday, the Minister of Justice seemed completely unaware that the NPF urged every province and territory to take action, and concerningly, she seemed not to have read the recommendations issued months ago. The NPF said that "... all governments, in particular provincial and territorial governments, must be willing to commit to smarter bail reforms that go beyond legislative measures. Simple policy reforms and better resourcing could have a significant impact..."

They issued recommendations for smart bail initiatives, all of which involve provincial and territorial governments. Those include more resources to collection and sharing of data and improving community bail enforcement monitoring. The question is: What, if anything, is the Liberal government doing in response to the NPF's calls for action to fix the catch-and-release bail system?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I'm pretty sure that the member opposite doesn't have any idea of what I'm aware of, and I would appreciate it if they wouldn't continue to make such statements in the Legislative Assembly. I am responding to the questions asked. I look forward to working with our new federal counterpart, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada Arif Virani, along with other provinces and territories, to explore both legislative and non-legislative tools to better address this issue.

We have had participation in every one of the meetings that involved other ministers of justice and ministers of public safety across the country for the purposes of discussing this issue and the recommendations that have been made by several organizations, going forward, and how to best address them.

Mr. Cathers: Five questions — no answers from the minister.

The National Police Federation said, "The current 'catch and release' system and lack of data-informed processes, supports and monitoring compromises public safety across Canada" and "Without serious, wholesale reform jurisdictions across Canada are at risk of a bail system that is broken beyond repair."

They specifically call on provinces and territories to take action to implement smart bail initiatives. All seven calls to action require action by this government. The Premier signed a joint letter by premiers to the Prime Minister about what that

government needs to do, but the NPF is clear that provinces and territories also need to take action to fix the system.

The minister seems out of touch again and is clearly not on top of this important file, so I will give her another chance. Will the Minister of Justice commit to acting on all seven NPF recommendations to fix the catch-and-release bail system, and will she provide us with a timeline for when her government will act on those recommendations and implement them?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: What I am hearing from the member opposite is, first of all: What are we doing in the sense of taking this on to make the changes that this country needs and that this territory needs? First, I want to reflect on the fact that the National Police Federation, in the initial meeting that I had with them — it was the first time that we ever had leaders from across the country sit in a meeting and actually meet with them and go through and listen to them. That was the first thing.

The second thing we did was in July of this year — we sat down again with the NPF. In the first meeting, we didn't have representation from the RCMP. We did have other forces from across the country in those meetings. I stood strongly with premiers from across the country, putting together our strategy to ensure that the federal government put the proper legislation on the floor of Parliament as quickly as possible.

We acted, they listened, and we are now urging them to get that through as quickly as possible. So, yes, there has been leadership and action on this file. Our Department of Justice, again, will be working on a number of the interdependencies with that particular work. The member opposite has not given any of the credit due to the premiers, as we have stood up and have had those changes in action. That is the leadership that the country needs and that the territory needs.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Speaker: Motions respecting committee reports.

MOTIONS RESPECTING COMMITTEE REPORTS

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6

Clerk: Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6, standing in the name of Mr. Cathers.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Lake Laberge:

THAT the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges' eighth report, presented to the House on October 4, 2023, be concurred in; and

THAT Standing Order 11(3.3), regarding requiring House Leader agreement for the delivery of ministerial statements, be added to the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, as recommended by the committee.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, this motion is to concur with a report from an all-party committee, the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges. The majority of MLAs on that all-party committee voted in favour of a change to the

Standing Orders that the Liberals disagree with, and they are trying to delay and put up roadblocks to prevent it being enacted.

I believe that this is the first time in the history of the Yukon Legislative Assembly that any government of any political stripe has refused to bring forward a motion of concurrence to accept the recommendation of an all-party committee, so we decided to bring forward the motion asking this House to accept the majority decision made by the all-party committee ourselves.

The change itself is intended to prevent the Liberal government from wasting the House's time with ministerial statements that re-announce press releases or are otherwise empty and lacking in substance. Our motion today would not prevent the government from making ministerial statements; it would simply require them to cooperate just a little and get the agreement of one other House Leader that the statement was indeed a new policy and worthy of the House's time to debate.

Ministerial statements are supposed to be about new and significant policy announcements by government. Instead, this Liberal government repeatedly uses them for re-announcements of press releases and other fluffy statements that, in our view, are an abuse of ministerial statements. Also, as noted by the Leader of the Third Party earlier today, the closing statement is intended to be about the minister answering questions posed by those responding to the ministerial statement, but instead, it is regularly used — almost exclusively used — to take shots at either the Yukon Party, the NDP, or both.

These ministerial statements burn up hours of time, subtracting from the valuable and very limited amount of time we have to ask the government questions about issues that matter to Yukoners and bring forward issues on behalf of our constituents and other Yukoners.

I will give an example of how this Liberal government has abused ministerial statements and the consequences of that. During one Spring Sitting, the Liberals were very reluctant to allow much debate on the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Education budgets. In that Sitting, the hours spent on ministerial statements, many of which were pointless re-announcements, added up to wasting over a full day of the 30-day Spring Sitting.

In contrast, Mr. Speaker, during that Sitting, there was less time spent debating the Department of Health and Social Services budget of \$443 million, which was almost 30 percent of that fiscal year's budget for the entire territorial government — but again, there was less time spent debating the Department of Health and Social Services budget than was spent on ministerial statements. More time was also spent on ministerial statements in that Sitting than on debating the Department of Education budget of \$214.5 million. The combined total of the budget for those departments was 45.8 percent of the government's total spending, and those departments touch the lives of thousands of Yukoners every single day.

Asking questions about Health and Social Services and Education is far more important to Yukoners than listening to re-announcements of government press releases. So, this is why

we are proposing a change to the Standing Orders — which, I remind you, the majority of MLAs on an all-party committee have already voted in favour of doing.

The Legislative Assembly sits for a limited number of days, which has not increased in over 20 years. During that time, devolution led to the Yukon government having more responsibility and power. The population has grown, and the budget of the territory has roughly tripled, but the time available for MLAs to debate the budget and ask questions on behalf of Yukoners has not increased.

It is also worth noting that the use of ministerial statements on a daily basis was started by the Liberals. During any month of any Sitting under the Liberal government, they have literally done more ministerial statements than the Yukon Party government did in 14 years in office. We felt ministerial statements weren't a good use of the House's time when we were in government, and that feeling has only grown much, much stronger now. Most people are likely familiar with the saying, "This meeting could have been replaced with an e-mail." Well, just like that, most ministerial statements by the Liberals could have been replaced with a press release and, in most cases, probably already were a press release.

The Liberal Cabinet Office put out an over-the-top statement about this motion recently. Frankly, Mr. Speaker, I didn't think that the Liberals could find a way to top that, but today, the Premier's ministerial statement on ministerial statements was a jumping-the-shark moment for his Liberal government. Some of his statements were outlandish and bizarre, and I will resist the temptation to respond in detail, because I suspect that I would give in to the temptation to break Standing Order 19(h). I am also not going to spend much time dignifying those over-the-top statements, or press releases, with a response, other than pointing out that the government has many, many tools at its disposal if they want to share a message with Yukoners.

If the government issues a press release or holds a press conference, media cover it. The government also has social media that it controls and its own website to post any news about any topic whenever they want. They also have a large advertising budget at their disposal, which they can increase at any time if they wish, and of course, if you add up the number of government communications staff, between the Cabinet Communications office and departments, there are more communications staff in government than there are journalists in the territory trying to cover government.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal assertion that the opposition could somehow censor government communication is nonsensical and completely ridiculous.

The Premier has also tried to paint a picture that ministerial statements are somehow vital. The notion that some Yukoners don't listen to the news or read it but somehow depend on hearing ministerial statements as their source of information about government is frankly laughable. I am pretty sure that there is no one in the Yukon sitting at home every day eagerly awaiting the moment when they can turn the dial to 93.5 FM and hear the ministerial statement of the day.

As noted earlier, if the Liberals do come forward with a proposed ministerial statement that has substance and is worthy of debate, we will happily agree to scheduling it for debate. Even if our caucus doesn't agree with scheduling one for debate, all the Liberal minority government needs to do is to get the NDP to agree that the statement is worth the House's time.

At its heart, this is just about the Liberal government giving up their total control of this part of the House's time and actually having to cooperate a little bit with someone else.

The Liberals have already threatened to spend a lot of time arguing against this motion. I urge them to avoid filibustering this motion, allow it to get to a vote in a timely manner, and allow this House to move on to other motions scheduled for today, like the Yukon Party motion about cancelling the government's plan to close rural garbage facilities affecting people, including my constituents in the Braeburn area, as well as two NDP motions which are listed for later today.

In closing, to recap what this is about, if passed, this change to the Standing Orders would simply require the Liberal minority government to get the agreement of one other House Leader that a proposed ministerial statement was indeed a new policy and worthy of the House's time to debate it. All it would require is just a little cooperation by this Liberal minority government.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, we have five standing committees. On each one of those standing committees, we have: two members of the Liberal Party, the government; two members of the Yukon Party, the Official Opposition; and one member of the NDP. On all but one of those committees, the government member chairs, so you effectively have one Liberal member, two Yukon Party members, and one NDP member who are voting. In other words, the opposition has three votes on those committees, and the government has one vote. That's fine; that's how it works.

There is something that I disagree with the member opposite on: It isn't the decision of those committees; those committees make recommendations back to the Assembly. This is the place that is the highest level — I mean, technically, this is the government. What we use the word "government" to mean is often the executive branch; this is the legislative branch and we have the judicial branch, but it is the Legislature that takes the decisions.

We have an example of that from yesterday with the Members' Services Board bringing the motion, doing the Committee work on Bill No. 29, and we worked to bring that back. In fact, I asked the indulgence of this House to get to that debate without one day's notice, and away we went.

The Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges — I am going to start calling it "SCREP" — is the committee where we make up the rules for how we conduct ourselves in this House. It is pretty important, and I think it's a privilege. I happen to be one of the members, and I think it's a very important committee. I thank the committee members for all of the work that has been happening on SCREP. It has been a lot of work lately.

I went back to try to look at how that standing committee, which deals with rules about how we govern ourselves, has done since, say, 2000. Under the Duncan government, that committee met nine times; under Premier Fentie's two successive governments, it met five times — a lot less, no reports; and under the Pasloski government, it met once — no reports, and it had as its members the current Leader of the Yukon Party and the Member for Lake Laberge, who is standing up and putting forward this motion today.

Under us, in the last two Assemblies — under the Liberals — the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges — SCREP — has met 19 times over the past seven years, and we have issued 10 reports. Those reports come here to the Assembly, where we vote on them and where we talk about the rules. I think it is worth noting that, under the confidence and supply agreement, we have had much more movement with SCREP. I think it's pretty impressive, but today is a very different subject, and I am going to talk about today in a bit, but let's talk for a moment about what changes we have brought forward over those 10 reports.

First of all, we limited the overall time of tributes to 20 minutes. We established regular sitting dates that were going to happen in the first week of October and the first week of March every year, taking away this challenge of the Legislative Assembly and the challenge of the public service in trying to plan. We worked to consolidate introductions so that they didn't go on too long, so that time was managed better, and we introduced a new rule that allowed the Speaker to acknowledge the First Nation traditional territory at the beginning of each Sitting.

Since the confidence and supply agreement, we have also added more to our rules. We brought in limiting the length of individual tributes to three and a half minutes; requiring ministerial statements to be shared two hours ahead — we were already doing that as a practice, but we made it a rule that you had to have the ministerial statement in the hands of the opposition parties by 11:00 a.m. or else we would not deliver a ministerial statement; inclusive forms of address; limiting Committee of the Whole speeches to foster more questions and answers — that is one of the biggest ones. We went from 20 minutes per question and/or answer to eight minutes. Now, the opening remarks from the minister and the critic from the opposition parties could take 20 minutes, but it was really about limiting it, because what we saw debate happening in previous Legislative Assemblies — we would see that it was used to take up time rather than to answer the questions, so that was what we did with that. Finally, we also brought in the clause 76, often called the “guillotine clause”, which was only going to be for budget bills, and we shortened the length of bells calling for division to record votes so that we would get that done faster.

Today, we are debating ministerial statements, and this motion that we have in front of us is completely different from all of this other work, and I'll talk about it in a moment, but I would say that, before today, I would categorize the improvements that happened under us, as a Liberal government, in conjunction with the confidence and supply agreement made through SCREP, as being about two things,

really: increasing the efficiency of the House, trying to streamline our time so that we can have more time to debate budgets and legislation; and being about fairness and inclusion — for example, about fixed Sitting dates, about inclusive forms of address, et cetera.

On all of those debates that we brought in, of those 10 reports where we brought in the changes to the rules of this House — how we govern ourselves and how we conduct ourselves — we have had healthy debate, and before today, we have reached agreement across all parties. Today, we do not have that. Why is today so different? What we are debating is whether or not the opposition should be able to “obstruct” ministerial statements. That is not my word; I am borrowing that word from Floyd McCormick.

I listened to the Member for Lake Laberge give his opening address to this motion, and I have heard him, so many times, reference Dr. McCormick in this House — quote him back. In fact, when I look back through the past several years here in the Assembly, I found dozens of times where the member opposite quoted — and not just the Member for Lake Laberge, but the Leader of the Yukon Party, the House Leader of the Yukon Party, the past Leader of the Yukon Party, all quoting Dr. McCormick — and, today, Dr. McCormick put out a social media post and referred to it as “obstruction”. That is how he was talking about it yesterday.

I think that it is important to note this: That, as the opposition appoint themselves as gatekeepers for information being shared with Yukoners — to put it plainly, and — okay, that's fine; the members opposite laugh. I am disheartened by this motion today. They think that it is a laughing matter; I do not. Today's motion is disheartening, and I am concerned for the erosion of our democracy — and again, the members laugh.

Before I get to why, let me give you some background on ministerial statements to build on what the Member for Lake Laberge has said. They were introduced into Canadian Parliament roughly 50 years ago, in 1975. By the time we got to responsible government here, in 1979, they were already part of our Yukon Daily Routine. So, they have been part of the Assembly all along, up until now, when they are about to change.

They are a brief statement from a minister — four minutes is what you are given. Each opposition party gets four minutes to respond; then the minister rises again to sum up and answer the questions. I disagree with the member in what he has said about the purpose of the ministerial statements. This language was put into our Standing Orders in 2001. They are — and I quote now: “... an announcement or statement on government policy or a matter of public interest.”

There is no discussion about what the reply is when the minister gets up. It doesn't say that the minister is required to answer questions. It just says — quoting again: “... Cabinet Commissioner may then give a reply of not more than four minutes.”

So, the Member for Lake Laberge is just adding in his perspectives and suggesting that those are the rules. It's not — and those rules have been in place since 2001. I want to just go there for a moment, too. It was interesting to me, because as a

member of the standing committee, the Clerks provide us with lots of background information. One of the things that they gave us was tables showing ministerial statements and when they have been used. In the late 1990s, under the Penikett and the McDonald governments, ministerial statements averaged more than one a day, and they were longer. That's what led to the debate at the time about limiting them to one a day and limiting them to four minutes per statement. The early 2000s is when that rule came into place.

Under the Duncan government, they were less than one a day. Under the Fentie government, there were a few statements. As the member opposite notes, under the Pasloski government, they only gave one statement over their five years. By the way, that one statement that they gave was on mental wellness, but the day they gave the statement — when I looked it up — the Yukon Party failed to let the opposition MLAs know that they were going to give that statement, so it had to come back the next day. They failed to share the statement with the members opposite, which was the practice. So, what happened that day is the ministerial statement went over two days.

The Member for Lake Laberge seems proud of the fact that his government chose not to do ministerial statements, chose not to talk to Yukoners, chose not to comment on matters of government policy and public interest. That's fine; that is their choice. What is in this motion today is whether the government requires the approval of the opposition party, or parties, in order to bring forward a ministerial statement.

By the way, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, the Leader of the NDP, when she was talking about ministerial statements, she did a lot of math to say how much time it takes up. We were told that, by taking a look at the average, it is not 60 minutes a day. That is what it can be, but what it is, is between 10 and 11 minutes a day. Okay, it still takes time — I acknowledge that — it takes time to share this information with Yukoners. As I have said, we have always had the practice of sharing that statement with the opposition parties at 11 a.m., but we made that a rule that it was a requirement.

After the 2016 election under us, as the Liberals, we went back to using ministerial statements on most days. We let House Leaders know what topic is coming, and we share the statement two hours ahead, which is now a rule of the Standing Orders. So, let's get to the why. Why do the opposition parties want to give themselves the ability to gatekeep the government or to obstruct Cabinet? Yes, that is me, again, quoting Floyd McCormick.

The Member for Lake Laberge said that this is a waste of time, and frankly, it was, for me, the toughest comment he said in his opening remarks. I think of the things that we do in this House as important. I think that the topics that we put in front of people, whether that be the sexual orientation and gender identity conversation that we had last week, whether it is the convention centre from this week, whether it is the Minto mine statement that I gave yesterday — these are all very important topics, and I don't belittle the topics that the members opposite choose to bring up during Question Period. I am surprised that the member opposite calls them a waste of time.

Ministerial statements come in the Daily Routine just ahead of Question Period. Does that make a difference? Absolutely. The Daily Routine is the one hour in this House when the cameras are on. It is the one hour when media are attending in person, so it is the time when we see the most attention on the House, and it also sees the most grandstanding in the House. When I compare Committee of the Whole, I think about the time we are in right now, in the Orders of the Day. Yesterday, we were in Committee of the Whole for Tourism and Culture. Opposition members rose roughly 30 times and asked questions. I rose roughly 30 times and supplied answers.

You know what? I will check with my colleagues, but I thought it was a healthy exchange of information. It certainly was much more respectful than what I experience — or what we all experience — here during the hour of the Daily Routine — not during Tributes, because that is when we have guests here in the Assembly, but when it comes to Question Period and ministerial statements. The Member for Lake Laberge talked about the Premier taking shots at the opposition. Does he really think that the opposition doesn't take shots at the government during those same statements during Question Period? I don't think that our House needs to be less respectful during the Daily Routine; I just think that it is.

By the way, I will say for the record that it is my experience that our Canadian legislative assemblies are more respectful than the legislative assemblies in other countries, and from my experience, the Yukon Legislative Assembly is more respectful than provincial assemblies. And again, from my experience, the 34th and 35th Assemblies, under which we have been government, have been more respectful than how this House was under the Yukon Party. I hope that the next Assembly is more respectful again, but regardless of the grandstanding during the Daily Routine, it remains the time when members of this Assembly speak most directly to Yukoners — and that makes this motion fundamentally wrong for the opposition to gatekeep the government from speaking to Yukoners.

Take yesterday as an example. I spoke about the Minto reclamation and closure. During that, I heard from my critic that we had given a media briefing recently and that we had briefed the opposition members recently. Well, I know we did that, because I asked the department to do that, and still, I had new information, and I had made a commitment that I would update the House and Yukoners on developments. That is why I brought that statement forward. Would the members opposite have decided: No, not of interest?

Then the Member for Lake Laberge raised this point: Well, we have lots of opportunities where we could make statements. We could talk to Yukoners in different ways. We could use social media; we could use news releases, as he suggested; we could make outward-facing statements, not ministerial statements; we could have community meetings; we could have media scrums; we could have debate in this House, but the House Daily Routine is a formal moment. It is recorded in Hansard. Media are present, and we ask the opposition to respond. They get the opportunity to put their perspectives on the floor and make them formally there. It is a balanced part of

our Daily Routine. So, let me use an analogy to explain how I can so easily understand that this feels wrong.

Do we get questions from the opposition? Yes, all the time. If I bump into members in the hall, we will have a conversation. Will I get questions? Yes. If I happen to be talking with them in their offices or if they are in my office, do I get questions? Yes. They send me notes, passed through pages, with questions. I get texts, e-mails, formal letters, which we casework. We get written questions submitted in the House.

With all of these ways that opposition members can ask questions, do we still need Question Period? My answer is: Of course we do. Still, I think that it should be more respectful, as I was saying earlier, but I absolutely think that Question Period is essential. I would never think to limit Question Period. I would never think to gatekeep it. I would never think to say that opposition members need to vet their questions through us first before we decide whether they are valid questions to be asked and posed in front of the House.

Imagine how egregious it would be — how much of a disservice to Yukoners — if a majority government decided to use their majority to reset the rules of this House to reduce Question Period by 10 minutes or to give the government the power to vet questions ahead of time. Imagine how that would be seen as completely inappropriate. In that analogy, just turn it around now — that is what we're debating today. The opposition, as the majority, is seeking to change the rules of the House to cut ministerial statements, to gatekeep the information being shared with Yukoners, and this is a glaring overstep.

I agree that ministerial statements are hard work. Departments put in a lot of effort distilling critical information down to a brief message. Ministers review them, edit them down, and discuss key elements with their deputy ministers and colleagues. Opposition parties also work hard to pull their criticism and questions together ahead of the House each day. I agree that it's hard work, but, of course, that is the job of MLAs. We should be working hard, not changing the rules to gatekeep government.

The opposition has said that we repeat information and that there are too many ministerial statements. Yesterday, in my statement on Minto, I already mentioned that we had recently provided some technical information, but I had new information. Even with that new information, my main message yesterday was about reclamation and closure. I used those terms in my ministerial statement a dozen times, and it still didn't get picked up in the media as reclamation and closure. It just reminds me that you really need to emphasize your message often to help get those messages clearly out to Yukoners.

One of the ways that I think about it is that I understand that there are seven members of Cabinet — seven ministers. However, there are 18 different departments — ministries, if you like. My guess is that I am in touch with these departments — through briefings, submissions, caseworks, texts, e-mails, bills, calls with deputy ministers, and community events — almost every day, and every day there is something noteworthy that would be important for Yukoners to hear about — and to hear our perspectives as well as the perspectives of the opposition.

I am not suggesting that we do more than one ministerial statement a day, but I am suggesting that we have to make decisions about which things we will share with Yukoners, because there is only one a day. We have 18 departments, and I bet you that every one of them would have something new to say to Yukoners each and every day. There is always more to share, not less.

Earlier today, I tabled a list of the ministerial statements that we have delivered since the 2021 election. That list is impressive in its scope and relevance for the Yukon. I shared a similar list to the members of the standing committee, and I asked them which ones they would take away. They declined to respond.

But I ask members of this House to take the same exercise. I've tabled it here. You can get the list. It's not hard to do if you go through Hansard. Which three out of four statements would the opposition reject? Or which one out of four would they allow Yukoners to hear about? That's what it would take to get it to one ministerial statement a week.

I just want to talk a little bit about time in this House, because the Member for Lake Laberge referred to ministerial statements as a waste of time. First of all, he talked about this as filibustering even before I had begun to talk. I had told him, before I even got here, that I intended to debate this hard and that I intended to raise serious questions and concerns about the motion that he was bringing. I made no qualms about it. I said the same things to the standing committee. I debated against this vigorously. I disagree with it completely.

But let's talk about time in the House for a moment. This takes up roughly 10 minutes a day for every day that there is a ministerial statement. Ten minutes a day is what the average is — 10 to 11 minutes a day. That's what the Clerks gave us as the analysis over time.

We have many things here in this House. I am going to reference one again. This is one that I have often heard about — that we don't have members' statements in this House. The reason I think about this is because instead what happens here is that mostly opposition members but all members of the Assembly put forward motions all the time.

If you look at our Assembly and try to see what's different with it compared to other assemblies, one of the main things is that we have over 700 motions on our Order Paper. No place has that except here. One of the reasons is that we don't have members' statements. This is something that we could discuss at SCREP.

We have already done several things that have reduced the amount of time. We have changed how the bells work in the House so that we can get to votes more quickly. We have changed — in particular, in Committee of the Whole — how we've reduced —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

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

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources is, for at least the third if not the fourth time, repeating the same list of things done by SCREP. Talking

about the bells of this House is hardly a good use of this House's time. I would urge him to actually follow the Standing Orders.

I can hear the former Premier talking off-mic. It's Standing Order 19(b), which has been part of the Standing Orders all of the time that he has been a member.

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

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite referred to ministerial statements as a waste of time and my debate is talking about the use of time in the House.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: There is no point of order. It is a dispute among members.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What are the ways in which we are trying? These are changes that we have done through SCREP that have been there in order to improve the time of this House.

One of the things that has not been mentioned at all is the fact that, right now, as a minority government, every second Wednesday is always opposition Wednesday, but what it normally is when there is a majority government is an opportunity for government members who are not members of the Cabinet to bring forward motions. That takes one day every two weeks or one of every eight days. That has gone back into debate of the budget, so we have more time for debating budgets and bills right now, not less. The most critical one that we've done is where we try to answer questions directly in Committee of the Whole and allow for there to be more iteration on questions and answers.

I have done statistical analysis on that, too, to try to see how many times members have risen in this House and opposition members have had the opportunity to rise, and it is well different than under the 33rd Assembly when they were in government.

The final point that I'll make about this question about time is that if the Yukon Party really cared about this in principle, why didn't they do it when they were in government? Why didn't they take a look at all of the ways that you could improve time through the Standing Committee of Rules, Elections and Privileges? I know that they didn't use ministerial statements — I am well aware of that — but there is a whole suite of ways. For example, the Leader of the NDP pointed out how members of the opposition just brought in tribute after tribute, especially on opposition Wednesdays. I looked at May 7, 2015. I only saw seven tributes that day; I didn't see nine, but that's fine. What I am trying to say is that the opposition members are talking about time management in the House but not displaying how they would try to improve that time management themselves when they had the opportunity.

I will also talk about when they have been in opposition. We brought forward a motion around whether or not there was a state of emergency during the pandemic in 2020, I think it was — I'll have to look it up to be sure — and the members of the Yukon Party said that it had been undemocratic for us as a

government to declare a state of emergency, so we put a motion to the floor to put their money where their mouth is and they filibustered that motion three times, taking pretty much three full days of debate over five weeks, putting politics ahead of the pandemic. That's their use of time. And then they complained because there wasn't enough time to debate Health and Social Services, but they had filibustered for three days. My perspective is that this is doing Yukoners a disservice.

The last thing that I want to talk about is why we are doing this on a Wednesday. The opposition parties have a majority of the House. I think that it is clear from the ministerial statement — I haven't heard from the NDP yet on this, but I am guessing that their perspective is that there should be the ability to gatekeep the ministerial statements. Let's see — the Premier indicated that tomorrow our intention was to bring a ministerial statement about vaccinations. Let's see — the opposition says: That's no good. Sorry, we don't need to hear about that; you can put that in a press release — no need to talk to Yukoners during the Daily Routine. Let's just see whether they will say: No, we don't want to hear that information.

I wonder how soon it will be before they say: No, we don't want to hear it in a ministerial statement, but then I am still going to give you a question in Question Period. If I was a Yukoner listening, I would want to know what it is that the opposition doesn't want to hear about. I just don't think that there should be the vetting of whether or not this is valid government business.

Also, by the way, the Leader of the NDP talked about how it is government that sets the Orders of the Day. That is true; that is true. We are the ones who put forward the legislation, and then all of us in this House debate this legislation to decide whether or not to pass it, because it is so critical for Yukoners — budgets, bills, and things that change the acts that govern us. However, the lion's share of that is not about whether we are going to debate this bill or that bill; it is just when they all come up. Each time we put up — let's say that it is Committee of the Whole for our budget and we bring in a department. It is not the government that sits there and says that you should ask this question or, no, you can't ask that question.

In fact, one of the things that I said yesterday when I had the Department of Tourism and Culture officials in with me — we were just talking ahead of time and we were sitting down, and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Corporate Services was talking about various budget questions, and I said: "Please, I don't think that they are going to ask budget questions." But they did — I did get one budget question, but it is about questions that the opposition feels are important to understand how the government is making decisions, and that is important to Yukoners.

I believe in this process. I believe that there should be the ability for each party to bring forward the things that they think are important. I just think that this is some way to provide an override so that if the members opposite don't want to do the hard work and respond to a ministerial statement, that they'll just say: No, thanks — and I don't think that's right for Yukoners. The reason that we are doing this debate on opposition Wednesdays is because we do not believe in this

amendment. We think that it's wrong, and we're going to say so.

The member talked about what would be better to do today. I said to them that we're not bringing this motion; we don't think it should be brought. The member opposite felt that it was an important motion to bring and that it was important to pass through this House to change rules that had been standing here for 50 years, more or less, and using these tools about how we talk to Yukoners and starting to whittle them away because they don't like what the government talks about. It feels completely wrong to me.

I am going to take my seat, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate hearing this debate. I disagree with the premise of the motion in front of us, and I am definitely voting against it. I will, of course, respect the will of this House, but I will continue to seek ways to talk to Yukoners and not let opposition parties gatekeep.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon to speak to the Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6, standing in the name of the Member for Lake Laberge. I will also be speaking in opposition to this motion.

Oral ministerial statements are made in the House before the Orders of the Day. Their purpose is to announce new policies or provide specific information about current or urgent political matters, although the actual wording in Standing Order 11(4) is: "On the Ministerial Statement, as listed in Standing Order 11(2), a member who has been designated as a Cabinet Commissioner may make an announcement or statement related to his or her Commission." It just says: "... may make an announcement or statement...", so there isn't much in the way of modifiers, but I certainly heard from the member opposite as to what he believes the modifier ought to be, which could have been some of the work that SCREP could have done but chose not to.

This is a well-established custom in many Canadian legislatures. Through my comments, I will be quoting some portions of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, edited by Mark Bosc and André Gagnon, which provides some valuable guidance.

Parliamentary procedures have been described as a means of reaching decisions on when and how power shall be used. Parliamentary procedures have also been described as a combination of two elements: the traditional and the democratic. Put differently, while parliamentary procedures, based on the Westminster model, stem from an understanding and acceptance of how things have been done in the past, they are also embedded in a culture that evolves along democratic principles.

In Bosc and Gagnon, they quote John George Bourinot, an authority on parliamentary procedure and Clerk of the Canadian House of Commons from 1880 to 1902. In his 1892 book *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, Bourinot is quoted: "The great principles that lie at the basis of English parliamentary law have ... been always kept steadily in view by the Canadian legislatures; these are: To protect the minority and restrain the improvidence and tyranny

of the majority, to secure the transaction of public business in a decent and orderly manner, to enable every member to express his opinions within those limits necessary to preserve decorum and to prevent an unnecessary waste of time, to give full opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken heedlessly and upon sudden impulse."

I would just emphasize again in that quote: "... to protect the minority and restrain the improvidence and tyranny of the majority..."

Also, in Bosc and Gagnon, Erskine May, British constitutional theorist and Clerk of the United Kingdom House of Commons, posits that some of the forms and rules of practice were no doubt invented in Parliament itself but also have been traced to analogies in the medieval courts of law and the councils of the church. Some rule and practices have remained virtually unchanged for the last 400 years. The origins of some of the earliest practices of parliamentary procedure are "lost in history". Once again, that is the overarching theme of restraint and respect for long-standing traditions.

If passed, the motion before the House today will remove an important element of the government's accountability to Yukoners. This motion is a de facto veto over a sitting government with respect to a core component of the Order Paper.

As we have heard from the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes, in the last government — and in prior governments, as well — there was a succession of majority governments — the Yukon Liberal Party had a majority and by extension enjoyed a majority on the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, also known as "SCREP". The government and other majority governments in the Yukon before that could have moved to seriously curtail Question Period, Tributes, the conduct in Committee of the Whole, and, at its most extreme, substantially alter all Standing Orders in a manner that would limit the right of speech and would, in fact, be a tyranny of the majority, which is strongly discouraged, hopefully for fairly self-evident reasons.

I would argue that there are elements in the motion today that bely a lack of recognition of how the erosion of democracy occurs. Perhaps many do, but in any event, this is how it can happen — slowly but surely.

The opposition is deciding today to effectively eliminate a critical piece of the democratic discourse in the Yukon Legislative Assembly. Erosion of accountability is a real thing. Erosion of democracy is a real thing. We are, of course, extremely fortunate to have a well-functioning and healthy democracy and for Canada itself to be part of the very few countries — of the 200-plus countries that are in the United Nations — with full-fledged democracy. That number is somewhere, I think, between 25 and 30 or so. We are fortunate to gather here with substantial rights of free speech in order to represent our ridings and our constituents.

The opposition in this motion is basically saying that whatever the Yukon government proposes to communicate to Yukoners, we will let you know if we want to hear about it. This is, of course, not new for the Yukon Party, as

accountability is evidently at times not of value or importance to them. When the Yukon Party was in power, ministerial statements existed as an instrument but were inexplicably basically not used at all. As the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes indicated, the Yukon Party got around, over a two-day period, to deliver one ministerial statement between 2011 and 2016 in the 33rd Legislature.

When a government provides a ministerial statement, the ministers are putting themselves out there and are open to full critique and criticism, as the government is highlighting an item of importance to Yukoners, and, of course, the opposition can and does respond. Of course, I will acknowledge that it is work for the government, and it requires, as well, a certain amount of effort for the opposition to respond, yet it is a vital component of political discourse.

This motion today is at least a potential complete veto from the opposition. However, Mr. Speaker, the role of the opposition is to keep the government accountable to Yukoners and to question and oppose, as they deem appropriate, on behalf of Yukoners. The opposition treat the ministerial statement as if it is a superfluous process. However, the UK-based Hansard Society is clear: Question Period and ministerial statements are actually regularly singled out as a procedure that the government should give more time to by curtailing or limiting other less effective procedures, such as other debate.

The Member for Lake Laberge has, of course, been a member of this Legislature for a significant period. In fact, he will soon become the longest serving MLA in the so-called “modern era”, and yet, today, I put forward that he is misguidedly arguing that what he is proposing will improve democratic debate in this House.

Ministerial accountability is a fundamental principle. The government is accountable through its ministers to this Legislative Assembly. I would reinforce the message that the opposition is also accountable to Yukoners. What the members on the other side of the House are suggesting today is also relinquishing their collective accountability for their side of the equation. The opposition is trading their responsibility and accountability toward Yukoners with this intemperate power move. This procedural change, if voted in favour by a majority of members today, will curtail the opportunity for valuable additional scrutiny and transparency on a wide variety of important territorial issues.

Over the last few sessions, I have had the honour of delivering ministerial statements on but not limited to: the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*; energy-efficient retrofits; the Carmacks bypass; Xplornet; COP27; the Erik Nielsen International Airport work; the Nisutlin Bay bridge; work on the north Klondike Highway; the *Yukon Parks Strategy*; solar energy at remote highway camps; the COVID-19 verification app; the Dempster fibre project; a ban on single-use shopping bags and eventually paper bags; and others.

Even if I could credibly characterize most of these items as good news stories, ministers still metaphorically stick their necks out and are vulnerable, as they should be, to the scrutiny of the opposition members. Importantly, many of the responses that I have received from the opposition on ministerial

statements were appropriately targeted and challenging, and that is part of ministerial accountability. The opposition can try to assure us and all Yukoners that all they want is: Trust us; if it is important, we will allow the ministerial statement. The opposition will claim that: We are wise, prudent, and appropriate gatekeepers. However, with this motion, the opposition is eroding parliamentary discourse in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

The political landscape in the Yukon has changed and is not static. It will, of course, continue to change to reflect the changes in the territory.

Mr. Speaker, I will quote once more from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, third edition, 2017, as it relates to Standing Orders: “Although the means by which the House reviews the *Standing Orders* may vary, the *Standing Orders* may be amended only by a decision of the House. Such a decision is arrived at either as a result of a broad consensus leading to a unanimous or near-unanimous vote, or by a simple majority vote on a motion moved by any Member of the House ... Since 1867, there have been occasions when controversial proposals...” — perhaps such as this one — “... have led to lengthy debates in which the government has used its majority to amend the *Standing Orders*. On many occasions, however, procedural changes have been the result of a broad consensus among Members of all parties and have been readily adopted without debate.”

“Broad consensus” and “adopted without debate” — this is not what is occurring today, but it arguably should be the norm.

We all know that when the Yukon Party was on this side of the House, they were often remiss and lacking on measures of accountability. As indicated, between 2011 and 2016 — one ministerial statement, no media scrums, virtually no legislative returns, and lacking accountability and transparency.

Again, a veto for the opposition over a sitting rule in government with ministerial accountabilities to all Yukoners, in my view, is a mistake.

Once again, I will refer to an excerpt from Bosc and Gagnon that refers to an ancient document, *De Republica Anglorum: The Manner of Government or Policy of the Realm of England, 1583* was compiled by the honourable man Thomas Smith, Doctor of Civil Laws, knight and principal secretary unto the two most worthy princes: King Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth. This book came out in 1583 and it contains an impressive list of procedural rules and practices that, today, after more than 450 years, have barely changed — but apparently, the Member for Lake Laberge knows best.

We all well know Dr. Floyd McCormick, who is the retired Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, and he has provided opinions that I will provide some quotes from. Dr. McCormick has clearly indicated on his social media account that this motion is just a bad idea. He takes a trip down memory lane. I’ll start with: “... during the 29th Assembly (1996-2000) that these issues resulted in recurring points of order ...” — with respect to ministerial statements. “There were no time limits on [ministerial statements] and there might be two or three

[ministerial statements] on a sitting day. There were disputes over whether the content of a statement was within the rules.

“At the time the Standing Orders said a [ministerial statement] was to be ‘a short factual statement of government policy.’ The Assembly had also concurred in the 2nd report of the SCREP of the 24th Assembly which said a [ministerial statement] was to ‘to be made only on subjects of significance and primarily for the purposes of announcing new government policies.’ These disputes gave rise to numerous points of order over the years. In ruling on these points of order Speakers explained the dilemma they had been placed in due to the vague wording of the rules. They could only rule on the orderliness of a [ministerial statement] once the minister had delivered the entire statement. If the [ministerial statement] was disorderly the damage would already have been done.” Further: “Speakers urged members to revise the rules to make them clear and less likely to need an intervention from the Chair. These disputes continued into the 30th Legislature Assembly ... On October 25, 2001, the Assembly...” — in his words, “finally” — “... changed Standing Order 11(3). The rule change broadened the definition of a [ministerial statement] to ‘an announcement of statement on government policy or a matter of public interest.’ It also set time limits (four minutes) on the [ministerial statements], opposition responses, and the govt reply, and limited the govt to one [ministerial statement] per sitting day.”

Dr. McCormick continues: “That is the situation that has prevailed. As the historical review shows the Assembly has already addressed [ministerial statement] issues dealing with content and time consumption. Over time it reached a workable, if imperfect, solution. [Ministerial statements] aren’t broken and don’t need to be fixed.” Further and importantly, the quote is: “There is a difference between holding the govt accountable and obstructing govt. Responding to a [ministerial statement] is accountability. Preventing the govt from giving a [ministerial statement] is obstruction. Members are rightly concerned about using the Assembly’s limited sitting time more efficiently. But giving the opposition some control over what statements the govt can and cannot deliver is the wrong way to do this. [Ministerial statements] are a way of getting govt statements (and opposition responses) on the House record, even if they have previously been made public.”

The Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes provided that guidance as well: “If members believe that it is not a good use of the House’s time, they can reduce the time limits or get rid of members’ statements entirely...”

I will conclude my remarks with a wise and prescient quote from 2007 by Peter Milliken, who was the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons for a decade, a significant portion of which he presided over a minority federal Parliament. He was very clear: “... neither the political realities of the moment nor the sheer force of numbers should force us to set aside the values inherent in the parliamentary conventions and procedures by which we govern our deliberations.”

Once again and to conclude, it is about restraint and respect for long-held values and parliamentary traditions.

Hon. Mr. Silver: This is an interesting motion to be speaking to this afternoon and I appreciate the comments from all colleagues on both sides of the Legislative Assembly.

My experience with ministerial statements generally falls into two different categories: my experience as an opposition member, about which colleagues know. I was the only current Yukon Liberal member to have been a member of the opposition, head of the government, and Premier and leader of the party.

I will start with the former, the opposition days. That was a shorter experience, as my colleague from beautiful Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes spoke to. It is shorter because the former Yukon Party government used ministerial statements extremely sparingly. In fact, the one time when I was sitting in opposition was basically the only time in a five-year period, from 2011 to 2016, that the Yukon Party used that mechanism.

On that day, the only day, it was curious, for sure. On May 5, 2016, the Minister of Health and Social Services of the day, Mike Nixon, rose to give a ministerial statement on their government’s newly released mental wellness strategy, entitled *Forward Together*. This was an interesting topic to be bringing forth as a ministerial statement, given that it took the Yukon Party over a year to produce a wellness strategy, yet the report didn’t seem to point to anything tangible. As an opposition MLA, I had tabled a motion calling on the government to produce a mental health strategy, which every MLA supported when it came to a vote, so I was disappointed when the Yukon Party’s mental wellness report turned out to be a far cry from the expectations that all members of the Assembly had by unanimously supporting the call for action.

The reason why I bring up the ministerial statement, however, is not because of the missed opportunity as a policy item, but rather, given its uniqueness — and I’m not even referencing the fact that it was the first ministerial statement from the Yukon Party that they gave or the first time that they bothered to update Yukoners with a tool that they had at their disposal as a government — I bring it up because the one time that it was used, it was awkward at best and failed procedurally to be open and transparent. Yukoners who look through Hansard would notice that this ministerial statement spanned two days. It took two days because, after Minister Nixon gave his initial statement, our former NDP colleague Jan Stick rose on a point of order to address that the opposition parties — as is very much the custom and very much the approach of all House Leaders in the Yukon Legislative Assembly — were not informed by the government that a ministerial statement was to be even given that day.

As I was the then-Leader of the Third Party, I supported then-MLA Jan Stick in the instance that the Yukon Party at the time had an obligation to inform opposition parties that a ministerial statement was being given. This is a general expectation of opposition parties and is important for them so that they can appropriately prepare for their informed responses to the government ministerial statements. Because of the confusion in real time around whether the opposition had been appropriately informed about ministerial statements of the day, the Speaker postponed the statement and gave a ruling at the

end of the day that the government had disregarded the general approach on how ministerial statements are organized and that they would give it another try the following day. So, the next day, on May 9, the New Democratic Party and I, as the Third Party, gave our responses to the Yukon Party's long-awaited mental wellness strategy ministerial statement, and once the government gave their final interjection, the whole clumsy and bumpy situation kind of came to an end.

Unsurprisingly, the Yukon Party didn't bring forth any more ministerial statements in the 33rd Legislative Assembly. That was the first and only in their roughly five years of that 33rd Assembly. It was the last one that they ever gave. In fact, if you look at Hansard, there are more references of ministerial statements by opposition members during the entire 33rd Legislative Assembly because we put forth notices of motions calling on the government to do a ministerial statement on one or several different types of issues than there were actual ministerial statements — so, more requests from the opposition for ministerial statements in that incarnation of the Legislative Assembly than actual statements.

When we had the opportunity to form government in 2016, we changed that. We changed a lot of things that I am very proud of as far as openness and transparency in the Legislative Assembly — one of which was the overpoliticization of tributes. That was the way that the Yukon Party basically did the equivalent of a ministerial statement. They would talk about the money that they would assess to certain things in their statements. We have had members in the Legislative Assembly today talk about their strategy of using up time in the Legislative Assembly with tributes based upon the day of the week — I won't get into that — but that was changed. We changed that so that the tributes were no longer politically motivated. We committed to open and transparent government. We demonstrated that by regularly having scrums after Question Period. Some folks might not remember that, but to this day, after Question Period, whoever the media wants, whichever minister they want to respond to questions, they get. This was not the approach of the Yukon Party.

So, again, no ministerial statements to inform, no regularly scheduled ministers available to the fourth estate, no Yukon Forum — another place where there should be dialogue and where you are going to be forced, I guess, or directed toward conversations that you might not readily like to have, but we believe that it is extremely important for all parties to be able to answer all questions.

Making our ministers' briefing notes accessible to the opposition and to the media — another thing that we did. Our colleagues in the opposition sometimes quip that they have obtained confidential briefing notes, although we made the changes to ATIPP, the rules, to make sure that these notes are accessible to the members opposite. That was our point; that was our intention. I would have loved to have had the same luxury when I was in opposition; I didn't.

I would very often give my Question Period questions to the ministers. Very often, I would give my questions for Question Period to the ministers before Question Period. To me, I thought that if I did, then I would have a better opportunity

to actually get to those briefing notes, because we didn't have the ATIPP act so that I could access those briefing notes. If they were ready and they could thumb to those pages in time, then at least I would get an account of what the departments' and the ministers' official responses were at the time.

Part of being open and transparent government is about letting Members of the Legislative Assembly keep the government to account. In these examples that I'm talking about, you can't just look at one thing, like the fact that Leader of the Third Party said that they don't like how the Liberals use these ministerial statements. It shouldn't be about how we use them; it should be the process that allows debate and transparency.

So, again, to go from an opposition time where there was no debate in the Yukon Forum, no debate with the ministers and the media, and there were no ministerial statements, we believe that this an opportunity for all of us to have a conversation about something that maybe some political parties might not want to talk about.

It was interesting listening in the news lately about Alberta's attempt to start down the road of taking what they consider from a particular report to be their fair share of the CPP. It was an opportunity for the federal Prime Minister to write a letter, which was very interesting. I can't recall any other time when I saw a Prime Minister writing an open letter like that to a premier. It was also interesting because lacking any comment on that tough topic was the leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, Pierre Poilievre. Again, to his credit, he did finally come out and make a statement on that and said he doesn't agree as well. Again, this is an example of — you're in Question Period, you're in the regular debate, and there will be topics that opposition don't want to talk about, just like there are going to be issues that the government does not want to talk about. Why limit either side of those? Imagine a Members' Services Board coming together to talk about how a government should have access to all questions before Question Period and deciding whether or not these questions are worthy of the floor of the Legislative Assembly — that's utterly ridiculous, as I think we could all agree.

As a former opposition MLA, I know the importance of ministerial statements. My colleagues here on the government side know that time in opposition was very important to me. I lived it, being in the very difficult spot in the House of being the Third Party of one. So, opposition having the tools to keep government to account is important to me, and I don't just mean in this iteration of the Legislative Assembly. We shouldn't make decisions in the Legislative Assembly based on the personalities of the people in the seats. We heard today in the ministerial statement: We don't like how the Liberals use these ministerial statements. It should be more about what this House represents as far as openness and transparency moving forward.

Think about a situation where you have political parties in the opposition who may want to block the party of the day from saying something extremely important to Yukoners. We have heard the opposition talk about how that is what press releases are for. I completely disagree with that statement. The Hansard is the ultimate conversation, the ultimate record of public

opinion, long past newspapers — all due respect to the media, all due respect to our communications departments of all three parties. It is the Hansard — it is the debate in here that is extremely important.

This is why we, when we formed the government, took the ministerial statement so seriously, because it's an opportunity not just to hear from the government but also the opposition on maybe topics that are being avoided by opposition.

As a minister, a former Premier, an MLA, and frankly as a Yukoner, I think it is extremely important that we ensure that there is an opportunity to hear from the Yukon Party, the New Democrats, and the Liberals on all issues. We may not all agree with our opposition colleagues on issues; that is kind of why we are in different parties. I may have concerns about their responses; they might have concerns about ours. We will talk about how we all use our time. I would urge people to look back over debate and see how many dollars were debated in our five years compared to theirs and how we use our time accordingly. I would stand by our record in that particular case compared to the Yukon Party, but again, this is just my opinion — a statistically relevant opinion, but at the same time, this is my opinion.

Again, getting our opinions into the record on all topics — that is what this is all about — and that is what makes democracy, as imperfect as it is, an incredibly desirable system. So, when the opposition gets these opportunities to respond to ministerial statements and tell Yukoners where they feel the government has missed the mark or what ideas they would pursue instead, I think that is an extremely interesting opportunity, one that is given to them through other avenues — these ministerial statements.

I know that, as an opposition MLA, I would have very much appreciated the opportunity for more ministerial statements. That is why we urged, through motions, for the members opposite to give these statements, because we wanted to hear their opinions on particular topics. It's a shame — I think it was a missed opportunity for the members opposite in the House and for Yukoners in general.

Now, this is unfortunately shortsighted by our current opposition to get rid of these ministerial statements, again, because: We don't like the cut of the jib of the party that is in; we don't like the way they use it.

Again, that is very troubling, because this is a decision not just for us, but this will move forward — well, unless a majority government of another ilk comes in and decides that: Well, now that we are a majority government, we will change that rule.

That's the part that kind of stuck in my craw a bit: We don't like how you use them; therefore, we are going to use our majority on the Members' Services Board to stop you from using them.

That's really interesting. I think about some of the first ministerial statements that I gave as the Premier, and I wonder whether opposition parties would have deemed them to be acceptable. I think back to the time when we were in the midst of a pandemic, and I think: Wow, imagine if we had — or just imagine if there was, in the future, another pandemic where you have two opposition parties that are completely against the

health and safety measures that a chief medical officer of health is giving, and they have decided to not ask any questions in Question Period about it, but you need to, in the official record of the Legislative Assembly, have a conversation and talk about the importance of lifesaving vaccines, for example. Imagine that type of fictitious scenario where both opposition parties are extremely against that. They could just block by using their majority in a Members' Services Board connotation.

I must have struck a nerve, because now the opposition is speaking off-mic quite a bit. To my point, we shouldn't be making decisions based upon whether we like each other or each others' approaches to things here in the Legislative Assembly. We should be making it based upon what it means to Yukoners, what it means to debate, and what it means to the future of the Yukon. That's more important, I think, than: Well, you kind of annoyed us, so we're not into this.

I will say that, as well, I know how valuable time is in the morning, as an opposition member. I know how difficult it is to be given something and say that you need to talk on this now — especially when you're in the Third Party and you are only one person and your staff is very, very limited. I didn't have CASA support; I just had my budgetary allotment at that time. That would be difficult, but even in that scenario, I wouldn't want to block the government's ability to have a ministerial statement. I wouldn't even have thought of blocking that.

I think back to the updates on the financial advisory panel that we put in, which were extremely important and extremely well-debated by the opposition, from their political perspectives — upgrades on the territorial government's performance plans and progress reports, economic prosperity, the future of the Yukon, the sustainability of our future. There is just so much to it — updates on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which is a critically important issue to this current government. All three parties all agree in this particular representation of the Legislative Assembly, but what would happen if two opposition parties didn't? They would mute the minority government of the day's ability to talk about something as important as the protection of our caribou.

Again, I wonder which of these ministerial statements that we did in the past wouldn't have been up to snuff, according to the opposition. I find myself agreeing with former Clerk of the Legislative Assembly Floyd McCormick, that it's "obstructing the government" and "responding to a [ministerial statement] is accountability". I completely agree with that. It's a shame that the opposition doesn't and that they don't want to pursue that accountability the way that our Standing Orders have reasonably allowed for decades.

I'm going to wrap up here, Mr. Speaker, as I do want to hear the opinions of everybody in the Legislative Assembly, but again, I go back to the days of COVID-19 and how important those ministerial statements were, and I urge the opposition to think past the annoyance of having to prepare a ministerial statement response and look to the importance of all topics at all points, being able, as a political party, to represent the government when they have the honour of being in government, whether they are in a minority situation or a majority situation. We hear the Yukon Party, for the first time,

talking about the popular vote, which is always great. We hear what you're saying. It's by a thin margin that you're even in here, but we are. This is the government — minority or majority — this is the government — the Yukon Liberal Party — and our ability to continue to have the debate I don't think should be doctored by the opposition, because they don't like the way we do these statements.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for having the time here. I will not be supporting this motion, and I hope that our colleagues in the opposition do not vote to remove an important opportunity for clear, researched information-sharing that allows Yukoners to hear from all parties on all sides in a time when information is being more and more precarious and far less balanced and fact-checked around the world and that institutions and the avenues that they provide should be valued and safeguarded, not thrown away.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to join my colleagues in response to the Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 on ministerial statements. I, of course, strongly disagree with the Member for Lake Laberge that statements by ministers are a waste of this House's time. I think that we all worked hard to gain these important roles in the territory, and it's not something that I take lightly on any day in this House.

How we share valuable information — such as what our schools are doing to increase safety or how Yukoners can be better informed for the well-being of themselves or their families — truly matters. We are fortunate to be able to share information with Yukoners through ministerial statements, where we hear from all three parties on the record on topics that are important to Yukoners.

As stated in the Yukon Legislative Assembly Standing Order 11(3), "... a Minister may make an announcement or statement on government policy or a matter of public interest." As several of my colleagues have noted, these statements are crucial for keeping the public informed, encouraging healthy debate in this democratic institution, and will serve as a valuable resource for future generations, providing insights into the current economic, social, and political landscapes. I am sure that folks will go back. There is a debate going on right now about the sexual orientation and gender identity policy throughout this nation. If they go to our Hansard, they are going to be able to clearly find out what folks were thinking at the time, because some of those thoughts and questions are now part of public record.

In a recent issue of the *Yukon News*, I noted that the Member for Lake Laberge and the Member for Whitehorse Centre essentially said that these statements were a waste of time. I truly hope that members don't think highlighting the importance of inclusivity in schools is a waste of the electorate's time or that announcing important funding streams to address gender-based violence isn't important to Yukoners.

This Liberal government certainly doesn't see highlighting and informing Yukoners of important information and debating important social and economic issues as a waste of time.

My colleague earlier raised a very good point in the House about — when the House is sitting, there is a great focus, of

course, on the Legislative Assembly. We have media specifically assigned to cover the Legislative Assembly, and the first hour and a bit is probably the most important time to really capture what is happening. There is very little following Committee of the Whole and other debates that happen later in the day. This time in the House is incredibly important. These ministerial statements are often reported on. It is such a great opportunity to bring noteworthy news to Yukoners. I mean, that is the point of a ministerial statement on a policy or on an announcement.

In April 2017, I was honoured to deliver the first ministerial statement from this Liberal government. It was an opportunity to be vulnerable, I guess, with Yukoners and show empathy for a grieving community. Through this statement, I highlighted that the government was working with our partners and Yukon First Nations to provide support to a grieving community. Both opposition parties thanked me for bringing the statement forward and took time to acknowledge the recent deaths in the community. In reflecting back to that time, I really recognize the value of bringing forward such a statement and there was a great appreciation, as well, from the community — that it was important enough for legislators to speak about it in the House and give a response. I think that, to me, is crucial in that this is Yukon's House of Assembly, and we have an opportunity every day to represent Yukoners — and through ministerial statements, instead of looking at them as an annoyance, or something that is not valuable, or a waste of time, as noted by the Member for Lake Laberge, they should look at it as an opportunity to inform Yukoners and to add your voice.

This Liberal government has delivered hundreds of ministerial statements on a wide range of topics, including health care services, economic funding opportunities, vaccine rollouts, music festivals, partnerships with Yukon First Nations, and the list goes on. I am proud of all of the ministerial statements that our government has delivered, and they were all completely aligned with Orders of this House — in making an announcement or a statement on government policy or a matter of public interest.

Opposition members now want to change the Standing Orders because they feel these statements and the information contained are not in the best interests of Yukoners — I'm not sure. We are only hearing from the Member for Lake Laberge from the opposition so far, so I guess he is the voice of the Yukon Party.

I ask: Do opposition members feel the statements I delivered on this government's commitments to the Yukon First Nation School Board to be irrelevant or not important to Yukoners? It was important for our government to inform Yukoners how we were progressing toward a school system where Yukon First Nations had more authority over the delivery of the school curriculum. From that statement — and I quote: "Our Yukon Liberal government is committed to the sustainability and success of the First Nation School Board. Together with our partners, we are writing a new chapter on education in the Yukon and building a brighter future for the territory. We are committed to ensuring that all Yukon school authorities have the resources that they need to deliver high

quality and culturally appropriate education. We are pleased to have reached an agreement with the board of trustees on a new 15-month funding agreement for the First Nation School Board to receive more than \$35 million. This funding will support the First Nation School Board to implement their vision for education in the schools that they operate and their unique needs as an Indigenous school authority.”

For the record and in reply to my statement, the Yukon Party Official Opposition and Member for Copperbelt South brought forward questions about the finances of the agreement and how this funding compared to the students not in the First Nation School Board schools — and I quote: “How does this funding model compare to funding for the Yukon Francophone School Board and its schools?” “When it comes to operation and maintenance, can the minister tell us if an equitable amount of per student funding will be provided to those schools that have decided to continue under the existing school governance model?” This is a great example of how elected members of this House use the ministerial statements to inform Yukoners and state their position for the public record.

In the case of our Liberal government, we spoke to reconciliation and empowerment of Yukon First Nations in delivering the school curriculum, in contrast to the Yukon Party, which brought forward their conservative policy questions about the cost of reconciliation and how this reconciliation was going to impact students not attending First Nation School Board schools. These are very important statements for Yukoners to hear. I can assure you that it was very interesting for the trustees and those who have been involved in the establishment of the First Nation School Board to hear this directly. They were very interested in hearing that.

Another ministerial statement that I recently made was on the sexual orientation and gender identity policy recently enacted by this Liberal government. I won’t go into the quotes within this statement because it was last week, and I hope that folks truly remember the very conservative questions that were brought forward. As part of the opposition, the Yukon Party again brought forward their conservative positions through the Member for Copperbelt South and brought forward several questions. In my statement, I focused on the rights of children, their safety, and the importance of a complete community supporting students. I feel that, in their reply, the Yukon Party really focused on the appropriateness of parents being informed of their child’s choice. These are important defining statements and questions from both this Liberal government and the opposition Yukon Party that Yukoners need to hear and appreciate.

Opposition parties bring forward questions that they feel are important to their constituents, and we, as government, bring forward ministerial statements that we feel are important to all Yukoners. Opposition parties now want to pre-approve and decide whether ministerial statements are brought forward by the government or even maybe eliminate them altogether. This type of opposition gatekeeping is a very scary concept.

Are opposition members now preparing to bring forward their questions to government members in advance of Question Period? This currently happens with ministerial statements

where opposition members receive the ministerial statement by 11:00 a.m. on the day that the statement is to be delivered in order to provide opposition members with an opportunity to deliver an informed response.

It’s not lost on Yukoners that opposition members are in favour of eliminating the amount of information that the government can share with Yukoners.

This Liberal government believes in the freedom to inform Yukoners with information that is important to them and in support of their well-being and quality of life. We believe that sharing information with citizens fosters transparency in government operations. Yukoners have a right to know how their government functions, how decisions are made, and how taxpayers’ funds are allocated. Transparency builds trust and confidence in our institutions.

I find it very rude that the Member for Lake Laberge is whistling right now while I am talking. This may be a joke to folks in the Legislative Assembly. It certainly is not to me. Again, as I started, we all worked very hard to gain these seats to represent Yukoners. It is our job to be in this Legislative Assembly. I have listened to many, many hours of debate — I guess you can call it — from the Member for Lake Laberge where it was just clearly wasting time so that we wouldn’t get to certain business in the day.

My 20 minutes that I have to speak to this is important to me as an elected member of this Legislative Assembly and it is my right to be heard here, so I am going to continue on.

Transparency builds trust and confidence in our institutions. We accept our responsibility of being accountable to Yukon citizens, ensuring that they have as much access to government information as possible. This allows Yukoners to hold elected officials and public servants to account for their actions. This accountability ensures that those of us in power act in the best interest, and we are serving Yukoners today. We know that sharing information about government policies, programs, and services can lead to more efficient and effective governance. Yukoners are then in a position to provide feedback and suggestions, leading to improvements in government operations. Informed Yukoners can make better decisions, and when we share information, it allows Yukoners to make educated decisions about their health, safety, finances, and more.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the ability for any government to share information with citizens is a fundamental aspect of a healthy and functioning democracy. It promotes transparency, accountability, informed decision-making, and citizen participation — all of which contribute to the well-being of society and the effectiveness of government.

My colleagues and I are, of course, as I started out with, opposed to this motion and will not be voting in support of it.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I have some remarks this afternoon and I am going to be as brief as possible because, frankly, we want to get to a vote this afternoon. We are not running out the clock this afternoon; this isn’t a filibuster. This is a bunch of government ministers — MLAs — who are seeing a back-door assault on our ability to talk to our constituents,

and we take it very seriously, unlike — judging by the body language and remarks of the members opposite — our colleagues across the way.

That's not a surprise to me, because I have been there as a member of the public, as a journalist, trying to get information from the members on the other side of the House. It wasn't easy, and I want to put that marker down right out of the gate for the public and the media who have been dealing with this government and not that government, because it was a totally different experience. I was there.

I am going to talk a little bit about that this afternoon. I am going to talk about ministerial statements, because I have been listening to them since 1989 when I moved to the territory as a journalist and covered this House. I listened to the ministerial statements as far back as then, and I actually thought they were useful, as a journalist at that time covering the Legislature. So, when I got into government as a minister and saw that the — I also covered the many former governments — and saw that they hadn't been used for a long time, I thought it was a good idea to resurrect them, because they were useful to me — as a member of the public and as a journalist — to actually have government ministers address me directly through this Chamber. I will talk a little bit about that, too.

There is a very good reason why the opposition is bringing this motion to the floor and not our government. They want it more than we do. We didn't want it. We didn't think it was broken. It's not broken, and I will get to that in a little while, too. It's broken for the members opposite, because they don't like hearing what we have to say, and they are seeking to control that. That, fundamentally, is a marker that we should all pay attention to, and we should be worried about that. We should definitely be worried about that.

I am not surprised by the Yukon Party. As I said, I worked as a journalist trying to get information from that government. It was like pulling teeth — worse than pulling teeth. There was no access. There were no scrums. Documents were withheld. We had to use the ATIPP act for virtually everything. It was terrible.

I am surprised about the NDP a little bit this afternoon. As I have said, their governments have been relatively progressive on this front. They used ministerial statements more than we have. They used them well. So, to see them aligning themselves with the government that didn't provide any information is a dark, dark turn and surprising to me. It is certainly turning their back on a good legacy, and I am really surprised that they are doing that.

We didn't bring this motion to the floor. I am the chair of that committee — I don't support what the committee has come up with — the machination to get this before the House today. I wasn't going to bring the motion to the floor, and neither was my good colleague, because we don't believe in it. We think that it is fundamentally wrong, and so, we are leaving it to the opposition to do it, but we do not fundamentally agree with it. I fundamentally do not agree with it. In fact, I am vehemently opposed to it.

Ministerial statements serve an important purpose in our democracy and in governments across the country, as my good

colleague noted earlier in his remarks. They provide important information to Yukoners that is recorded in Hansard, serving as a historical record for future generations about the most important issues of the day.

The members opposite have no idea how these work as a minister, because they didn't do them. They know what it is like to be in opposition and handle it from that side; they don't know what it is like to be a minister and be subjecting yourself to a ministerial statement, to be putting forward a ministerial statement. Let me provide a little bit of insight because of their lack of experience in that process — also to the media and the public who hopefully will pay some attention to this.

Ministerial statements are not easy for any of us to put forward in this House. You put your statement out — you prepare it; you put it out there on whatever issue or policy or initiative or whatever we believe is important for Yukoners and for the opposition and the media to hear that day. Then you prepare for a whole battery of questions challenging you on that issue on the fly. Again, it is improv. You have no idea what is coming back, and you have to prepare yourself for that. You don't know what it is like; it is uncomfortable.

This isn't fun, but it is important, and it is a mini-debate restricted to 16 minutes, coming in at about 11, according to the Clerk's office stats — 11 minutes is the average per day when the ministerial statement is brought forward. In that time, you have a mini-debate, and the public can then hear the government's point of view, then the Yukon Party's point of view, and then the NDP's point of view, and they see it all wrapped up in a neat little package. They can determine who has come out on top. It's not a waste of time. I take offence at that. As a civilian, I relied on them so heavily; as a reporter, I relied on them. They brought important issues to light that otherwise would not have been.

That mini-debate makes you better. It's uncomfortable, but it makes you better. It makes you self-assess if what you are doing is on the right track or not because you are hearing other perspectives. It's important to our institution here, our democracy, for that very reason.

So, they are important to me, to this government, to this House, and to the Yukon public as a whole. Giving up that opportunity to present issues to the public, to give the opposition the ability to veto that, to be a gatekeeper, is wrong, just as it would be wrong for them to have to give us their questions before they present them to us in the House and allow us to prepare answers. We haven't asked for that; we didn't ask for that when we were in our majority government. We didn't restructure the running of the House as a majority, but we have met with the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges many times, as my good colleague said in his early remarks. I'm not going to repeat them here because, as I said, I want to get to a vote.

As a journalist, I hold the right to free speech and freedom of expression dear. I fought for it. Trying to pry information from the Yukon Party when I was working in the media was not easy. The Yukon Party was very conservative in their approach to providing information to the public. Public documents on freedom of information were withheld from the

public — I'm not kidding. In fact, one of the very first documents that I released in my role as a government minister was just such a report, because it had been withheld. The civil service came to me and said: Do you want to release this document? They were nervous. I said: What are you talking about? It's a report on providing information to the public. Of course, I want to make it public.

That wasn't the practice before, Mr. Speaker. They kept everything as tight as possible. Nothing got out — no daylight. The former government did not hold scrums with the media. The former government did not return the calls of the media. They prevented the release of briefing notes — notes that were meant to be read by ministers to inform the Yukon public. We changed that as well. Our briefing notes are now publicly available. Changing that culture of control, of restricting access to the information that the Yukon public holds — it's their information, Mr. Speaker. This government is their government, and it's their information. Changing that culture from one of restriction and holding everything tight, not letting anything out, to one in which we try to foster open communication with the public — make more available and fewer restrictions on what's available is a difficult cultural change for a government to undergo. We're seven years into that experiment. Is it perfect? Gosh, no. Is it better? Absolutely. And yet, today, here we see going back to worse than it was before at the hands of both opposition parties.

As I said, it's important to remember how contemptuous the Yukon Party was at providing information to the public when in office, how controlling they were and apparently are. It's also important, though, to record for the record in Hansard that the former New Democratic parties that I dealt with wanted open information, and apparently this latest iteration does not.

I will now provide more context. The Penikett New Democrats used ministerial statements a lot, as I said, back in 1989 to 1992. I used them as a journalist; I listened to them here in this House. They were used all the time. They were important and useful, and it was the New Democrats under Piers McDonald who used ministerial statements more than perhaps even our government.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: They used them sometimes several times a day, Mr. Speaker. I hear the Leader of the Third Party over there talking off-mic. She is upset about this or something — I don't know — but the fact is that the Piers McDonald New Democrats used ministerial statements a lot.

It was useful to me as a journalist, to me as a citizen, and now we have this new New Democratic Party working with the Yukon Party to restrict that access, to treat media and the public — to restrict that debate in the House. That's even more troubling. I expect it from the Yukon Party; I do not expect it from the New Democrats. It's turning their back on their illustrious past.

What we're seeing today is an effort to obstruct the information flow in this House. That, as noted by others today, is coming from none other than Floyd McCormick, the former Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. He has written that: "As the historical review shows the Assembly has already addressed

[ministerial statement] issues dealing with content and time consumption. Over time it reached a workable, if imperfect, solution." "[Ministerial statements] aren't broken and don't need to be fixed."

He also wrote: "There is a difference between holding the govt accountable and obstructing the govt. Responding to a [ministerial statement] —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Third Party House Leader, on a point of order.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, this exact text has already been read into the record by a previous speaker, which is, I believe, a violation of Standing Order 19(c), which refers to repetition.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: This is a dispute among members. Minister of Community Services, please continue.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is clear that the New Democrats don't want to hear this again, but I'm just going to carry on a little bit more, please.

"There is a difference between holding the govt accountable and obstructing the govt. Responding to a [ministerial statement] is accountability. Preventing the govt from giving a [ministerial statement] is obstruction", says Mr. McCormick. "Members are rightly concerned about using the Assembly's limited sitting time more efficiently. But giving the opposition some control over what statements the govt can and cannot deliver is the wrong way to do this." It is the wrong way to do this, Mr. Speaker.

"[Ministerial statements] are a way of getting govt statements (and opposition responses) on the House record (Hansard) even if they have been previously made public." This is an important distinction and one that I talked about earlier. It is a mini-debate. We can hear both sides in a nice little package. If members believe that this is not a good use of the House's time, they can reduce the time limits or get rid of ministerial statements entirely...

"If they are truly interested in using time more efficiently, there are other, better options: reduce the amount of time devoted to tributes, permit the tabling of only those documents that are required by law or an order of the House, get rid of oral notices of motions and stop inundating the Order Paper with hundreds of motions that will never be debated; shorten the length of speeches during debates, etc."

Some of these actions we have actually taken. Our government has worked with the opposition, in concert, to do this — collaboratively. This was not that. This is an imposition by the opposition parties to not work by consensus or collaboratively. It is to force a change in the Order Paper on the sitting government. The opposition is setting themselves up as gatekeepers. In the case of the Yukon Party, as I said, that is not surprising, but the New Democratic Party — something outside of their norm, outside of their history — moving from a champion of information to something darker and less open.

I was elected to represent —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Leader of the Third Party, on a point of order.

Ms. White: Pardon me, Mr. Speaker. Let me get my Standing Order.

That is — yes, 19(i): “uses abusive or insulting language”. That was too much; that was a bit personal there.

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

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I happen to agree with the Leader of the Third Party on this and would note that the minister, throughout his speech, has actually been either over the line or very close to over the line on 19(i) in directing it both to the Yukon Party and the NDP and has certainly used a lot of abusive and insulting language.

Speaker: Minister of Environment, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I’m curious on this one. I don’t think I have ever seen two opposition members — well, this is a point of how things operate. I don’t think I have ever seen two members of the opposition provide their contributions to the Speaker on a point of order consecutively. I don’t think I have ever seen that.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Clarke: There is no consecutiveness; there is just me right now.

Speaker’s ruling

Speaker: On the point of order, the Speaker can choose who stands on a point of order and recognize them.

On the point of order from the Leader of the Third Party, tempers are kind of getting high here. Please civilize the comments. It is a dispute among members.

Minister of Community Services, please continue.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I just achieved a double-double.

I am going to shift my remarks a little bit now. As I said, the opposition is setting themselves up as gatekeepers. I was elected to represent the citizens of Whitehorse West. The motion on the floor today will put the Yukon Party and NDP between me and my constituents really is what we are talking about, and I don’t support that. I really can’t. As I said, I am a champion of free speech. I always will be, and I think this really does fetter members on this side of the House from being able to talk to Yukoners and their constituents.

I am just going to focus on one last aspect of this motion, and then I will take my leave.

Both the Yukon Party and the New Democrats have, in the past, complained about having to hear about new developments in the media rather than in this House. Now they want to limit the amount of information we provide to the House. That seems to stand in stark opposition. They are conflicting approaches. Surely, anyone listening understands that. So, we have to — we’re just left speculating on the purpose of this motion, which

makes the opposition — as I have said a few times and others have — gatekeepers.

They don’t want this government to give the Yukon public more information. That is clear. They would rather accuse our government of not being transparent, even as they limit our means to speak to them and Yukoners. This will be something that I’m sure we will be revisiting time and again now in this iteration of the Legislative Assembly.

All right. So, I want to finish on a caution to the public and the media who may be listening this afternoon. I have worked covering this Chamber for 20 years. I’ve been in the Chamber now for seven or so, and I know what it’s like to not be able to get information that the public owns from a government, and I don’t want to go back there.

Today, what we’re seeing is a move toward those days, and I think the media and the public should take that under advisement.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I will not be repeating, at the risk of having a point of order — but I certainly won’t be repeating what has been said by my colleagues today. They have all spoken brilliantly, heartfelt, from their experience, not just in the last seven years from their experience but from their experiences with respect to previous careers as well.

I will start by saying that — addressing a couple of the things that have been said by the member of the opposition with respect to this. I appreciate that this has been said today, and that’s what I’ll respond to, but it has also been said on many occasions by members — actually many members of the opposition, either in responding to ministerial statements or in responding to other parts of their debates.

That is — in particular with this sort of misconception — that ministerial statements are supposed to be about new programs, or they are supposed to be about some new announcements, or they can’t be something that has also been announced in media releases, or that somehow — I heard today for the first time — the minister in the response is supposed to be responding to the questions that are asked. Those are all very interesting ideas, but they are not the Standing Order. They are not what is required or permitted, may I say, in the Standing Order, and they are absolutely interpretations being made by the members opposite.

So, if we are going to start talking — and go down the road — about how the members opposite will be the deciders of who is able to give a ministerial statement to the public of the Yukon and will determine who will be able to present a ministerial statement or what topics will be presented on a daily basis, I think that we should question their ability to make interpretations about that, because they clearly have not read the Standing Order on the face of it. The truth is that the ministerial statements, as listed in Standing Order 11(2), permit a minister to make an announcement or a statement on government policy or — quote: “... a matter of public interest”. “A matter of public interest” has been defined by the courts on many occasions as quite broad, and a broad interpretation of public interest is what is intended here. You will note, Mr. Speaker, that it doesn’t say anything about whether or not

it should be a new program — I am not sure where that came from. I think that it is a hold-over from the changes that were made, I believe, by the Yukon Party in the past.

We are operating under Standing Order 11(2) right now, which is a Yukon Party creation — or certainly this evolution of it is. Now they don't want us to be able to use it. They don't want the government to be able to make those kinds of announcements or statements. If we call them "ministerial announcements" — are we having a different debate here today? I don't know, but ministerial announcements and statements are permitted by the Standing Order. We have complied with the rules on every occasion on which we have given ministerial statements.

You have all heard that we have given many ministerial statements. We have used this opportunity in the Standing Orders to speak to Yukoners and to speak to the members of the opposition and to hear from the members of the opposition about things that they believe are good or don't believe are good with respect to the topics in the ministerial statements. Yukoners deserve to hear all of those points of view.

The last points that I will make with respect to ministerial statements — the Standing Order also indicates: "A member of each of the parties in opposition to the government may comment thereon for not more than four minutes..." And it goes on. They don't need to respond if they are not interested in responding; if they're not interested in speaking to the public about these topics, they don't need to. It says they "may"; it does not say they "must".

I have been extremely proud of the opportunity that we have taken with respect to ministerial statements and the importance of using ministerial statements and speaking to Yukoners through this medium. I would like to say that the topics are carefully chosen. We are not running around searching for things to say in a ministerial statement. In fact, there are often more topics that we would like to speak to Yukoners about and would like to hear from the opposition about. We choose them extremely carefully and decisions are made so that they will be topical and so that they will be of interest to Yukoners so they can be informed. Sometimes they are about new programs — sometimes not.

The most recent ministerial statement that I had the privilege to make was on October 16, which was the coming into force of the *Missing Persons Act* and regulation. I think that was an extremely important opportunity to speak to Yukoners. I have spoken about Car 867. I have spoken about gender-affirming health care. I have spoken about the Yukon dental program. I have spoken about Opportunities Yukon and their Cornerstone project. I have spoken about aging in place.

Back in the fall of 2021, I spoke, on more than one occasion, about the importance of issues around COVID-19 — the vaccination requirements, the vaccination booster shots, and the vaccine and safety measures. All of these were incredibly important — not only to speak to Yukoners but to put on the record. One of the complaints made today about this use of ministerial statements is, in fact, that we can use other means by which to respond to Yukoners or to provide them with information.

The member opposite says that we can use other means. We can use news releases; we can advertise — I don't think that's an appropriate use, frankly, of anybody's advertising dollars with respect to these kinds of topics. We can use social media; we can use other things — absolutely we can, and we use all of those because we take transparency extremely seriously. We think that every day we have an opportunity and a responsibility to speak to Yukoners about programs, about issues, about things that are affecting their daily lives, and about what their government is doing to be responsive to them. So, we use all of those and we will continue to use all of those, and ministerial statements are an extremely important version of that communication.

I will note that a press conference is not the same, frankly, as a ministerial statement. It's not on the record in the same way that the members in this Legislative Assembly should respect the way in which the public record is taken into account. Having a communication in a different way and not having it put on the record in the Legislative Assembly is not, in fact, the same thing. Yukoners deserve to be able to search Hansard time after time. The members opposite should also respect that this is to put into history — to put into the history of the Yukon Legislative Assembly and into the history of the Yukon — the things that were important topics of the day and how their government and their opposition responded to those topics.

We've heard that the Yukon Party only did one statement in five years, and they didn't even abide by the rules in doing so. We've heard that there should be other ways in which we can pursue communicating with Yukoners. We've heard that it takes up too much time. The Yukon Party doesn't care about time or they would not have abused tributes that we have heard spoken about today — seven or nine or whatever the number was.

Those rules had to be changed as a result of those actions. They don't care about time or they wouldn't have taken an entire Wednesday to debate a motion and speak — or "filibuster", as some used the term — about a Queen's Jubilee and the importance of that. It's simply — that wasn't a good use of time. That is not for me to say. It is their opportunity; it is their use of time —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible).

Point of order

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

Mr. Cathers: The language that the Minister of Health and Social Services just used regarding the motion that my colleague brought forward regarding the Queen's Jubilee is, I believe, in contravention of Standing Order 19(j): "speaks disrespectfully of Her Majesty or of any of the Royal Family..." I would urge you to have the minister retract her comments and to apologize to this House and to the Royal Family.

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

Hon. Mr. Streicker: My colleague was not speaking disrespectfully about the Queen or the Royal Family. My colleague was commenting on the use of time in this House.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: On the point of order, it is a dispute among members.

Minister of Health and Social Services, please continue.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just have a few more comments, and they all concern me, as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, which is clearly the way I am addressing you today. I think we should call this what it is. In my opinion, we should call a spade a spade, as they say. In my opinion, this is an opportunity being taken by the opposition to block government's opportunity to use the Standing Order in a proper way — that is as an opportunity for government and the opposition to speak to Yukoners, an opportunity to reduce the amount of work that they have to do.

I wish that I could trust that if ministerial statements were to be removed as a Standing Order or this opportunity was to be removed or drastically amended or irreparably changed in a way as a result of this motion today, that the members of the opposition would say, every Monday morning or every day that we are in this Sitting: Oh, that sounds like good topic; you should have a ministerial statement on that today and then we should be able to respond if we choose to, because that's what the current Standing Order says. I wish that were the case, but I don't trust.

We have heard that they believe that perhaps some of the 20 ministerial statements that I have had the honour of giving since April 2021 — most of them are time wasters or have been called not important enough to address with/to? Yukoners. I just simply, as many of my colleagues have said today, do not agree that this is the truth. I appreciate that they may have a different point of view about this, but taking the opportunity through this motion to try to irreparably change this Standing Order and silence or block the government of the day from speaking to Yukoners about important topics — not frivolous topics but important, timely topics — and them having the opportunity to respond to those in the Legislative Assembly is simply wrong, in my view. It's not to be supported.

I am drastically disappointed in not hearing more from the NDP today. We have heard a response to the ministerial statement that was given earlier today. Thank goodness that was given, because it may be the only time that we hear from them today about their point of view on ministerial statements. I hope with all hope that they do not support this motion, going forward.

We have had Yukoners approach us and show us appreciation for the ability to look up topics and hear from the three parties on those topics. Almost always, ministerial statements are responded to by the opposition and the Third Party. The ability to do that and look those up in Hansard has been appreciated by Yukoners.

More information is better. More points of view are better. Restricting or blocking these is not a positive move for this Legislative Assembly.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, well, if jumping the shark was an Olympic sport, the Liberals would have won the gold today in synchronized shark jumping. The Premier's grandstanding and calling it "a dark day for democracy" as my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition noted earlier today — he is either going over the top with his rhetoric, or if he truly believes it and believes that the opposition parties are conspiring together to bring about a dark day for democracy, then call an election. This Premier is serving in power even though not one single Yukoner voted for him to be Premier. No one voted for him to be Leader of the Liberal Party. He has no mandate from the Yukon and yet purports to claim that it is a dark day for democracy. Well, either withdraw his over-the-top rhetoric and admit that it was over the top, or if he actually believes it, drop the writ.

We know that is not going to happen, because we know that the Liberals here today all believe that if an election was held right now, the Yukon Party would win, and they know that they have lost the confidence of the public.

I am just going to summarize here; I could go on at great length after listening to a very long afternoon from the Liberal Party members amply demonstrating why this is often referred to as "wasted Wednesday", but I will touch on a few things. The Minister of Health and Social Services, in her argument against this, surprisingly admitted that their ministerial statements aren't new policies or information a lot of the time and insisted that they don't have to answer questions that the members of the opposition ask them when we rise in response to ministerial statements and suggested that we just didn't understand the Standing Orders.

That is the point of how this Liberal government has abused ministerial statements with re-announcements and re-announcements and re-announcements. For example, the Premier, in his rather over-the-top rhetoric, gave the example of wanting to call a ministerial statement tomorrow that he said related to COVID and flu vaccinations. Well, that is a great example of exactly what we are talking about, because the government issued a press release about that October 10. We can read the press release. Any Yukoner interested in it can read the press release.

This proposal — again, I do have to remind members — was agreed to by a majority of MLAs on an all-party committee who voted in favour of a change to the Standing Order that the Liberals disagree with and are trying to delay and put up roadblocks to prevent it being enacted. The change itself is intended to prevent the Liberal government wasting the House's time with ministerial statements that re-announce press releases or are otherwise empty and lacking in substance.

Our motion, if passed, would not at all prevent the government from making ministerial statements; it would simply require them to cooperate just a little with other parties and get the agreement of one other House Leader that the statement was indeed a new policy and worth the House's time to debate.

I would also note that the government has suggested that this is about preventing communication and preventing speech, but I have to remind them — as they know very well — that the House's time is very limited and valuable. The government doesn't want to increase the number of sitting days per year, but when we spend hour after hour after hour on ministerial statements, it takes away from the time we have to ask questions about important departments, like Health and Social Services. I know that is why the Minister of Health and Social Services so passionately defended ministerial statements. She doesn't want to have to answer questions about the Department of Health and Social Services. No wonder, considering how the government is failing thousands of Yukoners who don't have a family doctor. We have nursing shortages in rural Yukon which reached as high as 50 percent before the government took action. We have the closure of health centres. We have an unprecedented series of gaps in emergency medical services coverage in rural Yukon and an education system in crisis. No wonder the government would rather use ministerial statements prepared by department staff to avoid having to answer the tough questions.

I would note that the Government House Leader, who led off at great length for the Liberals — there are areas that the minister is neglecting within his own department, including the ongoing firewood shortage that is affecting Yukoners for yet another year. Yukoners have trouble getting access to firewood, which for decades and under previous ministers — who were not Liberal ministers — no one would have dreamed that this would have been an issue, yet the minister continues to neglect his job, spending his time on research projects and taking shots at opposition members.

In the interest of time, I will wrap up. I would just note, as I mentioned in introducing this, that —

Speaker: Order, please.

Member for Lake Laberge, please carry on.

Mr. Cathers: I will wrap up, since we are eager to get this to a vote and move on to other matters, such as the next motions on the agenda, and again, as I noted, this — contrary to the repeated assertions of Liberal members — would not prevent them speaking. It would not prevent MLAs being able to speak to constituents or on behalf of them. This would simply be taking away the power of the Liberal Cabinet to unilaterally control this amount of time in the Legislative Assembly each and every day, and it would require them to get the agreement on scheduling ministerial statements of just one other House Leader that the matter was new, that the matter was worthy of the House's time, and this is intended to be in the best interest of the House's time.

I would also note, just in closing, Mr. Speaker, that this specific proposal is the result of suggestions that we made and that we reached agreement with a majority of other members on SCREP regarding. It is a compromise where we had suggested several other approaches to dealing with this, including the possibility of eliminating ministerial statements altogether. But ultimately, we worked together to try to come

up with an option that would be mutually agreeable to the majority of members, and SCREP ultimately recommended it to this House by a majority of members, and we hope that it will pass today.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?
Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. McLean: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Silver: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Disagree.

Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. Clarke: 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.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 11 yea, seven nay.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion respecting Committee Reports No. 6 agreed to

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 793

Clerk: Motion No. 793, standing in the name of Mr. Hassard.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to cancel its plans to close the Silver Trail, Braeburn, Keno, and Johnsons Crossing solid-waste transfer stations and work with the residents of each area to ensure that there are appropriate solid-waste disposal solutions that meet the needs of these communities.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to speak to Motion No. 793, which, of course, is regarding the solid-waste transfer stations in Johnsons Crossing, Braeburn, Silver City, and Keno. I would like to start by thanking all of the people over the past few years who have worked on improving the way in which solid waste is dealt with

throughout our territory. From government staff, municipal staff — numerous folks across the territory have taken part in sitting on various committees or have just participated in community meetings. All of their input is certainly appreciated.

We know that solid waste poses issues, and we know it isn't cheap to deal with, but most of my comments today will be around consultation and respect. We know, as well, that one of the agreements under the CASA arrangement is for the government to consult with these four affected communities, and I would like to thank the NDP for this; however, I am not sure whose definition of "consult" will be used with regard to this issue.

Just the other day during Community Services debate, we heard the minister say that the communities had been consulted with many times, but the Leader of the NDP rightfully reminded him — and I will quote: "... the outcome ... is not consultation." This has been the case since day one. From the very first meeting I attended in Johnsons Crossing with the previous Minister of Community Services, it was a statement. It was not consultation. The minister came down and essentially told community members that: Your transfer station is closing; freeze your garbage and haul it to town. That was the message.

It was a message that was not well-received, and unfortunately, since that time, not much has changed. The only thing that has changed is the frustration felt by the residents in these communities, as it continues to grow. Now, many letters have been written, but apparently, all have fallen on deaf ears. Now, the most recent letter — and I believe it was signed by roughly 130 people — was addressed to the Premier. That was from residents around Silver City, and if I could, I would like to read that letter into the record. The letter reads as follows — and I will quote:

"We, the residents of Silver City and the surrounding area, are writing to you today in the hope that you may find time to personally consider our situation here and move towards a reconsideration of your government's ill advised determination to shut down our deeply needed transfer station, and thereby avoid doing grievous damage to our community.

"It's painful to recount, but the Minister of Community Services has stubbornly and consistently refused to engage with us on this issue. At the one meeting he attended, in Destruction Bay, he opened the meeting by announcing that he was NOT there to discuss that issue, so vital to us all, but was there merely as part of 'a previous planned tour of the communities'. It was a very well attended gathering and everyone who was there can testify to the fact that he responded to our concerns in an arrogant and condescending manner with a demeanor wholly inappropriate for a public servant. Sad to say, he was dismissive and disrespectful towards the assembled community members.

"Your desk, as the saying goes, is 'where the buck stops', and bears the ultimate responsibility for the impact of government decisions on the people of the Yukon. Thus, it is directly to you that we now appeal.

"We have heard a lot of nebulous justifications wrapped around phrases such as 'global warming concerns' and 'modernization', issues which carry no rational, direct bearing on our predicament here. For a decision that will do no less than

devastate our community, we deserve to be provided with some concrete and practical reasoning. What we have not heard is even one good, intelligible reason for the govt. to harm us in this way. If you are aware of such a reason, please convey it to us.

"We are a growing community, with new residents coming in and new businesses taking shape. Year by year, tourism is constantly on the increase. Please tell us ... How can our government aggressively promote tourism on the one hand, while, on the other hand, dismantling the infrastructure which rural residents desperately need in order to cope with expanding tourism??"

"It should be self evident that the Govt. of Yukon should not be in the business of pulling the rug out from under such places and thus strangling fledgling communities in their infancy. Astonishingly, this policy is redolent of a callous disdain towards rural residents. Is our govt. simply unaware of what is like outside of the city limits of Whitehorse? To us, it comes as outright hostility towards our way of life.

"Government handouts we've received begin by saying that the closing of rural transfer stations will 'save taxpayers money and reduce emissions. Both assertions are demonstrably untrue. It is inarguable that requiring our residents to drive hundreds of km. several times a week will both greatly increase overall emissions and incur thousands of dollars in additional expenses for taxpayers here. It is inarguable that requiring our residents to drive hundreds of km. several times a week will both greatly increase overall emissions and incur thousands of dollars in additional expenses for taxpayers here.

"At this time, we will not go into listing all the reasons why this policy is a disastrously counterproductive mistake. Suffice it to say, the reasons are there, and they are good, sensible reasons. They have been communicated over and over, to government representatives and in the media. Constantly having to reiterate our case is tiresome; we would rather be focussing our attentions elsewhere. The thing is; We love this community and will not give up defending its viability.

"Of course, government is not expected to be infallible. Mistakes are made. However, one hallmark of good government is that when mistakes are made they can be recognized, retracted and reworked, in order to better serve the public interest."

This leads to my earlier comment about respect. These individuals, just like the individuals in Keno and Johnsons Crossing — they are individuals — they are Yukoners who deserve to be respectfully listened to. They are the ones who elect us all, and they are the ones who pay their taxes, and those tax dollars pay our salaries here in the Legislature.

On Monday, the minister stood in this House and said — and I quote: "... it is financially impossible to put the type of controls for a community, say, of 10 people or less that are needed to secure a site so that travellers from the highway or nearby communities don't decide to dump their propane tanks, their engine blocks, their construction waste, and their waste oils and other deleterious substances out of the sight of prying eyes..."

So, I have trouble with many parts of this quote. For starters, I like to believe that there are very few people who are actually going to do such a thing in this day and age and that if we properly post signs saying what is and isn't allowed in a particular site, that people will obey the rules. And for those few who may chose to disregard the rules, I am curious what's stopping them from dumping these items in one of the many side roads or gravel pits along the way?

Another issue that I have is the number of references the minister continues to reference. For instance, in the quote that I just referred to, he states that there are "10 people or less". Now, we know that, when speaking to media, the Minister of Community Services has said that there were less than 10 people when referring to Johnsons Crossing. Yet the community has continued to argue and provide numbers to the department, to the government, showing that this is certainly not the case. I know the latest numbers from Johnsons Crossing showed that there are approximately 54 permanent residents, with over 100 part-time residents, and I know that this number is much more accurate.

"Financially impossible" — another thing that was said by the minister, and it's certainly a bizarre statement to say about a system that is already in place and for a government that has spent millions on overruns, such as we are seeing on the Nisutlin Bay bridge, because of this government's poor planning and not having permits in place, despite calls from many people — or talking about spending \$44 million on a port in a different country that may not even suit the needs of Yukon companies.

So, it's pretty rich to hear this minister talk about the spending. We are talking about Yukoners who have invested, in some cases, their life savings into homes and businesses with the understanding that certain government infrastructure is in place for them to use, but then to have that infrastructure removed with no consultation whatsoever — it's not right. Again, being told the outcome is not consultation. That is the crux of this motion.

Now, I understand the financial implications of putting the liabilities on the government books regarding the closure costs of these transfer stations, but the government must also consider the citizens of these communities.

I could go on for hours and hours debating things like how many greenhouse gas emissions there are from travelling or YESAB submissions and who said what and the responsibilities of everyone under the sun, but honestly, I would just really like to hear from other members of this Assembly, and I would love to see this motion come to a vote.

In closing, I would again just say thank you to all of those whom I mentioned earlier for all the work they have done to date, but understanding that this motion is about real consultation to find solutions — real solutions — that work for these residents, for these citizens of the Yukon. I don't mean just saying, hey, here's a new bear-proof can, and we put up a sign. We are talking about real solutions.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Before I begin this afternoon in earnest, I really want to thank the MLA for Pelly-Nisutlin for

bringing this motion forward this afternoon. Thank you. I am glad for the chance to speak about garbage this afternoon. Weird, I know. I am like that.

In fact, in one of our recent engagements, the member opposite asked what world I live on. It's still Earth — a unique, tiny blue marble that shines ever so brightly in the vastness of this cosmos. Earth's uniqueness is at the heart of my remarks today. This is it. This is all we have. This is our home — our only home.

For a millennium now, humanity has lived a rich life on a hospitable planet with a generally benign climate. Now that is changing: Our climate is less pleasant and our world a little bit less rich and hospitable. That is happening because of us. Mr. Speaker, this matters to me. The environment is central to this motion, and it has been a passion throughout my life.

Now I have a smidgeon of time to talk about it this afternoon in this House, which, as I mentioned earlier today, has also been a focal point of most of my professional life in the Yukon.

I want to thank the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin for the opportunity this afternoon to discuss this. Next, before I crack on, I have a few other people I would like to thank. I want to get this out of the way, because once I begin in earnest, this would get lost and it's important.

It takes a community to raise a child, and here is proof. The incredible team at the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society: Gill Cracknell, Joti Overduin, Lisa Taylor, the late Mike Dehn, Juri Peepre, Malkolm Boothroyd, Bob Jickling — environmental stewards who had a profound impact on my understanding of the Yukon and the natural world. I want to thank them.

Similarly, Mike Walton, Stu Clark, Karen Baltgailis, Skeeter Wright, Lewis Rifkind — who wrote "Waste not, want not", a recycling and environmental column for me — Bob Van Dijken and the team at Yukon Conservation Society, current and past, for all of their guidance to me and hard work in protecting the territory that we all love — I thank them as well.

I add to that list my good friends Matthew Lien and Ken Madsen, environmental champions and disrupters whose good-natured mischief had a profound influence on a much younger me and that persists to this day. We shared many rich adventures, gentlemen, and you had a great influence on my understanding of the planet and frankly greatly improved my life in innumerable ways. I want to thank them as well.

I had a few mentors, as well: Peter Lesniak, Erling Friis-Baastad, and Ken Bolton. I was lucky enough to have a few grains of their incredible talent penetrate my thick skull and work their way into my soul. I thank those gentlemen as well.

The team at Community Services, specifically for today's discussion — all of the people involved there. I could name them, but in fear of leaving somebody out, I'm just going to say thank you so much to all of them who work selflessly day in and day out to improve life for Yukoners, handling many, many minute details on these very, very challenging files — in this case, to improve the Yukon's landfills and to make sure that our beautiful territory is looked after generally. They are all true

public servants and have, in some cases, unnecessarily put up with a ton of garbage on this file, literally and figuratively.

I had hoped to spare them some of that, and I apparently failed, and for that, I apologize. They certainly didn't deserve some of the treatment they have received. I am indebted to them all and I thank them.

I also want to give note to Brandon Kassbaum, my friend and advisor. His guidance has laid the foundation of this talk this afternoon and I thank him. Finally, Genesee Keevil, my friend — one of the most grounded and courageous people I have ever had the pleasure to work alongside. Our walks are few but cherished, and I look forward to the next time when I might glean some new insight from your keen mind.

Enough said, Mr. Speaker. Let's dance.

First, I want to note that the services to rural Yukon are being expanded. Let me repeat that: Services to rural Yukon are going to be expanded. We are investing in regional landfills in Destruction Bay, Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Carmacks, Teslin, Haines Junction, Watson Lake, Dawson City, Faro, Marsh Lake, Tagish, Carcross, and Deep Creek. Not only are these landfills getting or have received capital upgrades, scales, fences, electricity, buildings, et cetera, they are also going to have staff to supervise their operations — more staff in rural Yukon. This is a good thing. It's going to put more income into rural Yukon as a result of this plan.

These landfills will also handle organics and recycling better, and this is critical for our environment and to meet our greenhouse gas emissions. There will be more services in rural Yukon.

The plan came from municipalities. They wanted regionalization of landfills and there is good reason for that. The Ministerial Committee on Solid Waste that my good colleague shepherded in the early days was struck in October 2017 with representatives from rural communities, four Yukon government officials from the departments of Community Services and Environment, and one from the City of Whitehorse. The group was co-chaired by the Association of Yukon Communities and the Department of Community Services. It was to provide recommendations for actions related to solid-waste management in the Yukon, which we have talked about quite a bit in the House. It was brought about because municipalities wanted the landfills to be better used.

They came with recommendations in April 2018. The theme was "Regionalization". They wanted to review waste management costs and service levels for unincorporated areas, develop and implement a solid-waste regionalization strategy and framework, which was done, and develop a strategy for managing landfill liability responsibilities, including legacy liabilities.

Specifically, the committee had a vision centered on the efficient use of resources and supports for enhanced municipal solid-waste operations and directing existing and new resources toward enhancing regional solid-waste sites that would help the Yukon government ensure that there is an appropriate level of service for the entire population, as well as strategically prepare for the eventual closure of some solid-waste facilities without

significantly reducing service — without significantly reducing service.

There is also a theme for user-pay. The committee's vision was to explore and implement designated materials regulations or extended producer responsibility as soon as possible. That work is being done as we speak.

We just passed legislation, as a matter of fact, in this session. We wanted to implement a solid-waste user-fee pilot in the Whitehorse periphery and explore user fees at all sites. We have done that.

We wanted clear standards — implement the best practices and explore the role of social enterprise, entrepreneurship, and local innovation in waste management across the Yukon.

These recommendations were fully endorsed by the Government of Yukon and are underway now — in phase 2 of that plan.

A business person in Destruction Bay has a problem with the closure of transfer stations and they have been very clear about this. I have heard them and I acknowledge their concerns. They have been the vanguard of opposition, and they have done a good job representing their position and rallying like-minded folks to their cause, especially the closure of the unsupervised, uncontrolled, and tipping-fee-free transfer station located at Silver City. It is about 46 kilometres from Destruction Bay. It is important to note that there is a landfill in Destruction Bay roughly four kilometres from the centre of town, and that landfill — four kilometres away — takes all garbage, recyclables, brush, and clean wood. It is open and will remain so, and it will be improved like the other regional landfills.

I have heard that there are issues with tourism garbage in Destruction Bay. I understand this. This is an issue, for tourism-facing businesses across the territory. For example, businesses in Carcross see incredible tourism traffic and handle waste from visitors every single summer. A colossal number of visitors go through that community. In Carcross, tourism businesses build that cost into their business models, charging customers for the service — for the removal of garbage. That is an acceptable avenue for businesses. If they aren't doing so yet, businesses and not-for-profits should build that cost into their activities. It is a legitimate cost of operation.

It is different for residents. They can't raise that money. It is harder for them and I certainly understand that. That is why the transfer stations that we're talking about this afternoon are meant to be used by residents and not by businesses. Unfortunately, they are not supervised. As the member opposite noted just a few moments ago, we have no eyes on who is using the service, but we do see the effects of those who are abusing that privilege, and the environmental and economic cost of that abuse is clear. Even in the last few weeks, we have seen transmissions, engine blocks, and waste oil dumped on the ground. We have seen construction waste dumped on these sites. We have seen propane tanks, old barbecues, waste metals, and other matériel that should not be placed there dumped all over the place. The cost of fixing this and cleaning it up is extraordinary, and it's simply because there are no controls on the sites. That is what we are seeking to end here. That is really what we are talking about this afternoon with this motion.

In any case, it takes an awful lot of work to champion an issue. I want to thank the individual and individuals in Destruction Bay for their ferocious advocacy in their region. I understand how hard this can be for people living in rural Yukon. We are talking about a way of life and a way of doing things that has been established for decades. A change of this kind is hard — very hard — and I have heard that and I understand that. We saw this earlier when we moved away from burning garbage in our dumps. I remember covering that in the media and it was a tough transition as well.

Today, we understand how that's really not acceptable. But like that earlier change — burning garbage — and given our current circumstances in the Yukon, in the country, and in the world, improving the way we handle garbage, recyclables, and compostable material is absolutely necessary. On that front, we all have to do our part. We produce an awful lot of garbage as a society. We all have to consider that and assess that. Making polluters pay for that garbage is one way of doing that.

All right, I will say that, on this issue — and here we are again this afternoon — never has so much ink been spilled for garbage collected from so few people. Believe me, I know about spilled ink and I know about garbage now — on that, I am fast becoming an expert or at least an apprentice. Make no mistake — I don't want to be misinterpreted. The statement I made about how much ink is being spilled is not intended to belittle the issue in any way, shape, or form. For the few dozen people we are asking to adopt new ways of disposing of garbage, the weight of the garbage they produce — this is difficult, and I understand that. Garbage, the detritus, of our far too wasteful society is, in fact, a very, very serious issue. Waste poses a significant risk to our environment. Poorly controlled waste from our homes and businesses threatens to sully our forests, our fields, our rivers, and our lakes. Poorly controlled waste from our homes and businesses threatens to pollute our soil and groundwater — and not to remind members this afternoon that Whitehorse aquifers have started to show early signs of contamination from surface water that could possibly, in the future, require extensive treatment facilities. So, yes, how we handle our waste in our society is a serious issue. Waste is also a serious producer of greenhouse gas, so it's important to our efforts on climate change. Poorly run landfills represent the third largest source of methane production in North America. I know that the member opposite who wants to remove our price on carbon also doesn't want to put a price on garbage, apparently — but it's important.

As I said, this is our home. It's the only one we have. Time and time again, we are proving excessively efficient at wrecking it. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas. It's 86 times more potent than carbon dioxide, according to a federal discussion paper on the subject. Thoughtlessly landfilling biodegradable waste is the primary cause of this methane production. Improving our landfills, making them more secure and better managed through gates and staff, will help us mitigate methane production — this according to a federal discussion paper that urges regions to do so. As a matter of fact, the discussion paper says that the only approach to reducing

future emissions of this voracious methane and greenhouse gas is to manage emissions at our landfill sites better.

The only way to do that is by managing our landfills. We have to do better. We have to better manage our landfills, and we have to better manage the people who use our landfills. We have to supervise them. We have to have eyes on what they are dumping, how they dispose of it, and where it goes. We have to control our waste better, and we have to reduce it.

I am going to put the first very fine point on the discussion this afternoon. The Yukon declared a climate emergency. We declared an emergency because we face a dangerous situation that requires immediate action. That is basically the definition of an "emergency". Climate change is exactly such an emergency. Dealing with an emergency takes precedence over everything. If we don't, then it's clearly not an emergency. So, here we are, again, while in a state of a climate emergency, discussing perpetuating uncontrolled, unsupervised garbage disposal that will inconvenience people but that federal research has shown is essential to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions.

In *Our Clean Future*, we have now set a target through the confidence and supply agreement to reduce our territorial emissions by 45 percent. It's going to be very, very difficult to get there. One of the ways to do that is by better managing our landfills, making sure that we capture everything we can and handling it in a way that reduces and separates the compostables and organics from the rest of the garbage.

Here we are discussing ways to weaken that, so how can we have a 45-percent target and not do everything we can to make the target? This is where I am conflicted. I want to do everything I can to hit the target, and I'm having my hands tied by not having the ability to do everything I can to hit the target.

We don't want to leave our small communities behind, and we have no interest in simply closing doors and walking away. We want to find solutions that are realistic, affordable, and workable. We are working on this. We have a workshop happening up the north highway in the next few weeks to do exactly that. We want to find solutions that are realistic, affordable, and workable. As much as it is not a viable solution to hire staff to manage and monitor a small transfer station that serves a very small number of households, it is also not a solution to simply keep operating as we have. We are committed to finding solid-waste solutions with these communities, but our team needs to be given space and opportunity to work with the communities on what that could be.

We have had some successes already. We are moving toward regional facilities that will serve a broad regional area and ultimately reduce the amount of trucking needed to move waste to Whitehorse. We have worked with municipalities and the AYC in a positive way. We have found a path to help gate and staff municipal sites to implement a consistent system, based on user-pay, managed, and monitored sites. That is a step in the right direction. We appreciate the willingness of residents of Keno, for example, and local businesses to have the conversation that we're trying to have in Silver City, Johnsons

Crossing, and Braeburn. Out of that came a reasonable solid-waste solution.

In this case, rhetoric is a distraction. It's preventing constructive conversations about sustainable solid-waste options and solutions. It is a disservice to suggest that the only solution is to keep the transfer stations open and operating exactly as they are today. Sites that are expensive to clean up like that are not monitored or managed, and it does nothing to encourage diversion. We need to find reasonable ways forward that still serve the needs of residents and fit into an entire system of change that we're going through for solid-waste management in the territory.

I really want to give the staff, who I talked about earlier, the time and the ability to continue to engage community members on local solutions and ultimately find ways to serve our communities.

Like me, the staff understands that any change we make to transfer stations will have real impacts on the residents who live there. We want healthy and sustainable Yukon communities, and we need to find ways to support local solutions to these challenges. The ongoing engagement should yield some results that will make sense for each community in the context of the entire system.

We have to hit higher targets. We have to find ways to do that. We have to work with residents to do that.

I am going to let my colleague have a few words, and I am going to take my seat. This is an important issue for us. This is our home; it's the only one we have, and we have to look after it.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Before I came to this Assembly, I was on Whitehorse City Council. I worked with the Association of Yukon Communities. We often went to meetings around the communities. In particular, I used to watch how some of our non-Whitehorse communities worked in that space, because I had a home out in Marsh Lake.

One issue that just kept coming back was solid waste. Municipalities and the local advisory councils were all very nervous about liabilities around the landfills, about the amount of solid waste, and about what was happening across the territory. I stepped away from that work for about a year, and then I ran in the 2016 territorial election for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes and was lucky enough to be elected to represent the folks. Then I was put into the role of Minister of Community Services.

My first conversation was with the past Mayor of Whitehorse and then executive director of the Association of Yukon Communities, Ms. Bev Buckway. Bev and I had worked together, and she was excited that I had taken on the role of Minister of Community Services, and the first words out of her mouth were: "You have to do something about solid waste." So, I sat down and talked with AYC. They had written a paper talking about the systemic nature — the systemic problems — with solid waste across the territory, and they asked us to commit to solutions. I remember talking it over with the Department of Community Services and saying that we were going to make a real effort on this file. I knew that it was not an

easy file. I also knew that there would be some deep, difficult challenges, including within my own riding.

I remember going to the AGM in Faro, I think it was, and I remember lots of the members from here were at that AGM, and the president of the Association of Yukon Communities was from Faro at that time. We went there to talk about solid waste, and we gave our commitment, as a government, that we would work with the Association of Yukon Communities to re-do solid waste across the territory with the notion of making it more sustainable, with the notion of dealing with risks and liabilities for municipalities, and it was to re-envision it broadly. I physically made the move to call up the then-Minister of Highways and Public Works and return my garbage can — we are not allowed to use props, but I am just going to point to the garbage can that is here — we had one in our office, and I said that I am going to work to reduce my garbage so that I don't need one of these, and I gave it back. It was a symbolic gesture, but it was to say to the Association of Yukon Communities that I was onboard with them and deeply committed to re-doing solid waste across the territory.

They said that they had been concerned that we had been down this path several times and that it was going to take some while to build trust in them and that we really were committed as a government.

It is my recollection that, when I spoke to the Association of Yukon Communities' annual general meeting in my capacity as Minister of Community Services, it was very well-received. Had we done all of the work yet to have the conversations with all of the communities? No, we had not, but we went about starting to do that.

Now, one of the fundamental principles that was there under that whole vision for what we should do across the Yukon was that we needed to make sure that our landfills weren't just drop off. We needed to get them to become gated and staffed, and that was across the board. That is not necessarily an easy thing to do, but when I listened to the Minister of Community Services talk about investment in communities, I knew that every job, in every one of our communities, was important for those communities. It is good to have those government jobs in communities, or government contracts, and here were examples that we were going to start to provide.

Again, municipalities agreed that they, too, would make sure that their landfills were gated and staffed — and I agree with the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin that 99 percent of Yukoners don't abuse the system, but the challenge is that one percent. When they dump something in your landfill or your waste facilities, it goes through the roof — those costs — so, you really do need to staff — that was clear.

The next thing we agreed to was that we needed to put a small, nominal charge on all landfills, and the place we were going to start was in my own backyard — in Marsh Lake, Mount Lorne, Carcross, Tagish, and Deep Creek. That charge was going to be very small, but it was never going to cover the costs; it was just going to be at the same level as it was for Whitehorse so we would stop this leakage. People were driving

from town to our smaller communities to drop off their garbage, and we needed to stop that.

I will just pause for a second there, Mr. Speaker, because I sense you are heading for time. So, let me just see if you wish to call for time.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I will keep going — thank you.

So, if you think that's — let me just — for all of the colleagues in this House —

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. 793 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

The following sessional papers were tabled October 25, 2023:

35-1-118

Yukon Arts Centre Annual Report 2022/23 (Streicker)

35-1-119

Yukon Heritage Resources Board Annual Report April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023 (Streicker)

35-1-120

Bill No. 29, *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, reprinted with amendment in English and French (Pillai)

The following document was filed October 25, 2023:

35-1-158

Yukon Geographical Place Names Board 2022-2023 Annual Report (Streicker)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 148

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Thursday, October 26, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

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Lane Tredger	Third Party House Leader Whitehorse Centre
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, October 26, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of changes made to the Order Paper. The following motions were not placed on today's Notice Paper as they are out of order and outdated: Motion No. 801, notice of which was given yesterday by the Hon. Premier; and Motion No. 803, notice of which was given yesterday by the Minister of Community Services.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Introduction of visitors.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly to welcome a number of very distinguished guests who are here with us today for our tribute to the first poppy.

Joining us today are First Corporal Retired Morris Cratty; Petty Officer 1st Class Retired Dave Hart; Ranger Retired Peter Zwikirsch; Sergeant Retired Rose Davis; EMS, John Trefry; Sergeant Retired Joe Mewett; Sergeant Retired Dave Laxton; Commander Retired Max Harvey; Major Retired Red Grossinger; Captain Retired Cal Knowles; and Corporal Retired Brian Reed.

I would also like to welcome to the Assembly today, wife of veteran Ken Burke, Dorothy Burke, and son, Redd Knight.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, in honour of the Duty Counsel Day tribute, I have the honour of welcoming to the Assembly, Norah Mooney and Mark Chandler, who are both staff lawyers with the Yukon Legal Services Society, as well as Michael McBride and Amy Ryder, who are Yukon Legal Services Society board members.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, we have a number of people here for our Klondike Road Relay tribute this afternoon.

I have Tracey Bilsky, Sport Yukon executive director; Liz Butler, race coordinator; Reid Vanier, Sport Yukon communications, Klondike; Mike McCann, the International Road Relay Advisory Committee — they just celebrated their 40th anniversary with the race — and Donna Jones, volunteer with the Klondike Road Relay and current participant for the 30th year; Stacy Lewis, who is president of the board of Sport Yukon; Amanda Deuling, the sport tourism manager at Sport

Yukon; Megan Cromarty, who is with the Yukon government Sport and Recreation branch.

If you could all help me in welcoming them to the House this afternoon, I would appreciate it.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I think she may have been missed, but I would like to welcome Sue Greetham to the House. I should also just acknowledge that Amy Ryder's two daughters are here, although I don't know their names — if we could welcome them, please.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, just to add a few folks who were missed as well — I notice that Legion member Scott Westerlies is here as well, and the former Mayor of Mayo, Shannon Cooper, is here as well.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Royal Canadian Legion's poppy campaign

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to the Canadian Legion's annual national poppy campaign. The Remembrance Day poppy is a symbol of respect and gratitude for the military personnel who have died and sacrificed in war. The poppy, a symbol that was inspired by the poem *In Flanders Fields* by Canadian military doctor, poet, and soldier Colonel John McCrae, represents the blood spilled in war but also the renewal of life.

We wear poppies to remember and pay tribute to the contributions that veterans have made for the safety and security of Canadians and others around the world. Poppies are worn from the last Friday in October to Remembrance Day on November 11. This year, we can begin to wear poppies on Friday, once the Commissioner receives the first poppy on October 27. This annual campaign is made possible by the Royal Canadian Legion. We are thankful for our local chapter, the Whitehorse Legion Branch 254, working tirelessly to support our local veterans and ensure that they have the assistance they need, and it also provides a community hub for veterans.

I hope that Yukoners will continue to donate to the Royal Canadian Legion to help support local programs and services. Donations from the poppy campaign go directly to support veterans and their families. Wearing a poppy is a way to show veterans that we recognize their service and that we support them and their families and appreciate their contributions to our society and their sacrifice.

I invite all Yukoners to join me in wearing a poppy during this campaign to show our support and gratitude. The poppy reminds us to reflect and consider the meaning of the term, "Lest we forget".

By wearing a poppy, we pledge to never forget the cost and consequences of war and the importance of peace. The poppy

campaign ensures that we do not forget their sacrifices and courage, giving our community a way to remember and support our veterans and their families collectively. Their selflessness and dedication have stood in defence of our freedoms and our way of life. I will be wearing a poppy to acknowledge that we remember not just the loss of life but also the mental and emotional burden that selfless service often carries.

Thank you to all the veterans for answering the call of service.

Applause

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to all veterans and the Royal Canadian Legion as they launch their annual poppy campaign tomorrow and the numerous other activities that they organize in the week leading up to Remembrance Day.

As a proud member of the legion, I sure appreciate all of the work done by our local Royal Canadian Legion Branch 254 on the poppy campaign. It is great to see so many in the Legislature today.

I would also like to thank all other Yukoners — the ladies who organize the Yukon remembrance campaign and those in the smaller communities who distribute the poppy boxes to key locations. From the last Friday in October to Remembrance Day, millions of Canadians wear a poppy as a visible pledge to never forget those who sacrificed for our freedoms. I would encourage everyone in the Yukon to show their recognition by proudly wearing this symbol of remembrance and taking a moment to reflect.

When I was a teenager in our community, we were home to a number of World War II veterans, one being my grandfather, Ron Watson. At the time, my family owned the local grocery store in Haines Junction. Grandpa would always make sure that the poppies were out by the cash register — right out, front and centre — so that they could be seen. I will never forget the day when I was running the cash in the store, chatting with my grandpa, and a lady came in and asked what they were. He said that they were poppies for Remembrance Day, to remember those who fought in wars and for those ones who made the ultimate sacrifice.

She looked at him and said that she didn't support war and that those should not be out on display. My grandfather explained to her, with a tear in his eye, that he had been on the front lines for four years and why it was so important to remember his buddies who didn't make it home. When he was done speaking, she apologized and let my grandfather place a poppy on the left side of her coat, right over her heart. I will never forget that day.

Wearing a poppy is a great way to show your appreciation and respect for veterans and those who are serving today. It is our duty to make sure that the actions of those who dedicated their lives and died for our safety, freedom, and independence are never forgotten.

Lest we forget.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to speak to the importance of the remembrance poppy. We are lucky to live in Canada, a country envied for our stability, safety, and security. We don't face daily attacks on our person; our streets and skies are quiet without the backdrop of armed conflict. In recent years and weeks, we have seen a rise in armed conflict and the devastation that it leaves behind. We have been given a window into war that, more often than not, many of us are unable to bear, so we close the curtain and we turn away.

This ability to look away distances us even further from our veterans, the very people who have witnessed and experienced first-hand the realities of war. This ability to turn off and tune out allows us to remove ourselves from the true cost of war. It separates us from the tens of thousands of men and women who are currently serving in the Canadian military and all of those who came before them to support freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights around the world.

The two weeks leading up to Remembrance Day are about pulling back that curtain. The symbol and the legend of the poppy was born out of the lived experience of John McCrae. His beautiful poem *In Flanders Fields* has moved generations of Canadians and still symbolized for us today the loss, the heartache, and the cost of war. The poppy is the visual cue to stop and remember. They remind us not to only acknowledge the sacrifice of those who lost their lives, but to acknowledge the sacrifice of those who answered the call of duty and walk among us today. By wearing a poppy, we are saying that we remember, we see you, we honour you and your sacrifices, and we are thankful for everything you have done and do.

Mr. Speaker, you can disagree with war. You don't have to like it or support it or even want to acknowledge it, but none of that should ever take away from the importance of the poppy. The poppy isn't a symbol that supports war. It doesn't symbolize the politicians who make the decision to engage in armed conflict. It symbolizes the men and women who have personally borne the cost of those decisions, and it is to them that we owe a debt of gratitude, and it is to them that we pledge to remember. It is for them that we wear the poppy.

Lest we forget.

Applause

In recognition of Duty Counsel Day

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government and the Yukon NDP caucus to pay tribute to national Duty Counsel Day, celebrated each year on October 27. This day, initiated by Canada's legal aid associations, enables us to raise awareness of the important work that duty counsel lawyers do for Yukoners and all Canadians.

Not everyone is aware that all Canadians have a Charter right to free legal representation in certain situations. Duty counsel are legal aid staff who provide free legal advice and representation in various types of criminal and family court proceedings. Duty counsel staff also provide 24/7 on-call services that can be accessed by anyone arrested or detained by

police. I am very happy to recognize this vital service that increases access to justice daily for all Yukoners.

Statistically, legal aid professionals who make up duty counsel provide help to Canadians over 1.2 million times a year. In the Yukon, there are 16 lawyers who provide duty counsel services and are funded by the Yukon Legal Services Society, also known as Yukon Legal Aid. For 22 years, I was part of that team of staff lawyers.

Duty counsel provide assistance year-round to those in need, standing up for and protecting their legal rights free of charge. Anyone can suddenly find themselves involved with the justice system, which is complex and can be very overwhelming. Mr. Speaker, that is why the duty counsel exist. At the courthouse, over the phone, or virtually, duty counsel are there to assist all persons navigating the justice system.

Working under tight time constraints and immense pressure, duty counsel lawyers in the Yukon protect the rights of clients in the justice system, providing them with expert legal help and guiding them through their legal matters. They can provide clients with advice upon arrest about the charges that they are facing, court procedures, and their legal rights, including their right to counsel, their right to silence, and rights around search and seizure.

I am very pleased to have this day to recognize the vital service that duty counsel lawyers deliver in the Yukon every day and to celebrate their achievements. They are truly the unsung heroes of our justice system. I would like to thank all duty counsel and the dedicated staff who support them for their hard work and continuous commitment to access to justice for all.

Applause

In recognition of the Klondike Road Relay

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: I rise today to pay tribute to the Klondike Road Relay. The world boasts several prestigious and well-known running events. Boston has the marathon, Pamplona has the Running of the Bulls, and Tennessee has the gut-busting Barkley ultramarathons. The Yukon, Mr. Speaker, has the Klondike Road Relay. In September, this annual test of tenacity, fitness, teamwork, and fun celebrated its 40th anniversary.

Conceptualized in 1982 by the Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon, the race was a means of attracting more visitors to the territory in the fall. The first race took place in 1983 with approximately 25 teams. Since then, the Klondike Road Relay has made the Yukon a must-run race for runners and walkers from around Canada and the world. It highlights the importance of being active for life.

Shortly after its inauguration, the organization of the Klondike Road Relay was taken over by Sport Yukon, and it's no overstatement to say that their perseverance has been tested as much as the race's participants. Road relay organizers had to navigate the pandemic but still hosted a virtual race — the "Kinda" KRR — that began in Carcross, and the 39.5 race in 2022, ensuring the Yukon's contribution to the world's races were maintained.

The Klondike Road Relay follows the White Pass, the historic trail used by gold rush stamperders. Beginning in Skagway, the race cuts through BC and ends in Whitehorse. As one of the only, if not the only, running race that crosses international boundaries, it stands as an example of the close ties that we enjoy with our closest northern neighbour.

The race passes through the traditional territories of the Chilkoot Tlingit people, the Carcross/Tagish First Nation, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. It spans 175 kilometres and rises more than 1,000 metres in elevation. Through it all, runners, walkers, adults, and youth enjoy a trial of their athleticism and a strong community of athletes who revel in the incredible personal challenge and the social activities that accompany the event.

Volunteers are at the heart of the Klondike Road Relay. They work the checkpoints, keep race times, and direct all, while cheering participants as they make their way down the road. We thank them for their role and congratulate Sport Yukon on 40 years of the Klondike Road Relay. We wish the organizers and participants many more years on the trail.

Applause

Ms. McLeod: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 40th anniversary of the Klondike Road Relay, which held its first race in 1983. The Klondike Road Relay has become a tradition and made memories for so many over the last four decades. The Tourism Industry Association of the Yukon was the mastermind behind this race, which has become a much-anticipated annual event for runners and walkers.

While it began as a way to attract visitors to the territory, it has proven to be of great economic benefit as well to Skagway, where the race begins. The number of manpower and volunteer hours that it takes to stage this event every year is incredible. From organizing to running the actual event, and holding down checkpoints from Skagway to Whitehorse, there is no shortage of duties.

We would like to thank all those who have taken part over the past 40 years: Sport Yukon, volunteers, municipalities, sponsors, and participants. Without all of you, this race would not be possible.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Klondike Road Relay. This epic race has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. When I was small, my parents were — and they are still — part of a tightknit running community. I am sure that preparations started long before the race, but what I remember as a kid was getting dropped off at the neighbour's and my folks returning the next day looking a little haggard, with a stereo duct-taped to the driver's side mirror, to pick me up to head to the finish line. As the years passed, my dad continued to run with various iterations of his team and my mom took a more active role with timing.

I have so many memories of the finish line with my little sister, of the legendary Ron McFadyen putting a microphone

from a radio right into people's faces and asking them how the races were as they were panting to catch their breath, of megaphones, clipboards and Lycra — so much Lycra back in the day — and chaos.

Fast-forward many years and many races, and my dad, who just turned 73, continues to run, but now so does my little sister, and now it's her kids at the finish line. My mom has been part of the board for three decades and part of the timing team for at least two of those.

Ten or so years ago, my friend, Mike McCann, who was in charge of the finish line, asked me if I would like to help, and I thought that was the coolest ask ever — to get to hang out with my parents' friends and volunteer to be part of this epic race. Mike has revolutionized the finish line. It is high-tech, with a team of people making sure that each racer is recognized and celebrated.

What we see on race day doesn't reflect the hundreds of hours that are put into it. Long before the finish line, I have seen the stacks of coolers, road signs, and clipboards that are taken out and filled before every race, only to be brought back days later emptied and stored, and the calls for volunteers and the work they put in at checkpoint crews to make sure that racers are supported and safe, and the folks who do the logistics behind the scenes — their magic — with what seem like never-ending supplies of enthusiasm and problem-solving skills.

The Klondike Road Relay means so many different things to legions of different people: conquering personal challenges while running or walking, running all 10 legs to be included on the Senator's Cup, midnight coffees bought in Carcross, costumes, or running a themed checkpoint that runs only in the middle of the night.

Being at the finish line feels like the ultimate privilege because I get to be part of the team that celebrates all of those accomplishments. I love this race, and I have never run a metre of it. I love the community that wraps around all of those who are involved, knowing that each and every person has an important role to play.

So, congratulations to everyone who has played a role in keeping this epic race going for 40 glorious runnings, and here's to 40 more.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Dixon: I have a letter dated October 19, 2023, from the Office of the Auditor General of Canada related to the consolidated financial statements of the Government of Yukon and its controlled entities as at March 31, 2023.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a report on an online petition to stop trophy hunting for grizzly bears in the Yukon, containing 37,000 signatures.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a quartz mining water-use inspection report from Minto Metals dated September 9, 2023.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees? Are there any petitions to be presented?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 21

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I wish to present a petition with 927 signatures that reads as follows:

To the Yukon Legislative Assembly:

This Petition of the undersigned shows THAT:

(1) Grizzly bears are designated a Species of Special Concern under the Federal Species at Risk Act. They are extirpated in much of Canada. But in Yukon close to 2000 bear hunting tags are issued annually, and they are regularly hunted for trophies.

(2) Grizzly bears require very large areas of undivided and undisturbed habitat, are the slowest to reproduce of all North American mammals, and are proven to decline from human activity. Increasing threats to their survival include: fragmentation of habitat due to roads, increased industrial activity, hunting, and the disturbed hibernation and food availability patterns and other difficulties caused by the heating climate.

(3) There has been no Yukon Grizzly count since an estimate done in the 1990's. Given the age of the estimate and the increasing threats to Grizzly survival since then, the precautionary principle must prevail at least until there is reliable knowledge of their numbers. The current management plan is not based on Western science or on Indigenous knowledge.

(4) Grizzlies are a keystone species. They are ecosystem engineers that disperse seeds, till that land, fertilize forests, and help to regulate prey species. Protecting them is protecting Yukon's biodiversity.

(5) First Nations have revered Grizzly Bears and considered them sacred for thousands of years. Many Yukoners of all backgrounds consider them integral to the value of wilderness.

(6) Grizzlies have an inherent right not to be killed just to be displayed on someone's wall.

THEREFORE: We the undersigned request that the Yukon Legislature:

(1) Ban all trophy hunting of Grizzly Bears in the Yukon. The 2017 British Columbia legislation offers both a model and the experience from several years use of it.

(2) Ban roadside hunting throughout the Yukon.

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

That this House urges the Government of Canada to apologize to all Canadian soldiers used as human test agents for chemical weapons experimentation between 1942 and 1945 and to act on all outstanding recommendations in the report entitled *Complaints Concerning Chemical Agent Testing During World War II*, authored by former Department of National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman André Marin.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Justice to respond to the recommendations of the National Police Federation, which represents RCMP members, entitled *Smart Bail Initiatives*, by taking action including:

- (1) committing to implement all seven of the recommendations which involve territorial governments; and
- (2) publicly setting a timeline for implementation.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to recognize that grizzly bears are a species of special concern under Canada's *Species at Risk Act* and ask the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board to protect Yukon's grizzly bears by revising the current grizzly bear management plan from 2019 to:

- (1) ban all trophy hunting of grizzly bears; and
- (2) ban roadside hunting of grizzly bears throughout the Yukon.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, as of October 23, all Yukoners six months and older can receive the COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations. With the onset of colder weather and the growing amount of time spent indoors, I encourage Yukoners to get vaccinated this fall. It is crucial that we all take action to protect our health and well-being, as well as the health and well-being of our loved ones and neighbours. We strongly recommend that everyone receive both COVID-19 and flu vaccines at the same time for enhanced protection. The flu can have severe consequences, especially for those who may be at risk.

As we look back on our challenging COVID-19 journey, the progress that we have made is remarkable, but it is crucial that we remain diligent. Getting vaccinated is a simple, yet powerful, way to prevent illness, reduce the overall burden on our health care system, and protect those who are most vulnerable.

The new COVID-19 vaccine provides protection against the most dominant strain and is safe and effective for

individuals aged six months and older. Both the flu and COVID-19 vaccines have been available to high-risk Yukoners, including those who are 65 and older or immunocompromised, since October 16. In Whitehorse, Yukoners can book appointments online at various locations, including pharmacies and the new vaccine clinic on 4th Avenue. Walk-ins can be accommodated, but we encourage online bookings to assist us with efficiently managing our health care staff and territorial vaccine inventory.

In addition to COVID-19 vaccines and flu shots, pharmacies in Whitehorse provide HPV and shingles immunization to eligible Yukoners. In communities, vaccines can be scheduled at local health centres. Contact your local health centre to book your appointment or for more information regarding immunization and upcoming influenza and COVID-19 clinics. All relevant hospital and health centre contact information is available on yukon.ca.

Health care workers across the territory have shown incredible commitment and resilience during this period. Thank you to community nursing staff for being a trusted voice and helping to educate Yukoners about COVID-19 vaccines, influenza, and how to stay healthy. Thank you as well to the immunization teams who have ensured the continued success of the vaccination rollouts over the years. Our government is extremely grateful to all the health care professionals, including nurses, doctors, paramedics, pharmacists, lab technicians, and the team at Yukon Communicable Disease Control for their unwavering commitment and invaluable support.

Over 15,000 vaccines have been administered so far this year, which is an achievement worth celebrating. According to Canada's COVID-19 tracker, as of yesterday, almost 90 percent of Yukoners over the age of five have received at least one dose, and almost 50 percent have received a third COVID vaccine dose. Ensuring widespread and easy access to vaccines is crucial in our collective effort to protect public health, foster immunity, and pave the way for healthier and more resilient communities.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health and Social Services issued a press release October 10, entitled "The Government of Yukon announces rollout of COVID-19 and flu vaccines". The minister's statement today contains no new information.

The Yukon Party continues to support vaccinations being publicly funded and made available to Yukoners in their communities. We encourage people to make informed health decisions about vaccinations and recognize the benefits of receiving appropriate vaccinations, including receiving childhood vaccinations, tetanus boosters, and recommended vaccinations before travelling to countries with a higher risk of certain diseases, and so on.

I would like to turn now to some questions: This spring, the government extended a sole-source contract for renting the Yukon Convention Centre, which it used as a COVID vaccination clinic. According to the *Yukon News*, on April 5: "The Yukon government's contract registry shows the office space at 4051 4th Ave. is being leased for \$360,000 until

March 31, 2024. On the registry, the lease contract with Northern Vision Development totalled \$720,000 since April 1, 2022.”

At the time, we questioned the need for continuing to rent that space at a cost to taxpayers of \$30,000 per month. The minister told us that government was moving to a smaller space owned by the same company. What is the status of the \$360,000 contract? How much did renovations to the new space cost, and who paid the cost?

There are some other health issues that the minister should have been focused on instead of this re-announcement. The last year has seen an unprecedented series of rural health centres closed and further reductions in health services in Yukon communities. There have been ongoing and worsening gaps in rural EMS coverage with paramedics from Whitehorse sometimes being sent by air at high cost to provide local coverage in rural communities. This leaves people in communities waiting longer than they should for an ambulance and pulls EMS paramedics out of Whitehorse, resulting in gaps during periods of high call volumes, and it also impacts medevac flight availability.

We have called on the minister to present a plan for addressing both of these serious issues in health care. The Liberals finally began work on a new health human resources strategy after we called for it for years. Today, thousands of Yukoners are still without a family doctor. Health care wait times continue to grow, and yesterday, the CEO of the Yukon Hospital Corporation told the board of trustees public meeting that, for the last fiscal year, expenses grew much more than revenues. He noted that, excluding a pension adjustment, expenses grew by 10.7 percent. In contrast, revenues grew by just 2.5 percent.

The hospital's report and audited financial statements show that they had yet another year where expenses exceeded revenues by millions of dollars. The total expenses, as shown on page 7 of their 2022-23 year-end review, was \$114 million. The total revenues were just \$112 million. This has been an ongoing problem under this Liberal government, which has chronically underfunded Yukon hospitals.

In two previous years, hospital expenses exceeded revenues by almost \$4 million. As shown in Hansard on April 6, I reminded the minister of past statements by hospital witnesses about budgetary needs, and I said, “Also, concerning, for the fiscal year that we are now in, as of April 1, the total budget shown for Yukon Hospital Services by the government is about \$10 million less than the amount that the CEO told us that they needed for the last fiscal year.” After attempting to dodge the question, the minister finally admitted that some of the core funding that the hospitals asked for this fiscal year hadn't yet been approved by Management Board. This chronic neglect of our hospitals is unacceptable, especially as the government plans to give millions of dollars to the town of Skagway for a facility that may never be used.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I urge the minister to work on the serious issues and crises happening in health care and take action to fix them.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I will start by thanking the minister for the information she has shared. The Yukon NDP add our voices to urge all Yukoners to get their vaccines as an act of care for their communities.

Since this is such an important issue, we do have a number of questions and suggestions about how we can make vaccines more easily accessible to all Yukoners. First, we want to suggest that Health and Social Services send an e-mail to people when it's time for their next COVID booster. This seems like it would be pretty straightforward since that information is gathered at the time of booking. It could even be an opt-in system so that only people who want to get reminder e-mails would receive them.

It can be really challenging to keep track of how many boosters one has had and hasn't had, and how long it has been. When life gets busy, keeping track of the time to book the next booster can easily get lost in the shuffle. So, we are asking that Health and Social Services set up an automatic e-mail reminder system that notifies people when they are due for their next booster.

I also want to bring attention to the people who don't have the skills or access to the Internet, where a lot of this information is shared. A mail-out to all Yukon households would be helpful in sharing information on the what, where, and how of the COVID vaccine and flu shots. We have heard from people about some questions they have about their vaccine eligibility, and it has been really difficult to find some of this information. For example, how long after having had COVID-19 should a person wait before getting their next booster? Is the COVID booster that's available the most up-to-date vaccine that is available in Canada right now? Are people able to receive the vaccine or flu shot if they are new to the Yukon and haven't received their health card yet? Answers to these questions would be helpful to Yukoners.

I will finish by thanking all the health care professionals, as well as those behind the scenes and the staff in the departments, who are working very hard to keep us all safe and healthy. We appreciate you.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, today, we are providing important life-saving information to Yukoners to support their overall health and well-being. I know that there will be many opportunities, as we debate the Health and Social Services budget, to respond to much of what has been said today, and I look forward to that opportunity.

We heard from the Yukon Party yesterday, and from the Member of Lake Laberge today, that the Yukon Party doesn't really want to hear information in the Legislative Assembly about vaccinations, and that is disappointing. Supporting Yukoners' health and well-being is one of the most important jobs of the territorial government, and no place is more sacred to our democracy than this Legislature.

During the height of the pandemic, we had one of the highest vaccination rates in the country, and this allowed us to keep COVID cases reasonably low in comparison with other jurisdictions, to keep our economy running, and to protect the most vulnerable in our communities.

This government will continue to ensure that we put the health and safety of all Yukoners at the forefront of our decision-making. Unfortunately, it is no surprise that the Yukon Party didn't want Yukoners to hear this critical information today in a ministerial statement, but vaccines save lives, and science speaks for itself.

Yesterday, Canadians heard from the Conservative Leader, Pierre Poilievre, that he continues to stand behind anti-vaxxers while defending his anti-vaccine mandate bill. Yukoners are not fooled: Despite the Leader of the Official Opposition's wobbly claims that the Yukon Party has no formal relationship with any federal party, we now know from the local media that the Yukon Party is very connected. Their own chief of staff has an official role on Poilievre's leadership team. Of course, we can, unfortunately, expect nothing less from the Yukon Party than to continue to distance themselves from any important vaccine dialogue.

I appreciate there were some comments about vaccines, but today, we are talking about COVID-19 vaccines and flu shots in the fall.

Unfortunately, it was extremely disrespectful, in my view, that the Yukon Party spoke to us today about frivolous tributes, and unfortunately, they didn't speak to duty counsel, an important Charter right for Canadians. Given there were distinguished guests in the gallery for this, it was disappointing today.

Today's ministerial statement focused on crucial public health information. None of us, on either side of this House, are public health professionals. It should not be for us to decide what health information the public has a right to receive, and more information is better.

This year, long-term care home residents have the option to get vaccinated at a clinic, participating pharmacies, or to have health care providers administer their vaccines in their homes. In addition to getting the vaccine, there are other, everyday personal protective measures that Yukoners can take to reduce the risk and the spread of illness: of course, staying home when you are sick; covering your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough; and frequently washing hands or using hand sanitizer remain to be as important as ever.

Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Faro community support services

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, it has been two years since the shootings in Faro that resulted in the tragic deaths of two people, injured another, and shocked the community. Immediately following the incident, members of the community spoke up about concerns for the lack of ongoing social services and mental health resources. At the time, the Minister of Health and Social Services said that those community members were inaccurate. Then, a year later, in the fall of 2022, we followed up again. At that point, the minister said that a new counsellor was being hired specifically to serve Faro and Ross River.

Can the minister tell us whether or not there is, indeed, a mental wellness counsellor who directly serves the communities of Faro and Ross River?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thank you very much for the question. The services provided to the Town of Faro, as with all of the communities in the territory, are incredibly important to the health and well-being and the community safety that occurs there. Dealing with issues of mental wellness, substance use, and overall health and well-being, it's incredibly important that we provide as much service as possible in the communities.

I won't comment on the quotes or comments that I may have said previously, because I don't recall them independently, but more importantly, I have been in touch with the Mayor of Faro, in person, and other times have spoken to him directly about the services that are needed in the community and about how that community has been so amazingly resilient, like most Yukon communities, but really pulled together to help to provide the services that their community needs.

The Carmacks Mental Wellness and Substance Use hub provides services to the Faro community and includes community counsellors, a mental health support worker, and a mental health nurse. I look forward to continuing.

Mr. Hassard: Recently, the Mayor of Faro has noted that the second anniversary of the incident has been very challenging for many community members. He noted the fact that Faro does not have a specifically dedicated mental wellness counsellor for the community. It is clear that there is a view from the community that the current services available are not meeting their needs. Mr. Speaker, does the minister believe that the current services in Faro are adequate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: What I know is that the community of Faro is amazingly resilient, as are all communities in the territory. The people of this territory pull together to support one another and have had to do so in far too many challenging situations. We have them responding to the substance use health emergency in their communities, to an aging population, and the unfortunate passing of community leaders and elders. It has been a very challenging time for all communities.

Would I like to provide the counselling services, the support services, on an individual community basis that each community thinks that they need? Absolutely. Are we working to do that every day? Absolutely. I appreciate the question.

Mr. Hassard: This isn't about how resilient Yukoners are; this is about the minister living up to her commitments. Again, will the minister agree to provide a mental wellness counsellor specifically dedicated to the community of Faro?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: We continue to work with the community of Faro and all communities. We are actively recruiting two community counsellors for the Carmacks hub. Residents have had — and do have — access to ongoing one-on-one counselling through the community counsellor who visits Faro on a biweekly basis and more often if needed. Counsellors from Whitehorse and other community hubs do visit Faro when requested, and a mental health nurse visits Faro monthly and will go biweekly when needed. A mental health nurse will be in Faro at some time during the week of

October 30 — next week — and group counselling, workshops, and support that is tailored to the specific needs of the community are also provided.

Faro residents have access to rapid-access counselling, which provides support within 72 hours of a client's first phone call, and there is currently Family and Children's Services mobile coverage through the regional supervisor. A competition for a Family and Children's Services regional social worker is currently in the process and housing is available for the successful candidate.

Question re: School busing

Mr. Kent: Yesterday, I heard from a family who lives just south of the Yukon River bridge on the Alaska Highway. They had a close call with their child at a school bus stop. With the northbound bus stopped with red lights flashing, a southbound vehicle sped by the stopped bus. Fortunately, their child was not hurt in the incident.

In February 2020, a report of the Task Force on School Bus Safety was issued by a number of jurisdictions, including the Yukon. It included four recommendations for improved safety, including extended stop arms and dash cameras.

Can the minister tell us where we are at in implementing the recommendations of that task force?

Hon. Ms. McLean: The safety of children as we transport them is incredibly important to our government. We have worked hard to ensure that children are kept safe when they are in our care. School buses are one of the safest modes of transportation available. In our current contract with Standard Bus, we have additional safety features such as strobes on the top of the vehicles and dash cameras in some vehicles. The Government of Yukon participates in the Transport Canada national Task Force on School Bus Safety as Yukon school buses must meet all of the Transport Canada requirements for buses.

At this time, I will just move into the transportation safety plans and some of the specific questions around the task force. In June 2019, the federal Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure — and particularly school buses. I will continue on with my answer in a moment.

Mr. Kent: As I mentioned, the Yukon participated in that report of the Task Force on School Bus Safety, so my question was with respect to implementing those recommendations.

In July 2022, there was a news release issued by the former Minister of Transport Canada in which he announced the following proposed regulatory changes based on that 2020 report. I will quote: "All new and imported school buses in Canada be equipped with extended stop arms and a new visibility system for the bus driver to better see around the bus; and clear requirements be set for the voluntary installation of infraction cameras. These devices can help law enforcement catch unsafe driver behaviour around school buses."

My question for the minister is: Are any of these features in place now on school buses in the Yukon? Will they be mandatory for Yukon school buses as part of the next tender for

student transportation services? When is that tender expected to go out?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The safety of Yukon's children is a key focus of our government. It is the law for drivers to respect the flashing lights and stop signs on school buses that are intended to keep our kids safe. We have taken decisive action to address the issue of those who do not drive lawfully around school buses. In March 2019, we increased penalties for failing to stop for a school bus and for passing a stopped school bus when not permitted. Fines were increased from \$200 to \$500, which is the maximum currently allowable under the current *Motor Vehicles Act*, which, of course, will be subject to review during the rewrite of the new *Motor Vehicles Act*, and demerit points for these offences were increased from five to eight. Further increases in fines and penalties as well as additional penalty options are being analyzed as part of our ongoing work to replace the *Motor Vehicles Act*.

As the member opposite indicated, in February 2020, the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety endorsed the report that he referenced, *Strengthening School Bus Safety in Canada*. Some recommendations, such as extended stop arms and increased visibility standards, will be addressed through the Canadian *Motor Vehicle Safety Regulations*. Others, such as installation of infraction cameras on the bus, could be considered through regulation at a later date after the new *Motor Vehicles Act* is in force.

Mr. Kent: With all due respect to both ministers, my question was: Are any of those features that were mentioned by the former Minister of Transport Canada in place now on school buses, and are they being considered for the next tender that is going to be going out with respect to student transportation services?

There is one recommendation from the task force report that the former minister failed to address, which is with respect to automatic emergency braking. To quote from the report: "Automatic Emergency Braking, to help reduce the severity of a collision or avoid it entirely. Consideration should also be given to exploring ways to pair this feature with other technologies for increased safety."

Since the federal minister didn't mention it, is automatic emergency braking something that the Yukon is considering pursuing, and if not, why not?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Since 2019, the Yukon government along with Transport Canada and other Canadian jurisdictions have participated in a national task force focused on developing measures to enhance school bus safety.

As indicated, in 2020, this task force produced a report entitled *Strengthening School Bus Safety in Canada*. The report included four recommendations informed by evidence and focused on school bus components that aid in safe bus operation and that deter motorists from passing illegally.

In February 2020, the Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety endorsed the report. As the member opposite indicated, in July 2022, the Minister of Transport Canada proposed updating manufacturing

requirements for school buses to increase safety, which followed the 2020 report on school bus safety.

School bus safety in the territory, of course, is of paramount concern to this government, and I will certainly endeavour to get back to the member opposite on the specific question with respect to automatic emergency braking on new buses.

Question re: Grizzly bear management

Ms. Blake: Grizzly bears are a species of special concern under Canada's *Species at Risk Act*. This means that they can become endangered or even extinct if they are not protected.

Grizzlies have very low reproductive rates and their population is unlikely to recover if their numbers drop. That's why up-to-date information on data is so important, but our current grizzly bear management plan is based on data from the 1990s. We need better data and better protections to keep a sustainable grizzly bear population.

Will this government protect grizzly bears as a species of special concern and create an up-to-date management plan?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Yukon is home to a vast array of wildlife species. Yukoners understand that diverse and resilient wildlife populations are crucial to maintaining healthy communities. The Department of Environment strives to ensure our stewardship of these species and that our interactions with them are responsible, sustainable, and informed by scientific, local and traditional knowledge.

Decisions related to harvest management, land use planning, development assessment processes, and various permitting and licensing needs are all informed by the work of biologists and technicians. This work includes wildlife monitoring population trends and investigating habitat requirements and patterns of use.

Mr. Speaker, some studies help us to better understand how many animals may be available for sustainable harvest while also allowing populations to replenish, which is done by determining the size of the population and how this changes over time. Other studies focus on human activities and how they affect wildlife so that we can develop strategies to lessen our impact on nature.

As a community, we can ensure that the territory's wildlife remains healthy and resilient for Yukoners now and in the years to come. Many Yukon species, particularly species of conservation concern and those that are harvested, are being monitored by Department of Environment biologists and technicians.

I am certainly prepared to respond to the second question, but thank you for the member opposite's concern with respect to the grizzly bear —

Speaker: Order, please.

Ms. Blake: The government estimates that the Yukon has between 6,000 and 7,000 grizzly bears, but the Yukon conservation plan for grizzlies clearly states that the true numbers are unknown. The Government of Canada's conservation report on grizzlies says that a stable population can sustain a maximum annual harvest of three percent, yet this

government is issuing 2,000 bear tags each year. If these are all used for grizzlies, it would be 30 percent of the population or 10 times the maximum safe annual harvest.

When will this government halt the sale of tags to hunt grizzlies for trophies?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Firstly, I would like to thank Sue Greetham, who is still in the body of the Assembly, for her tireless advocacy. I have had the opportunity to meet with her on a few occasions with respect to grizzly bear protection. Of course, in consultation with regional resource councils and local advisory councils, a hunting exclusion zone was established in the south Klondike Highway area — south Klondike Highway, down to Tagish, across from Tagish, back to the Alaska Highway, and then back to the south Klondike Highway. That grizzly hunting exclusion zone has existed now for two years.

With respect to the grizzly bears currently harvested in the Yukon by licensed hunters, the most recent number is 56 for 2022, and human-caused grizzly mortality is consistent and is deemed to be within a sustainable mortality rate of four percent, assessed by the Department of Environment's bear management unit.

Just for the benefit of Yukoners who might be listening today, resident hunters are allowed to harvest one grizzly bear once every three years — certainly open to gaining as much possible data as we can going forward, but right now, grizzly bear populations and harvest appear to be quite stable.

Ms. Blake: Grizzly bears are a symbol of wilderness in North America. People around the world come to the Yukon to see this animal. That means grizzly bears are more than just a symbol of wilderness, but also an important part of the Yukon's tourism. Imagine what this looks like to the Yukon's tourists when they see hunting from the roadside. This is not the image of a wilderness leader that the Yukon worked so hard to create. Seeing a grizzly bear shot from the road is not the memory the Yukon wants to make.

When will the government ban hunting grizzlies from all roadsides and highways?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the concerns raised today by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

In December 2022, the Yukon signed the bilateral *Canada Yukon Nature Agreement*. This commits us to increased surveying and monitoring of species at risk and engaging with First Nations and the Inuvialuit on approaches to managing species at risk. As a result, Yukon's capacity and resources for collaborative work with other parties on species-at-risk matters is significantly increased over the next years.

There are various examples that I can advise on, but with respect to grizzly bears, there will be remote camera trap monitoring of grizzly bears on the Klondike Plateau and in the South Beringia Priority Place, and various other monitors and surveys that will occur.

This new funding will also support engagement with First Nations and the Inuvialuit to build our shared understanding of species at risk, determine how we work together and how we manage species at risk moving forward, including if we should

go ahead with legislation for species at risk; although, as the member opposite did indicate, the grizzly bears are more species of concern rather than species at risk.

Of course, in the Yukon, it is always a balance between conservation and opportunity. As the Minister of the Department of Environment, I am always balancing those considerations.

Question re: Outfitter guidelines review

Mr. Istchenko: This summer, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board wrote to the Premier to request the outfitter guidelines be reviewed.

Can the Minister of Environment tell us if they will be agreeing to that review, and if so, what details about the review can he share in the House today?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have had the opportunity to meet with the outfitters and the Yukon Fish and Game Association on a number of occasions in the last two years, but in any event, with respect to — I can advise, with respect to outfitting in general, that outfitting is a valued industry in the Yukon that benefits communities through employment opportunities, the purchase of goods and services and, in many cases, a donated supply of fresh meat. The government continues to work with the Yukon Outfitters Association to support the industry, while ensuring the sustainability of Yukon wildlife.

We recognize that there are several outstanding issues of concern, and we are committed to resolving them collaboratively with the outfitting industry. To improve support for the outfitting community, the Department of Environment hired an outfitter liaison officer in May 2023. The outfitter liaison officer has been proactively working with Yukon outfitters and the Yukon Outfitters Association to answer questions, to address specific issues of concern, and to identify potential ways to resolve them.

Mr. Istchenko: In the letter dated July 28, the Fish and Wildlife Management Board recommended a review of the outfitter guidelines and suggested a process for its review. There is no doubt that the outfitter guidelines are dated and in need of a review, but this recommendation to review them comes at the heels of a significant impact caused by COVID, and then the Yukon government's surprise decision to eliminate multi-year quotas for outfitters, which has led to a review of that process, and there are several ongoing appeals to both the Outfitter Quota Appeal Committee and the Concession and Compensation Review Board, which are still working their way through the system. It seems that every aspect that the government can control about this industry is facing upheaval. So, it was certainly a surprise for those in the industry to see that, now, the outfitter guidelines are recommended for review.

So, my question is fairly simple: Did the minister accept that recommendation, and if so, has a review been launched?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with Yukon First Nations, transboundary Indigenous governments and groups, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and renewable resources councils with respect to new guidelines. Should amendments to the act proceed, the Yukon Forum has provided direction to work in

close partnership with Yukon First Nations and transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to develop them.

The Department of Environment has begun preparatory work, including a review of consultation actions since 2005, in order to identify policy issues and consider what additional resources will be needed within the Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations to support advancing this. Undertaking revisions to the *Wildlife Act* is a process that can take several years to complete and requires prioritization and explicit support from all levels of government, including First Nations and other partners.

I am familiar with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife branch correspondence. It is still being considered by our government.

Mr. Istchenko: My question was simple to the minister. I just asked him if he had accepted the recommendations — he has received the letter — and if so, has a review been launched? How will the industry be involved, and what would some of the timelines be for this review?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The correspondence has been received, it's in the process of being reviewed, and there will be due consideration as to next steps going forward.

Question re: 2 Lodgepole Lane concerns

Ms. Van Bibber: Residents and neighbours near Lodgepole Lane in Whitehorse continue to be frustrated with the lack of action about a lot that is covered in garbage and leaky oil drums. During debate about this issue at city council, city staff and elected officials have all expressed a desire for the Yukon government to do more. Will the Yukon government step up and assist the City of Whitehorse to get this site cleaned up?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have seen recent correspondence from the City of Whitehorse, and it indicates that the movement forward in the last three or four months has been the most significant in a positive way than it has been in the last two years. In my discussions with the Mayor of the City of Whitehorse, she was of the view that this file is now proceeding. Of course, we have always taken the position that the City of Whitehorse is the lead on this file, unless there was demonstrable contamination, which has never been established by either our officials or the officials from Health and Social Services, but this is a qualified, positive story that there is movement forward on the cleanup, and I consider myself to be in regular contact with the Mayor of the City of Whitehorse on this file and on various other files.

Ms. Van Bibber: The CBC Yukon story about this issue revealed that e-mails from Environment Yukon have suggested that the site is listed and considered contaminated, as defined by the *Environment Act* and contaminated sites regulations. However, when asked about contamination at the site last spring, the minister said — and I quote: "... without strong evidence of a clear responsible party or significant adverse effects, the Department of Environment has no ability to order or direct the current property owners to remediate."

Can the minister confirm that the site is considered to be a contaminated site and now meets the threshold for the government to take action?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the Member for Porter Creek North. We understand from the City of Whitehorse that they are directing clean-up efforts at this time at the property, including surface debris removal, sorting of the various materials into organized piles, and dealing with the condemned residential property. Longer term, we understand that clean-up efforts may also involve soil remediation.

The Government of Yukon continues to support the City of Whitehorse with technical expertise and assistance. Spills on private properties are common, and living near a site with contamination does not necessarily present an inherent risk to public health. Following testing, there does not appear to be significant hydrocarbon contamination on this private property — 2 Lodgepole Lane was added to the contaminated sites information map, which is a public inventory of properties for which the department holds evidence of contamination at one point in time.

Mr. Speaker, I would again like to reiterate that we are committed to supporting the City of Whitehorse officials with technical expertise and assistance in navigating applicable regulatory requirements. The Department of Environment will continue to be an active and collaborative partner and will continue to support the City of Whitehorse, but, as indicated, there does appear to be movement with respect to clean up on this site, which has been an issue for a number of years.

Ms. Van Bibber: The e-mail from Environment Yukon, referenced in the September 2023 CBC Yukon article, said the Yukon government is considering its legal options. Can the minister tell us what legal options or legal action the government is considering taking with respect to this site?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As I have indicated, the Government of Yukon is aware of issues reported at 2 Lodgepole Lane regarding public health, safety, and potential environmental concerns; however, as I have indicated, we understand from the City of Whitehorse that they are directing clean-up efforts at the property, including surface debris removal, sorting of the various materials into organized piles, and dealing with the condemned residential property.

The e-mails that the Member for Porter Creek North might be referencing, or is, in fact, referencing, appear to be somewhat dated, but, in any event, it appears that there is positive movement forward on this problematic site. As I indicated in my quite regular meetings with the Mayor of the City of Whitehorse, she has not communicated any specific asks to either the Department of Environment or the Department of Health and Social Services with respect to this file, but we are always available to talk, as we were when the issue of the underground tanks in Riverdale at the Riverdale Super A was resolved — collaboratively, in a multi-team, multi-department approach, quite quickly and decisively.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 29: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)* — Third Reading

Clerk: Third reading, Bill No. 29, standing in the name of the Hon. Mr. Pillai.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 29, entitled *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023)*, be now read a third time and do pass.

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am pleased to rise at third reading of this bill. I am happy to see this bill, which amends the *Elections Act* to establish an electoral boundaries commission in advance of the next scheduled territorial election on November 3, 2025. Under current legislation, the next commission would be appointed after the next general election in November 2025. This amended bill enables a commission to be appointed no later than January 22, 2024.

The progress of this bill has been unique for the Legislative Assembly, having moved to Members' Services Board for discussions following second reading, rather than through the traditional stages of Committee of the Whole, where we would typically call officials into the House to assist in answering opposition questions. Those questions, and the corresponding answers, would have been put on the official Hansard record.

Instead, we have brief minutes from Members' Services Board that have been concurred upon.

I would like to reiterate that our government did not support that motion to send the bill to Members' Services Board as we felt that the bill put before the Legislative Assembly was a good piece of legislation.

We felt, and still feel, the urgency to start this work. We lost over a week in progressing this bill and enabling a new electoral district boundaries commission to be established and start their work.

The Members' Services Board reviewed the bill. The only amendment made was to the date of January 31, 2024, as being the latest that a commission could be appointed. It now sets the date at January 22, 2024. So, we have lost more than a week that could have been used to appoint members to the commission. This has cut into the time that all parties, and the Chief Justice, have to appoint members and the chair to the commission.

Our government is committed to seeing a commission struck to make recommendations on electoral boundaries. The past week, in my opinion, did not enhance the process, but rather delayed it. Our government will, of course, support the amendment so that this important work can commence.

This bill does amend the *Elections Act* prior to the next general election. Without this change, Yukoners would have to go to the polls with the same electoral boundaries as have been in place for more than a decade and a half. There has been significant growth and movement in Yukon's population since

the last adjustments to the electoral district boundaries were enacted in 2008. Yukoners, whether living in urban or rural settings, or in new or existing neighbourhoods, need to know that their voices are being heard and their interests are being represented.

Let's not forget that the bill also corrects two technical deficiencies in the act — one regarding the time frames for appointing commissions, and the other for implementing amendments to electoral district boundaries. The bill ensures that such errors are corrected and that the legislation is in place to protect the principle that Yukon citizens have the fair and effective representation they are entitled to.

I thank officials at the Executive Council Office and the Department of Justice for their help in preparing the bill before us. We look forward to seeing this bill proceed through the Legislative Assembly and receive assent today. Following assent, letters will quickly go out to the leaders of parties to request that they nominate their representative for appointment to the commission within 60 days. I have seen those letters and approved those letters; they are ready to go.

I look forward to receiving those nominations.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I would just note a few things in speaking to this at third reading. As our democratic institution's critic, of course, we do support the establishment of an electoral boundaries commission in a timely manner. We recognize that the current population numbers in a number of ridings — in fact, most ridings — are not aligned with the Canadian standard around what is an appropriate population variance. In the riding of Porter Creek Centre, in particular, the growth of Whistle Bend has led to a situation where that riding has substantially more people than the average for ridings, which is supposed to guide the representation levels in any individual riding, with the standard being a variance of plus or minus 25 percent. That, of course, is based on case law involving other Canadian jurisdictions.

My colleagues and I have consistently been clear. We believe that any changes to elections legislation, including the *Elections Act* and the *Electoral District Boundaries Act*, should go through an all-party committee. I believe that the date in this legislation could have been set earlier, especially if the government had gone through an all-party process to begin with, instead of insisting on unilaterally controlling the drafting of the legislation. That has always been the practice in the Yukon for decades under parties of every stripe until the current Liberal government.

I acknowledge that a mistake was made in regulations under the *Government Organisation Act* nine years ago that allowed government to act unilaterally. However, I do have to remind this House that, although that was in place in 2014, in 2015, when the Yukon Party government last changed the *Elections Act*, we still went through an all-party process that involved Members' Services Board and involved my colleague and me, along with the Chief Electoral Officer and a legal drafter, sitting down with other members of Members' Services Board and going through the legislation in detail and, in fact, provided the opportunity for not only questions but potential

amendments and discussion on whether the bill should be tabled.

Ultimately, that led to all members supporting the tabling of that legislation. Again, Mr. Speaker, as you know, after we went through that all-party process, the net result was that the then-Leader of the Liberal Party, the current Member for Klondike, along with the then-Leader of the NDP, joined the Premier of the day in a press release, where they all jointly supported the tabling of that legislation. The legislation itself was then passed unanimously by the House, and that process, of course, was a much better approach than we have seen used in this situation.

I would remind the Premier, as well, that Members' Services Board had previously instructed the Speaker to write to him, asking him to correct that error made in the regulation from 2014 under the *Government Organisation Act*. The Premier is in the odd situation of having two conflicting positions on record about this matter. The Premier, in the spring of this year, moved a motion supporting such a move, yet in his letter replying to the Speaker, he rejected that request from the Members' Services Board.

So, I would note, in wrapping up my comments at third reading, that we will support this legislation going forward. I do believe that the text of this legislation could have been different, including an earlier date for the establishment of a commission, if an all-party process had been used at the outset. I would urge the Premier to follow through on the commitment he made in the spring, rather than his more recent decision to say no to the request made by Members' Services Board through the Speaker, and urge the Premier to correct that error made in the 2014 regulation and ensure that it is very clear that the authority for any future changes to the *Elections Act* and the *Electoral Boundaries Act* must go through an all-party process first.

I have been on record consistently, as has my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, noting that we believe that it is important that the process be aimed at reaching consensus, and that it is about ensuring that Yukoners have confidence that no party in government is in any way, shape, or form using power to their advantage in adjusting the elections rules to their own advantage, rather than in the public interest in a non-partisan manner, as developed through an all-party process.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, in speaking today to the amended Bill No. 29, I think it's really important to note that, by moving the *Elections Act* and the proposed amendments to Members' Services Board, it really was non-partisan. There was the ability for politicians from multiple parties to have conversations at the same time with the legislative drafters and with the Chief Electoral Officer.

It's interesting to note that the Member for Lake Laberge has just twice now said that they were wrong — the Yukon Party was wrong — when they moved the *Elections Act* from a place where it was away from politicians to a place where it was closer to politicians. I do want to highlight that. I think that,

for a while, that was what was being looked for: an admittance of wrongdoing by the Yukon Party. Hopefully, now that it has been said twice on the floor, we can get back to moving the *Elections Act* away from politicians and more into a place where it's not directed by a minister, for example, which is what we've highlighted as being a concern and a problem.

Again, I do really think that, by working together — and we do see an amendment; we see an amendment by seven days of moving up that date. Regardless of what the Premier says about it taking more time, we can say that it's fair. It's fair, because all three parties had the ability to ask the same questions and hear the same answers, and there was some back and forth when we negotiated that timeline. So, I think that's important; I think that strengthens it. I think that actually insulates this decision from criticism.

So, I look forward to voting in favour of it, and more than that, I look forward to receiving my letter and appointing the person that I will to the boundaries commission.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, in closing, maybe I will clarify a few of the comments that were shared with us here in debate on third reading. I think that it's important to note that — maybe I'll speak to the comments that were made by the Member for Lake Laberge. I think that if anyone was listening closely, you would hear, in the beginning of those comments, focused on the fact that there wasn't a collaboration, or there wasn't a reflection of the Members' Services Board's work integrated into this particular bill, and then, as you got to the latter part of the comments, as I heard it, the member touched on the fact that there was specific work on correction of members' parts of the bill that were integrated from Members' Services Board.

Clearly, you would see that the approach that we took from government, and the work of the officials from Executive Council Office, was to sit with the Chief Electoral Officer to ensure that the tri-party content and work was integrated in. There were multiple conversations with the Chief Electoral Officer to ensure that the comments from Members' Services Board, that the trilateral conversation, was reflected in the bill that we did.

Also, it's important to note for Yukoners, and for the record, that what we're really talking about is shifting a period of time. We're talking about shifting this from now until what we would have seen after the next election, so that's really the work here. The content of the bill is very similar to what we have seen in the past, and there are nine key points that are reflected in the bill. I think it's also important to state that the Member for Lake Laberge speaks about some of the adjustments that were made by the Yukon Party, and it's really a "do as I say, not as I do" type of approach that's in place.

I want to reflect on the other jurisdictions that we see. I think it's important for Yukoners, as well, to have on the record just an understanding of how Executive Council Office — the

way it works here in the Yukon — or the Justice department would do this work versus what is being requested today by the opposition.

In British Columbia, this work is undertaken by the Attorney General, the Department of Justice; in Alberta, it is undertaken by the Minister of Justice and the Justice department; in Saskatchewan, it is undertaken by the Executive Council Office — similar to here; in Manitoba, it is undertaken by the Department of Justice; in Ontario, it is the Attorney General again, Department of Justice; in Nova Scotia, it is undertaken by the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Department of Justice.

So, as you will see, many jurisdictions across the country — most of them, the majority — do the work very similar to here, but there has, of course, been a request at this time. So, I think that probably the only difference from what we have heard is that, previously, there was a press release. Other than that, the work that has been done by all parties has been tabled and has been integrated into this work.

Of course, this process — the next steps, we will see a Chief Justice move forward to either — we will see a current judge from the Yukon Supreme Court, or retired, who will move forward. We will also see work undertaken by three representatives and the Chief Electoral Officer coming together to do this work. Yukoners will have — from corner to corner to corner of this territory — an opportunity to integrate in their perspective and thoughts on this subject.

From my recollection, there will be a request that all Members of the Legislative Assembly have a chance, as well, to put their interventions in to see what they believe should be in place. Then, we will have an opportunity to see that report and reflect on it here, and again, to go through a very democratic process from start to finish — so, tremendous integrity in this work; accountability to Yukoners from end to end; the thoughts of all three parties reflected in the work — very solid work.

So, yes, there has been a bit of back and forth. I will leave it to the comments about what extra value is added, but I think I will commit to the House that we will get those letters out right away and let's get representatives appointed. We will see the work hopefully move quickly by the Chief Justice as we move forward.

With that, I will take my seat and look forward to a positive vote here today, Mr. Speaker.

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.

Ms. Clarke: 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.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for third reading of Bill No. 29 agreed to

Speaker: I declare that Bill No. 29 has passed this House.

We are now prepared to receive the Commissioner of the Yukon to grant assent to a bill which has passed this House.

Commissioner Webber enters the Chamber accompanied by her Aide-de-Camp

ASSENT TO BILLS

Commissioner: Please be seated.

Speaker: Madam Commissioner, the Assembly has, at its present session, passed a certain bill to which, in the name and on behalf of the Assembly, I respectfully request your assent.

Clerk: *Act to amend the Elections Act (2023).*

Commissioner: I hereby assent to the bill as enumerated by the Clerk.

I just wanted to say good afternoon to everyone. In the last while, I seem to have been surrounded by books. I love to read. I am an avid reader, but especially about history. I am very interested in the different history that has been happening around the Yukon recently.

After listening to Minister McLean do a tribute to the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle and the work they have done, I realized how important it is to be documenting that history. First Nation history has really taken a backseat for years.

It seems like I have been surrounded by books and different things in the last month. The awarding of the BC and Yukon Book Prizes happened in Vancouver about a month ago, and they are honouring and promoting the achievements of the book community in the Yukon and British Columbia. I was really pleased to be there and see the young man Cole Pauls from Haines Junction being recognized, and his book won the award — *Kwändiir*.

The Borealis Prize, the Commissioner of Yukon's Award for Literary Contribution, was given to Katherine Munro. It was

really nice to be able to be there to present that to her on behalf of the Yukon.

One of the things that I attended last night was the book launch for the Kwanlin Dün book. I don't know if any of you have seen it so far, but it is a beautiful book. Their history is in that book. It is our story in our words.

Anyway, I have been surrounded by — it seems like a lot of book launches. In fact, I even saw Stephen Kakfwi. He was here just a couple of weeks ago, and his new book *Stoneface* is really a great book. I have been reading that. It is so important to document that type of history and there are so many more that are coming up. I know that CYFN is documenting their 50 years, and with the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle before I left them — we are also documenting the history of the Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians. All of that is really, really important and I am glad to have been part of it.

I just wanted to share that today and will share other things when I come back another time. I have been here three times this week — once in the gallery — so I just thought that it was important to say a few words.

Thank you very much for listening and I appreciate your attention.

Commissioner leaves the Chamber

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 31: *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Billing No. 31, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I move that Bill No. 31, entitled *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 31, entitled *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to bring forward Bill No. 31, the *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*, for second reading today. The Government of Yukon remains committed to bringing forward modernized legislation that reflects the interests of and meets the needs of Yukoners. Today, we uphold that commitment by introducing the *Fiduciaries Access to Digital Assets Act*, which will facilitate fiduciary access to the digital assets of a deceased or incapable person while respecting the privacy wishes of that individual. In an increasingly digital-driven world, we own more digital assets than we may realize. Photos, e-mails, online blogs, e-books, and audio and video files are only just a few examples of those digital assets.

Every time an online account is created, we are also asked to agree to the online service providers' terms of service, data, and privacy policies. These service agreements often include provisions that confine access rights to the original account holder only. Although limiting access rights to digital accounts

may be intended to protect our privacy, this unfortunately may pose a problem when fiduciaries, such as a personal representative or an attorney, attempts to access these digital assets once the account holder is deceased or has become incapable.

In other Canadian jurisdictions, we have witnessed incidents where online service providers denied next of kin access to digital assets of their deceased loved ones. This proposed legislation aims to address this issue. The new act will align the Yukon's legislation with the best practices of other Canadian jurisdictions, modelled on the work of the Uniform Law Conference of Canada.

Enacting the proposed legislation will invalidate any provisions in service agreements that limit fiduciary access to a digital asset unless expressly agreed to by the original account holder through an affirmative act that is separate from their assent to the general terms of a service agreement. This proposed legislation is not intended to create new fiduciary powers; rather, it affirms and codifies the existing authority of fiduciaries to access tangible or digital assets belonging to the deceased or incapable individuals.

Fiduciary access to digital assets is subject to the terms mentioned in the instrument empowering the fiduciary, such as the will of the deceased person, letters of administration, maybe an order appointing a guardian, a power of attorney, or an instrument creating a trust, or an order of the court.

This new legislation will work to facilitate fiduciary access to digital assets while maintaining respect for the privacy and intention of the original account holder. Our government is proud to bring this bill forward to enhance protections for Yukoners and their digital assets by adapting and changing to the needs of modern-day society and aligning with other legislation in Canada as well.

I look forward to answering questions with respect to the details of this particular bill, and I also look forward to the support of the other Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Cathers: I would like to thank officials for the briefing on this legislation and their work on the legislation. We understand from that, that this is uniform law developed through collaboration between provinces and territories, which, for those not familiar with it, is intended to be a legal approach. When the uniform laws are developed, they are intended to be common across jurisdictions so that there is some consistency in the legal framework and so that best practices can be used across the country. We support the concept of the legislation and will have some questions, though, in Committee about it.

Ms. White: In speaking today to these amendments, I come at it, actually, from the aspect of having been an executor of an estate previously, and anything that we can do to make it easier for a loved one's family or someone who is dealing with the estate, I think, is really important. This really just kind of takes that step into the future, which, I guess, is kind of into the day we are in now, which is talking about digital assets.

I appreciated the briefings from the officials, and I actually won't have very many questions for Committee of the Whole, but do look forward to learning more.

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

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, as I have said, I look forward to the questions that might come from the opposition with respect to the details of Bill No. 31, and I look forward to unanimous support, hopefully, for this bill, as it proceeds through the Legislative Assembly.

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.

Ms. Clarke: 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.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 31 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

Motion re appearance of witnesses

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 12

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I move:

THAT, from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 26, 2023, Mark Pike, Chair of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, and Kurt Dieckmann, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operations of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Streicker:

THAT, from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 26, 2023, Mark Pike, Chair of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, and Kurt Dieckmann, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, appear as witnesses before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operations of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board.

Committee of the Whole Motion No. 12 agreed to

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 2, Executive Council Office, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Executive Council Office — continued

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I just want to take a moment to welcome the officials back in today: our Deputy Minister Justin Ferbey and Assistant Deputy Minister Kate Durand. Thank you to both officials for your support on our previous debate, and with that, I will cede the floor to questions from the members opposite.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I would like to get an update from the Premier on staking bans in the traditional territory of both the Ross River Dena Council and the Liard First Nation. Can the Premier give us an update as to where those stand, what the current extension is at, and how negotiations and discussions are for the possible eventual removal of those bans?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I am going to give a bit of a high-level comment about this, and then I will dig in a little bit more about what is happening at our tables, as well as some of things we are watching that are playing out across western Canada within the mining industry right now.

We have continued the mineral staking prohibition within the Kaska asserted traditional territory in the Yukon to allow time to address the court declarations made in the Ross River Dena Council and the Kaska Dena Council mining cases. The members opposite will be very well aware of the elements of those declarations — declaration 1 and 2 — and the challenges that come with those court decisions. Of course, we also have, for the public record, instituted a mineral staking prohibition for the Áashú village site and surrounding area in the asserted traditional territory of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation to support our ongoing discussions.

Our goal is to identify solutions that address our shared interests in land and resource matters and provide certainty to industry and benefit to all Yukoners. We are working collaboratively with our First Nations to develop mineral legislation to replace the *Quartz Mining Act* and the *Placer Mining Act*. In that process, we are considering many of the issues raised in the court cases and anticipate that new legislation will help address those, as well as the declarations.

Again, I am looking at the work at the table right now with all First Nations in the Yukon. When I say “First Nations”, I mean the 11 self-governing First Nations; the other three nations fall under the Indian Act — but also the transboundary nations. I think there are 24 nations in all who are feeding into the process on this particular topic of new legislation.

Concerning Ross River, of course, this goes back to March 27, 2013 — the current lease is in place until April 30, 2024. It's intended to allow time to advance the consultation. I would say that there is continued conversation with the Ross River Dena Council. There will be, over this fall, active conversations. I just had briefings this week from Aboriginal Relations and some of the key negotiators at that table.

I want to make sure that I reflect on this appropriately. We are, as a government, closely watching some of the court decisions that have taken place in British Columbia as of late. We know that the 2012 court decision in the Yukon was spoken to in the court action that took place in British Columbia as of late, and so we have had an opportunity to reflect on what that means for the Yukon. We have had our legal teams sit with us to understand what that means and to reflect on what some of the pathways forward are, both with the Ross River Dena Council and Liard First Nation traditional territory and Kaska traditional territory, and how we continue to look at appropriate pathways to exploration and appropriate opportunities to stake. It has been a number of years — politely stating that the case came into play while the previous government was there — and, as mines minister, I undertook extending that. Both the previous government and current government have a clear understanding of the challenges with that court decision. I think we have all wanted to find an appropriate pathway forward so that's something we are focused on.

I would say that, at this time, we are still reflecting on what has happened in British Columbia and trying to get an understanding of what the next steps will be there. There have been about 18 months, I believe, given to the British Columbia government to respond to that legal decision. I think that this will be something that will be a significant discussion at AME Roundup this year. Within the British Columbia mining sector, of course, many of the companies that work in the Yukon are based in British Columbia as well, and many of those companies work in the Yukon and British Columbia, so I think all will be watching what this means — to understand what the ramifications are and if there have to be different elements of modernization playing out in British Columbia, and then what that will mean as we continue to the work of modernizing legislation here.

Clearly, for the member opposite, I will state that, right now, we are reflecting on what has just happened legally and we are trying to see if that will help us define a pathway forward and if it will speak to declaration 1 and 2, which were the catalysts for the prohibitions in the Kaska traditional territories.

Mr. Dixon: When was the last meeting between the Yukon government and the Ross River Dena Council about this?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I will take a look to see if we can get the latest conversation at the officials' level. I don't have the exact date that I was in Ross River meeting with chief and council on a myriad of topics. As the member opposite would understand, when we are sitting at the table with the Ross River Dena Council, the conversation is about a number of things. Of course, going to the table with the Ross River Dena Council and just focusing on this particular prohibition and not the other challenges and opportunities within the community would likely not lead to fruitful conversations. The approach that we have had — and I think most in the Assembly can understand — is a respectful approach, looking at a number of things that are happening. There were tough discussions in May, and the focus in the community, as well, was ensuring that they find a very loved citizen of the community. They have not found success in that and Yukoners have not found any success in finding Ramona Peter. That was a key element.

But we also talked about some of the short-term priorities of the community, and those short-term priorities were around some activities that they wanted to see this summer to have their community heal, which was really around land-based cultural activities, which we committed to supporting. They wanted to talk about some short-term emergency housing options, which we have fulfilled and have put in place since that May meeting. They wanted to have discussions about safety in their community. We committed to — within the avenues that are appropriate for our government — support that work. There was a feeling at that point in time that there was illegal activity happening in the community and they were really focused on their most vulnerable citizens. We talked to them and talked to our Justice department about the best ways to support them — and also to the RCMP, which we followed up with.

That was the main focus, and then we talked about what the opportunities were around continuing to see exploration and

mining and getting to a place to unlock some of the more challenging conversations around the 2012 court decision, as well as how we look at focusing on things such as the resource roads opportunity for some of the folks who are doing construction there, as well as some of the partnerships that they are looking at.

With that, Madam Chair, seeing it's time to move onto our witnesses today, I move that you report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Porter Creek South that the Chair report progress.

Motion agreed to

Chair: Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 12 adopted earlier today, Committee of the Whole will receive witnesses from the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board.

In order to allow the witnesses to take their places in the Chamber, the Committee will now recess and reconvene at 3:30 p.m.

Recess

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

Appearance of witnesses

Chair: Pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 12 adopted on this day, Committee of the Whole will now receive witnesses from the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board.

I would ask all members to refer their remarks through the Chair when addressing the witnesses. I would also ask the witnesses to refer their answers through the Chair when they are responding to a member of the Committee.

Witnesses introduced

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Madam Chair, the witnesses appearing before Committee of the Whole today are Mark Pike, the chair of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, and Kurt Dieckmann, president and chief executive officer of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board.

Chair: Would the witnesses like to make brief opening remarks?

Mr. Pike: As mentioned, I'm Mark Pike and I am the chair of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board. With me I have Kurt Dieckmann, our president and CEO.

I just want to thank you for allowing us to be here today and, on behalf of Kurt, we do like to talk about the operations of our organization and how things have gone. We are here today to talk about our 2022 annual report, which I believe has been tabled in the House here, so everyone should have a copy.

There are many things that have happened over the last year that have affected how we do business, not the least of which is COVID and the fallout from that and how that's affected workplaces, workers, employers, remote work, and all the permutations of those that have gone on. We also are dealing with the effects of climate change and the differences that may have brought to workplaces, from the differences in

temperature and the disasters that we read about going on around the world and obviously in the north and in the Yukon as well.

We also are dealing with the changes to workplaces with respect to mental health injuries, and the things that we are now recognizing as injuries that require our assistance and the medical world's assistance to deal with, whereas in past years, they would have been sloughed off or not reported, or essentially ignored.

All those things together have made significant changes to how we have operated over the last year, and we are proud of how we have managed to handle that and how we have changed and adapted to those things as they have gone along.

With that, I will leave it to you to ask anything about our annual report so I won't spend any time talking about that, but certainly feel free when you get there to ask questions. With that, unless Kurt has anything that he would like to add, again I would just like to say thank you and we are here to answer your questions.

Mr. Dixon: Thank you to Mr. Pike for those opening remarks and to the minister for the introduction of the witnesses. Of course, we would like to welcome them both to the Legislature and look forward to parsing through some of their work.

I would like to begin on a subject that we have discussed previously with these witnesses, and that is the funding position. The range that is set for the ratio of the funded position versus total liabilities is 121 percent to 129 percent. I believe that this year, according to the annual report, we are at 131 percent. That is down from previously when it was as high as 143. I would just like to discuss that target and why it is that we never seem to be within that target. We always tend to be above it. For the last five years, at least, we have never been within the target range; we have only been above it.

I would just like to ask: How is the target range set? Does the board feel that it is necessary to comply with meeting that range, and if they do, why is it that we never seem to see the board within that range?

Mr. Pike: Madam Chair, I will start with that. Yes, in our annual report — I am just looking at the same page — we are at 131. The range that you referred to was set by the board in conjunction with our stakeholders in terms of trying to say: Okay, we are a small board and we can't afford to cut it too close because, when you get smaller numbers, the fluctuations tend to be greater. We can't afford to be too close. So, in conjunction with our stakeholders, we developed our funding policy that said we will be 121 to 129. I'm just going to say that it hasn't always been the case. We have been as low as a 100 in my time, and we have been as high as 150 — I can't remember the exact number — at some point.

We have had a significant variation over the years with respect to where we are. Our policies are set such that we are always returning to that range. That's the objective all the time.

You probably will remember that — I'm trying to remember the exact years — in 2018, 2019, and 2020, we as a board determined that we would like to get back to the range

more quickly, and we actually wrote cheques for rebates to employers to move us back to that range.

Our funding policy would have returned that money to employers over a period of time anyway, so it's not like it was changing how we deal with that excess. It was just a matter of the board saying let's get there quicker.

While we are sitting at 131, in the year 2023 and 2024, in terms of the rates that are set for employers, we have already determined that we will reduce the rate by a subsidy that will put us below the top of the range. It will return us to the 129-and-below range, subject to whatever happens in the world. We are always cognizant of that. In our annual report, you will see that our investments lost something in the range \$20 million in that 2022 year. Those are totally out of our control, and we are hoping that it's not permanent and that it doesn't continue, but those kinds of fluctuations could — and likely will — happen in years to come. They affect our funded position, depending on what the market is doing on December 31.

I don't know whether that answers the question but I will leave it at that. Kurt, is there anything you want to add?

Mr. Dieckmann: Just to expand on that a little bit, it's really important to recognize that our funded position, as reported in the annual report, is a point-in-time report. That is as of December 31, 2022. In 2022, our funded position in the worst part of the financial downturn got down to as low as — I believe we hit 119 or 120 percent. Then the markets recovered, and by the end of the year, we were back up to 131.

So, the entire idea of our funding policy is to make sure that we are always smoothing the rates so that employers don't get huge spikes. If we were to forcefully maintain that range, then what you would see would be spikes in our funded position on a year-over-year basis, which wouldn't serve our employers or our injured workers very well.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the response from the witnesses, and I appreciate why there is some diligence around staying above the target. Ultimately, my question is: Has there been any consideration to going back to stakeholders and reconsidering the target range? Just given the fact that — I appreciate the final point there that, at various points throughout the year, it may dip or rise, but ultimately, when it's actually reported, which is in the annual report — those are the numbers that we have in the annual report — in the last five years, it has never been within the range. Would we not consider, then, going back to stakeholders and reconsidering the range to better suit and reflect the need for maintaining the fund at a certain level, in order to accommodate the considerations that the witnesses have just outlined?

Mr. Pike: We, in fact, do that regularly. We talk to our stakeholders — our key stakeholders, our key stakeholder groups — and review that with them; we review how it works. With the leadership of those groups, we review in detail how those work. From those conversations and discussions, that I am aware of, we haven't had any — for lack of a better word — a "pushback" that we should change that.

You know, you sometimes see stuff from national publications that suggest that, but WCB is across the country. Every jurisdiction has different ways and different

responsibilities, as you know — you passed the act under which we operate. So, those don't mean as much as the feedback you get from local groups. So, we do that — and we are happy to talk about that at any point in time with any stakeholder who is interested in discussing how that works and what the effect would be if we had a different number or a different range.

Mr. Dixon: Have stakeholders of any kind ever indicated that they would like to review that range of 121 to 129?

Mr. Pike: It's hard to say at any time, because we meet with them regularly all the time, but I will say that nobody has ever said: I don't like the range that you have, and I want you to sit down and consider raising or lowering it. Nobody has said that, for sure.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I appreciate that answer. When we are above range, the board makes a decision to do what are called "surplus distributions". If I am correct, that's done per the funding policy of the board — 8.3. Can the witnesses describe how that works when a surplus distribution occurs — how that works, and how it affects local businesses?

Mr. Pike: Certainly, we can chat about that. In general, the funding policy says that, if you are over the target range, you should return the excess to employers in terms of a subsidy on their rates, and the period of time in which that subsidy takes place depends on how much over the target range you are. So, it can go from, I believe — Kurt can step in if I say something wrong here — from immediately to 10 years, I believe.

The same occurs on the other side. If you are under the target range, the employers get a surcharge to help bring you back up to the target range and, again, that surcharge will take place over a period of years, depending on how much you are out of whack from the target range.

Mr. Dixon: Thanks to the witness for that answer. My question is just about when the shift is made from simply returning the distribution of the surplus via the rate as opposed to actually writing cheques and sending cheques out to businesses.

Mr. Dieckmann: Madam Chair, I'll just elaborate a little bit on what my chair, Mr. Pike, said. The way it's laid out in our funding policy is, if we have a surplus that is less than five percent, then the entire amount is returned through the rate in a year. If you have from five to 25 percent, five percent per year over five years is how it gets rebated, so we do that.

What the board looks at when we get into a position where — if we get to where the surplus is greater than 100 percent to the annual assessment revenue, it says to return it at one tenth per year over 10 years, but if we get to a point where that won't reduce our overfunded position within the timelines laid out in the policy, then the board has the option to issue a cash rebate, as it were, to employers.

So, there is no hard, set formula for that. It really depends on what our market returns are doing, what the actuary calculates the return, and what the impact will be on rates and our funded position on a go-forward basis. There is discretion built into that, and the board, every year, whether we are in an overfunded position or not, does a thorough review of that, with input from the actuaries, and then makes a determination

whether or not it is appropriate to issue rebates in the form of rate reduction or add an additional rebate in the form of a distribution.

Mr. Dixon: So, just so that I am clear: When the decision is made to go beyond the funding policy formula with the percentages and year's return and actually issue cheques, that is a discretionary decision that the board makes. Is that correct?

Mr. Pike: Yes, Madam Chair, that is correct. I have to put in a plug here for the staff and the management of our board. We went through an unprecedented period where our investments grew a significant amount every year and that led to the board sitting down and saying: Well, we are doing so well that, in spite of our funding policy, which should be bringing us back to the range, we continue to grow outside of the range.

Although the option would have already been there, for the first time ever, the board sat down and said: We want to get back quicker than this funding policy is going to get us there. That led to the decision to give out rebates on the board's behalf, come up with the rules under which we would issue the rebates, and return money to employers with an actual cheque.

Mr. Dieckmann: Just to add to that a little bit — the board has to be really cautious, though, when they are issuing cash rebates, because what happens is, if you look at our funding policy, if we are over the target range then there is an automatic rebate built into the rate.

If the board were to then rebate too much in the form of a cash rebate and take us to a point where it would impact the amount of the rate reduction too significantly, that could actually really impact rates in a negative way. When rates come down, you want them to come down slowly.

For example, when we were 143 percent, if we issued a rebate that brought us right down into the range, the next year our average rate would have jumped by 30 cents. That's not 30 cents for any particular rate group, but it would have meant a 30-cent rate increase. In some rate groups, that could have been a rate increase of up to \$1.50 or \$2.00 on the rate, so you have to be really cautious when the board does that. The calculation has to take into consideration how much we can bring it down without seriously increasing the rate.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that.

I will move on through the annual report now. I noticed that there was a particular feature put on the outfitting industry, so I would like to ask a little bit about that. First of all, could the witnesses describe the particular initiative that was relevant to the outfitting industry that was undertaken and highlighted in the annual report? Can they describe why the outfitting industry was chosen for this particular feature? Then I will get into some questions about the outfitting industry.

Mr. Dieckmann: Yes, just in general, the way we classify our industries is we place industries in with other industries with like or similar costs is the way it's done so that those who are generating the most costs for the system will be paying based on what those costs are.

When we have an industry in a particular rate group and we see that their costs are starting to climb significantly, we will then engage with that industry. We will have discussions

with them to try to find out if there are things that are happening that can be influenced by introducing better safety practices, and those kinds of things, to reduce the number and severity of injuries, and hopefully to bring those costs down before we get to the point where we have to move that industry into a higher rate group.

If their costs don't come down, or we are not able to impact that trajectory, then they get moved into another rate group. That doesn't mean then, at that point, that we just wash our hands and walk away. We will continue to work with them and try to help them to establish safety programs, safe work practices, and safe job procedures that will ultimately, over the longer term, reduce the frequency and severity of injuries within that group.

What we did with the outfitters — they were in a lower rate group, and their cost experience was starting to increase fairly dramatically, so we engaged with them to see if there were ways that we could help them to address some of the issues that they were facing in the industry.

The board ended up approving the development of an industry-specific safety manual. So, the industry then hired a safety consultant of their own choosing and had that consultant work with all the industries. I don't know the exact number, but I think they visited 10 or 12 of the outfits. They worked really hard with them to develop their own safety manual. We supported them through that process, and they now have an industry-developed health and safety manual that can be used by any outfitter in the territory.

We continue to monitor how they're doing from an injury and cost perspective. Our hope is that, eventually, they will start to see a decrease in their injury costs and injury experience.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that response. Can the witnesses give us a little bit better sense — in the particular case of outfitting, can they discuss the calculation and assignment of risk category for a business like that?

I had been led to believe that they were in some way influenced based on their payroll and where their different positions are assigned throughout their business. Obviously, there is a difference in risk profile for someone doing administrative work or in ownership versus someone who is in the field, guiding or wrangling.

To what extent does the payroll of the individuals affect the risk category within which the business is assigned?

Mr. Dieckmann: The way we classify an industry is based on their primary function. If you are an outfitter, you are an outfitter and your primary function is hunting and guiding, and fieldwork is a large portion of it. We don't apportion different jobs within an employer as being at different risk categories. For example, if there is a construction company, we don't look at the people in the office paying the bills differently from how we look at the people in the field; it is the entirety of the business that gets classified in that industry. The costs are driven by the injuries and the risks associated with them, so if we were to pull out the admin staff and just look at the people in the field, what would end up happening is that you would pay less for your people in admin but you would be paying way more for your people in the field. It's an average across that

business is what generates the rate. It is tied entirely to your cost experience, and the cost experience is tied entirely to the type and number of injuries that you are having.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the response from the witness.

I will move on to a question about COVID-19 vaccine injuries. For a period of time, vaccination was a requirement for many workplaces, so a question was raised around whether or not an injury associated with the COVID vaccine would be considered a workplace injury. If so, are those numbers tracked? If so, can the witnesses tell us how many were approved for compensation based on a COVID-19 vaccine injury?

Mr. Dieckmann: If I am understanding the question correctly, it is: If somebody sustained an injury from getting a COVID vaccine, would that be a compensable injury?

Mr. Dixon: Yes, that is exactly the question. In some cases, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine was a mandatory requirement of employment and, therefore, some have asked whether or not, if someone were to receive an injury as a result of getting a vaccination — there have been a variety of different types, I understand — that would be considered a compensable injury.

Mr. Dieckmann: To my knowledge, we have not accepted any claims for individuals getting a COVID vaccine.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that answer.

I want to move on. In the annual report, there was a highlighted feature on work to assess psychological injuries. The work of one Dr. Dudley was highlighted in the annual report. Can the witnesses describe what that work entailed and some of the changes and the evolution that we have seen in the world of assessing psychological injuries?

Mr. Dieckmann: The work that we did with Dr. Dudley has actually been very positive for the organization and for how we manage psychological injury claims. What Dr. Dudley did was that he took a look at all the psychological injury claims that we have had from 2014 to, I believe, the end of 2021. This past year, he also has included the 2022 claims in there. Really, what he was looking for were patterns and the impacts of things like early interventions, so comparing those cases where there were delays in getting people treatment to the times when treatment was delivered in a much more expedited manner. In those instances, it became very clear that the faster we can get treatment happening, the better the outcomes that we have.

As I am sure you are all aware, we had this little thing called "COVID" happen where it was very difficult for a period of time to get injured workers — no matter what the injury was — in to see service providers, so there were some delays there.

There were actually some good comparators from before COVID. What we've done with psychological injuries — and we started doing this back in 2014, I believe. Even if we hadn't completed the adjudication on a claim, if we had a psychological injury claim, we were starting treatment right away with the person. One of the benefits of that was that it made it quicker for us to get a diagnosis and know whether or not there was indeed a psychological injury, and then we were able to move on and adjudicate and see if it did actually occur in the course of employment and move through that process.

The benefit to the person was that, whether or not it was an accepted claim, they had already started treatment and the outcomes for those individuals were considerably better than waiting. For example, for a PTSD diagnosis, it's a minimum of a month before you actually will get a diagnosis. If it occurs because of an incident, from incident to diagnosis, the psychologist or psychiatrist needs that amount of time to do the assessment. That proved to be very beneficial. Dr. Dudley looked at those types of things and things like: When we are working with workers to try to get them back to work, what was the impact of the workplace environment on the ability to return an injured worker to work?

One of the things that was highlighted in Dr. Dudley's findings was that where workers feel that they are supported in their return to work, the outcomes of return to work were far greater. In situations where the worker had a supportive team of the employer, the service provider, and our staff, that led to far better outcomes as well. Where there were challenges in the return to work was where workers felt that there weren't the supports in the workplace to help them get back to work. Those were a few of the things. I don't have all the details on the reports that Dr. Dudley did at my fingertips, but I can tell you that it really has helped us now to start to plan early when we have a psychological injury as to what interventions are going to be needed. A big part of it as well is setting expectations so that the injured worker clearly understands what the process is and what the eventual outcome is.

Mr. Dixon: Madam Chair, I appreciate that response. It's certainly sufficient for what I was looking for.

I would like to move on to the implementation of the new act. I had a question that was raised with me and I would like to explore it a little bit with the witnesses. It's in relation to division 6, which is "Prohibition against reprisals" in the new act, so it is section 54.

Section 54 of the new act outlines the process by which a worker who believes, on reasonable grounds, that they were threatened with reprisal. They are required to either make a written complaint in accordance with their collective agreement or make a written complaint to the board itself. The following section, 54(2), requires that this decision is irrevocable. The question that was put to me was: What if someone accidentally chooses wrong — where they feel that they are in a situation where there has been a reprisal and they make a written complaint to the board, only to then realize that there was actually a different process through their collective agreement that would otherwise have been appropriate?

The question is: Why is the clause included in section 54 irrevocable and what would happen if somebody were to mistakenly choose the wrong path in that instance?

Mr. Dieckmann: The reason that it is established that way — my understanding is so that — there are going to be overlapping processes in some instances, but this section is specifically designed for reprisals only. If somebody has a complaint under the collective agreement — let's say that they had put a grievance in — that grievance isn't what we are talking about here — but if, through the process of going through the grievance, there is an element of a reprisal that is

alleged, they can continue just through their collective agreement process and deal with the reprisal there, or they have the option to come to us and say: Okay, we're dealing with this grievance over here. For example, let's say that it was a harassment grievance — that process wouldn't be affected at all, but they could section out the piece on the reprisal. It could potentially speed that piece of the process up, because a lot of times grievances take a long time to settle.

If they decided to deal with it in its entirety through the collective agreement process, and they dealt with the harassment complaint and a reprisal complaint, and the individual wasn't satisfied with the outcome there, this is designed so that they can't then turn around and say: Well, I'm going to try a different process, and see if I can get a different outcome.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate the response. The next section 55 provides for the referral of a complaint to an arbiter, so the board can determine that a complaint — sorry, there is the provision for a complaint to be referred to an arbiter. I'm just wondering if the witnesses can describe the process. Who would they use in this case to be an arbiter? Do they have any instances of having something go to arbitration or go to an arbiter in the past year?

Mr. Dieckmann: To answer the second part first, we haven't had any instances that we have referred to an arbiter at this point. The process that we would go through if somebody lodged a complaint with us is we would take that complaint and process it; we would do a review to make sure that it hadn't already gone through another process or something like that, because that would then disqualify it, and then we would do very much of a cursory review to ensure that there was enough information provided for us to be able to send it to an arbiter at that point.

One of the things in the legislation, as well, is, if it is referred to an arbiter, it is then incumbent upon the employer to prove that there wasn't a reprisal. There is a reverse onus built into it there, so we have to make sure that, when we are referring it, there is at least some evidence that there has been a reprisal. But we don't do a fulsome investigation; we leave that to the arbitrator to do.

As far as who we would use, we don't have anyone on retainer, but there are a number of qualified arbiters in the Yukon and BC, and we would find somebody who was qualified and didn't have a conflict — hadn't been involved with any of the parties previously.

Mr. Dixon: I appreciate that response.

Section 55(10) has a carveout from the *Arbitration Act*. It says, "The *Arbitration Act* does not apply to a complaint that is referred to an arbitrator under..." this section.

I was curious as to why there was that carveout. Why would the arbitration processes used by all other arbiters not be relevant here, and why would we carve this section out from the *Arbitration Act*?

Mr. Dieckmann: Madam Chair, I honestly cannot answer that. I don't draft legislation, so I really don't know.

Mr. Dixon: If I understood the witness's previous response, there has not been a case where an arbiter has been used in the last year. Could I just get that confirmed?

Mr. Dieckmann: Yes, we have not referred anything to an arbiter in the past year.

Mr. Dixon: I will move on. The annual report also highlighted some work that was done around reducing barriers to trade with other jurisdictions and a number of initiatives to either synchronize or align regulations here in the Yukon with other provinces. Can the witnesses describe what some of that work is and what is planned for the upcoming year?

Mr. Dieckmann: This is a piece of work that we think is really, really beneficial for employers in the territory.

I am sure that you have all read through our legislation and our regulations and have seen some of the standards that are in our regulations and the datedness of some of them. What has been arranged is, there is an agreement between the various provincial, territorial governments. I don't believe the federal government is a signatory to it, but I will verify that and get back to you on it.

What the governments have done is they have all agreed to update standards for certain things within the occupational safety regulations. For example, first aid kits — if you look at the regulations across the country, we typically all have a level 1, or level 2, and level 3 first aid kit. The problem with them is that the Alberta first aid kit will have a different number of Band-Aids, different number of ointments, and different types of stuff from what is supposed to be in the BC kit, which is then different from the Ontario kit. What was agreed was that we would work with the Canadian Standards Association to establish a standard for first aid kits, and we would all adopt that standard.

Fortunately, the way our regulations are written, it lists standards and says that a workplace will adhere to these standards or any other standard acceptable to the director of workplace health and safety. So, what happens is that we come to an agreement on what the standard will be, then there is a signed agreement between the various governments, and then, whatever that agreed standard is will also be included in the regulation.

So, they can follow the standard that is currently in the regulation and only have a first aid kit that can be used in the Yukon, or they can follow the new standard that's put in place and get a first aid kit that is acceptable all across the country. That has been done for fall protection, it has been done for first aid kits, and it has been done for — I'm not sure everything that has been done, but it is work that is continuing.

I just got a note that the feds have actually signed on to it as well, so they are part of that agreement.

That is work that is ongoing, and we will continue working on it. The agreement and the work is done through the Canadian Association of Administrators of Labour Legislation, or CAALL, and it's the OSH subcommittee in conjunction with the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety that does a lot of the work and the research for the group. It's quite a good agreement, and we are very happy with the way it has been working out.

Mr. Dixon: I will conclude my remarks, and thank the witnesses again for their time. I will cede the floor to my colleague.

Ms. White: Madam Chair, I, of course, welcome the officials as always, and apologize about turning my back to you while speaking toward the Chair. It's always a little bit awkward in this spot.

I just wanted to start with — I mean, there were some big changes in 2022, when we talk about the — and I am always going to get it wrong, because it was "WCB" for such a long time, and now, of course, its name is the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, so "WSCB". I know that 2022 was a big time of change with the adoption of the new legislation in 2021, and in the annual report, it does talk about some of that progression and change. I will just ask kind of in broad strokes, and then I will go down a bit, but knowing that there were some big things happening in 2022, was there anything that the witnesses wanted to highlight before I go deeper into it?

Mr. Dieckmann: I could talk about what we do for a long, long time, so that is a big invite; I thank you for that.

I think what I would really like to highlight is some of the work that our staff have done. As the member said, the work that was done on the act and the legislation that this House gave us was a huge opportunity for us to re-look at our business. It required us to go through all of our policies — re-work all of the policies. It was a tremendous amount of work that had to be done, which is over and above the day-to-day work that we also have to do — because we still have a lot of injured workers who we need to make sure get the benefits to which they are entitled — and, you know, employers who we have to set rates for; and we do inspections; and we do all of this work — and this was layered on top of it.

We managed to in, you know, a year and a half — by the end of 2022 — for the most part, we were really ready to hit the ground running. In 2023, we have been working very, very hard on implementing all of the changes. The changes actually — the act came into force in the middle of 2022 and we had most of the work done, but then there was a lot of training, learning, and other things that had to happen. Our staff were able to do the day-to-day work that they did, and on top of that, they still managed to get the act done and still have time to do other things. I don't know if it was in this annual report or the last one where we talk about the running club with kids. That was an initiative that was brought forward by our staff to say that one of the things that we really like to do is work with young women and LGBTQ2S+ people who are somewhat left out when it comes to things happening in the schools and activities and those kinds of things. Actually, I believe that it was in 2021 that we started the Ironwomen running club and the work that they were able to do to move that forward. It is a program that has really taken off now and we see a lot of youth who otherwise may be marginalized and may otherwise be in situations that are higher risk, participating in that activity where our staff are then helping them to understand how to address risks, how to promote mental health, and how to maintain their own mental health all through sports.

Those are the kinds of things that we are able to do, in spite of all of the other work that is layered on top with the act changes.

Our new name is challenging for all of us: the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board. It doesn't slip off the tongue the way it used to, but I did note on today's agenda that we were still listed as the "Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board", so across the board, it is a challenging one.

Ms. White: First of all, I will apologize to the witnesses, because I am just going to go all over the place and back and forth on things. One of the highlights that was talked about in the report was a focus on social media and getting out there. I was actually quite curious, because I am not sure if the board is using — I am just going to call it "the board" at this point — targeted ads or if it is just supposed to scroll through folks' social media — and I say this only because I just realize now that I hadn't "liked" or wasn't following the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board; I am now — but I haven't seen any of the ads.

Within the 2022 report, it says that there was a push on trying to get out on social media and talk about safety. I just wanted to know the kind of metrics or what that program looks like.

Mr. Dieckmann: I am a little bit of a Luddite, so how we are using social media — we have a very good team who does that. Yes, they are collecting metrics. If I get this right — and if I don't, I will hear about it later when I get back to the office — what we do is use social media to try to drive traffic to the website. One of the things in our strategic plan is that we will try to communicate and reach people where they are. We were not at all in the social media space two years ago. It was late in 2021 and into 2022 when we started to dip our toe into it. Our manager of communications has done a really good job of setting it up. When we have any initiatives and when we have anything happening, we post it on Facebook. I am not sure if we are using Instagram or other platforms but I do know that we are using Facebook. We will put little teasers on there and ads on there, and they we try to drive them to where we have the detailed information.

Actually, just yesterday, our management team got together and we were looking at some of the statistics, and we are seeing some really good responses. If I am correct, over the past month, we had 5,000 hits on Facebook, which then drove, I think, half or more of those over to the website to get more detailed information. What we are trying to put on there are some of the things that we have really been concentrating on — information that is useful to our employers and information that is useful to young workers. When we publish anything, we push it out. For example, we will do a Halloween ad. You may ask what that has to do with workplace safety, but our philosophy is if you're not safe at home, you're not going to be safe at work. Safety is all-encompassing and goes across all areas.

We firmly believe also that if we start to talk to kids and teach kids very young how to think safely, it will impact them as they get into the workplace.

We are putting out a Facebook ad just to remind parents and youth of some of the things they should do for safety while

out trick-or-treating. What we will do is post that on the website and on Facebook, and then, in a lot of instances — not this one in particular, but in a lot of instances — if they click on it, it takes them to the website where there is more detailed information on what to do from a safety perspective. That is how we're using it. I wish I was more well-versed in the social media side of things.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that. I am on the Facebook page now and there is great content. First of all, I just want to say to your communications folks that there is great content, but I guess my concern is that, for someone who pays fairly close attention to what's going on in the Yukon and follows — or doesn't necessarily follow but gets a fair amount of information — for example, the Yukon government does lots of targeted ads — however the algorithm works — but they are targeted ads. The reason why I am bringing that up is that I don't recall seeing anything from the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board recently or at all. It's great content.

So, to follow up on the witness's point, the ad about Halloween, for example, is great. It talks about high-visibility reflective tape, good shoes, and making sure that you can move; all of those things are really important. I think that a lot of the information on the Facebook page is really relevant. It mentions the Ironwomen, of course. In July, there was a post about wildfire smoke and the things to do, which I think are all really important.

I guess what I am encouraging is figuring out a way to get that spread out further without someone necessarily having to like the page to see things — to make sure that the hard work is going further. There is the possibility that I might not fit within the algorithm but I would like to see what's going on. Now I'm following the page so that will be helpful.

There is talk in the report about the Guarding Minds at Work survey. It talks about how this was completed by board staff just recently in 2022 and how it is a proactive approach to mental health and — it has been mentioned before, but this is a different way — a point-in-time kind of snapshot of how things are going.

So, I was just hoping that the witnesses could talk a bit more about how this program was selected to be able to do that snapshot, and then I was curious if they know if other departments within Yukon government have used this as well to do that check-in on mental health. Although we talk a lot more about mental health and wellness than we did before, I still don't think that we're doing a great job — so, if they could just give me a bit more information about the Guarding Minds at Work survey, the things they found, areas to work on, and then whether or not other departments are using it as well.

Mr. Dieckmann: There again, that's a huge topic, and thank you very much for asking that question because I am actually quite excited about a lot of the work that we are doing in mental health and the work that is going on across the Yukon and across the country.

I agree completely. There is a lot more work to be done. There is an awful lot of work to be done when it comes to psychological safety and mental health in the workplace and those types of things.

The Guarding Minds at Work is endorsed by the Canadian Mental Health Association. There are a number of partners in the development of that. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety is involved in it; I can't even remember everybody. But the reason that we selected that particular survey is because it really does a good job of laying out the 13 psychosocial factors for mental health in the workplace, and it quantifies and qualifies quite well what those 13 psychosocial factors are and does a good job of explaining how you can address those factors in the workplace and improve mental health. It's really good, and the survey gives you a great snapshot of where your organization is. What we found in our survey was that there were some places that actually also aligned quite well with the employee engagement survey that is done on a regular basis by Yukon government. I think they do that survey every two years.

Things in our organization that we found that we still need to be working on are setting proper expectations for employees and for their work. Things like autonomy in work and decision-making are some things that we really can address. I wish that I had known in advance because I would have actually brought the survey so I could have told you the various things that we found in it, but what it really came down to is that it gave us a good set of goalposts to start to work toward addressing specific issues or specific areas where staff felt that we could make improvements.

The member asked about whether government is doing it. I can say that it has been adopted in a number of departments. I sit on the Deputy Ministers Review Committee — DMRC — and we have been going through the 13 psychosocial factors at the senior level, talking about things that we are doing in our workplaces and things that we can do as a government to help improve those 13 psychosocial factors. The model was used right across government and so there is actually a concerted effort on behalf of senior leadership in government to try to introduce that tool into the whole of government. I believe that it is going to take a little while to get that done, but it is work that is being done and I have to say that I am quite happy to be part of that.

For our organization, we are using that survey; that was the second time we did it. We try to do it on the off-years from the employee engagement survey so that we can keep a running pulse of how things are going in our organization given that there is some overlap in that. I hope that answers the question.

Ms. White: I do thank the witness for that. We can find all the information on the Guarding Minds at Work and the questions and stuff online, and that is where I was. It is also a suggestion that the board encourage government departments — or through that deputy minister panel encourage that those get rolled out in maybe a more regular way through government departments.

I think people are struggling, honestly, across the board, and the more that they feel supported at work where we spend a great deal of our time, I think the better off we will be.

I wanted to get into a bit more of the statistics stuff that the witnesses have. Does the board keep track of employees — maybe not necessarily direct numbers but averages or ballpark

numbers of employees by age? In categories, for example, we have accepted claims by age group, and it goes from 15 all the way up to 65-plus. I wanted to know if the board has an idea of, for example, the numbers of employees in the Yukon in those categories?

Mr. Dieckmann: Madam Chair, we don't have numbers of people. We are not even able to reliably track the number of employees or number of workers in the territory. We rely very heavily on the Bureau of Statistics to provide us with that information. We use a lot of their data to help us with crunching the numbers on our data as well. Our legislation is not set up in a way that — we don't ask workplaces how many employees they have. What we collect is payroll, and then we can do some estimates from the payroll and from the NOC — National Occupation Classification — codes. The amount of pay per occupation — we can extrapolate from that and get a rough idea of the number of employees in certain industries, but as far as ages go and solid numbers, no, there is no way that we can do that.

Ms. White: Is there something in the legislation that prevents that kind of collection of information? Knowing that the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board is responsible for all Yukon workers, I just wonder if it would make sense if we knew how many of those workers there were and in which categories they fell.

Mr. Dieckmann: There is nothing specifically in our legislation that allows or disallows us to collect that information. I would have to check with our legal counsel to see if it is something that we can do, but it is something that we, historically, never have done.

There are certain times when we need to know the number of employees, but, really, it's on the workplace health and safety side. All we need to know is whether or not an employer has more than 20 or less than 20, because that is sort of the kick-in point for safety committees. Beyond that, we really don't have any need to collect that information, so we don't. It would be challenging, because we would basically have to be asking every employer to report on the number of employees, and the number of employees they have who are within certain age groups. I think that would be a challenging bit of a burden on employers, if we were to do that on a regular basis.

Ms. White: I think I am going to disagree a bit with the witness, but I don't think he would be surprised that I might have a different idea on it.

The reason why I asked that is that, when we look at things, like accepted claims by age group or accepted claims by events or exposure, knowing if the demographic of the workforce is changing is important. I know that Mr. Pike had mentioned that, with the changing climate, we are seeing some different things, but I would suggest that, with the cost-of-living inflation crisis that we are seeing, we are probably seeing a different demographic as well.

One of the reasons why I ask that is, in 2022, the accepted claims by age group was up in 65-plus. Although it may have only been up by seven, in 2021, it was 33; in 2022, it says it was 40 — but being able to compare between years, based on demographic, that would give us an indication — for example,

was the workforce getting younger or older? Are we seeing changes there?

I am just currently online trying to go through another report to get an idea of maybe where we were at in different years. The reason why I am asking about the collection of data is to be able to make comparisons in the demographic of workforces. Does the witness have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Dieckmann: As I said, the Bureau of Statistics actually has good information on that, and we rely on that very heavily, and we do comparisons based on that data. What I'm saying is, for us to collect really, really solid, sound data, I don't know that we could ever do it without going to every employer, and saying: How many people do you have working and what are their ages?

I mean, as soon as we got that, that would change, whereas the Bureau of Statistics really knows how to do that, and they get good information, and we use that on a year-over-year basis to do our comparators. So, we do have a fairly good idea how many — the demographics, the number of temporary foreign workers in the territory. We have a pretty good grasp on that. We work with other areas of government to gather some information, so we know where some of these people are being employed, if they are temporary foreign workers or if they are working within certain age demographics. We are able to pull that data — it is just that we don't do it ourselves; we rely on others' data for it.

Ms. White: Just because the witness just alluded to having that number, can he give me an approximate number of temporary foreign workers currently working in the Yukon?

Mr. Dieckmann: I don't have that information on me, but we can certainly get back to the House.

Ms. White: I appreciate that, and maybe I will put a plug across to your minister to bring that number forward, if that is possible — so, that was just the number of temporary foreign workers in the territory, but they could also make that information available to him as well.

One of the things that you had just mentioned in one of your answers was that more than 20 employees required safety committees. Is there any way that any employer is able to not follow that? So, for example, if an employer had 21 employees and chose not to have a safety committee, what is the consequence of that?

Mr. Dieckmann: The consequence would be the same as not complying with any of our act or regulations. There is a statutory requirement where there are 20 regularly employed, so that is a bit of a caveat. What we typically look at for "regularly employed" is, if you have 20 or more for a month or better, we are going to order you to have a safety committee, because a lot of employers — especially seasonal employers — will have 20 or more during the summer, drop down to less than 20 during the winter — we still say that, yes, even though you are dropping down during the winter, you have to maintain a safety committee, because you will be back up over that 20.

So, once they've shown that they are employing over 20, we will issue orders, if they don't have a safety committee, to put a safety committee in place. There are a number of consequences for not complying with orders, anywhere from

— we can issue administrative penalties, we can prosecute, and those kinds of things. It rarely ever comes to that. People put safety committees in place when we approach them. A lot of times, we don't even have to issue orders; we just say, you have reached the point where they need a safety committee, and they will do it. We do tell them that, if they don't, we will follow up, we will issue orders, and we will make requirements.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that.

I guess one of the questions, when I'm thinking about safety committees, for example, and knowing that there are employers in the territory who have a large number of employees, but they might be spread out in different spots — we could talk about Air North. We have Air North employees in Old Crow, in Dawson City, and in Whitehorse. Their working conditions are quite different, and their realities are different, as the buildings are set up in a different way. Air North in Whitehorse definitely has more than 20 employees in one spot, although I would suggest there are different aspects. So, for example, an employer who has multiple locations or multiple job sites — how does that work for health and safety committees?

Mr. Dieckmann: The establishment of a safety committee is a responsibility of the employer. We don't typically tell them how to establish their committees. Where we will weigh in is where their committee isn't working, we may then order changes, but the way I've seen it work with some employers, depending on what they have and depending on if they have offices with more than 20 people in a variety of locations, which happens a lot with construction — they may have two or three projects going, so they will have a safety committee at each of the projects. Then they have a main committee that operates out of their office, and all the information flows back into the office, and that's where they maintain the records and do those kinds of things, and when the job shuts down, the committee shuts down in that area. So, that's one way we've seen it done.

Another way we've seen it done is where an organization that has a large office, say, in Whitehorse, and has satellites in other communities, they will set up so that they have a main committee in their larger office, and then they have safety reps in the other communities who then feed information into the committee and participate in the regular committee meetings.

So, there are a number of ways that it can be set up. What we look for in those cases, as I said earlier, is the effectiveness of the committee. If the committee is effective and it's functioning, then we really don't weigh in on it. If it's a dysfunctional committee, then we will require the employer to provide us with a method by which they are going to get it into a functional state. If they can't figure that out themselves, then we may issue orders. The challenge with that, though, is that if we are telling somebody how to set up their committee and don't really have a clear understanding of their corporate structure, we could introduce risk into that employer, so we are really cautious about doing that. What we will do is continue, in most instances, to push the employer to get their committee functioning and figure it out, based on their corporate structure and how they work.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that. It seems to me that, when we talk about a larger entity, and then with satellite — and the example of the construction company with multiple projects I think was good, but also with different offices. So, as an example, if there is a central office, and there are the satellites, and the safety committee is only based in the central office, is there an ability for employees to trigger a process to become part of a safety committee, if they feel like they are not being represented, or they don't have an opportunity to feed in that information? Is there a way for employees to trigger that process?

Mr. Dieckmann: There are a number of ways that employees can trigger that. Part of the way that the act is structured is that there has to be a safety committee, and there has to be at least one safety representative on the committee who is picked by the worker members of the committee, as the safety representative — right? So, in an instance where a worker, you know, feels that talking to their supervisor or providing information to their supervisor, they are not getting through, they can always go to their safety representative on the committee, and the safety representative can bring that forward. Depending on how the organization structures themselves for the selection of committee members, they can put their name forward, or they can talk to other workers and get nominated to be put on to the committee.

If they are in a unionized environment, they can talk to the union. The union has an ability to recommend members to go on to a safety committee, so there are a number of different ways that it can be done, depending on the structure. I am not going to pretend that there aren't some workplaces out there where it would be very challenging. In those instances, they can come to us and say: We don't have a functioning committee and we're not feeling represented.

Our approach on those is, first, we will ask a few questions. We will ask: Have you spoken to your safety representative or have you spoken to your employer? If they say yes, they have tried that and it didn't work, then we will follow up.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that.

As an example, the Yukon government is a large employer, and within that, there are departments. As a concern, for example, a department like Energy, Mines and Resources is reflective of a lot of different things. It's not just one aspect; it is a big department, and it covers a lot of different things. There are offices across the Yukon and different branches. If, for example, a department like that only had a health and safety committee that was based in Whitehorse, and employees wanted there to be satellites, and they had been unable to get that moving — either representatives outside of Whitehorse, or even setting up entirely different committees — where would those employees turn with those concerns?

Mr. Dieckmann: There again, I go back to the functioning of the committee. It is the employer's responsibility to set up the committee. That is the way the act is structured. If the committee is functioning and functioning well, I would question why they would want to set up a separate committee in other areas.

I understand the concept of there being different work happening in different areas, but part of the beauty of the safety committee system is, if you have different people from different work areas feeding information into a central committee, or it's being looked at from that corporate lens, there may be something that happens in one area that another area wouldn't even think about in their risk assessment, because they think they don't do that kind of work, but the fact that they have different work areas feeding all of the information in, it creates the opportunity to then look around and say: Okay, well, they do that kind of work over there, but we do some similar stuff here, and is that a hazard that we need to be considering and actually putting some similar controls in place to what's happening over there?

That's the beauty of having that central view on it and that corporate view on it. But if somebody were to say they feel, as workers, that there should be a separate committee in that workplace — if we received a complaint on that, we may go and investigate and take a look at it, and if we determine that committee is actually functioning well the way it is, we're not going to weigh in. Really, it's up to the employer and the workers to figure out whether or not it makes sense to have another committee in another area.

Ms. White: I was listening to the radio — I apologize, because this is going to be a little bit vague, but mostly because I just kind of caught it — it's about employer safety records. There was a report on the radio last week about employees being able to go online and check out the safety records of prospective employers before taking a job. I can't even tell you what jurisdiction it's in because I did not catch that, but I know that it was happening in Canada, and I really think that it's a good idea. I think that employees always should be able to take steps to keep themselves safe, and they should be able to find out, for example, if a prospective employer has a good or a bad track record when it comes to safety.

I was on the website for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board but I was unable to find if that was a possibility here. I think the more that we can do to keep workers safe is important, and sometimes that is knowledge — making sure that people have access to knowledge.

Can the witnesses let us know if a person is able to find out if their employer or prospective employer has a good and sound safety record? Is there a way for us to check out prospective employers?

Mr. Dieckmann: The only thing that we post on our website is administrative penalties. If employers get administrative penalties, we will post those on our website. We don't have a rollup of numbers of orders or those kinds of things posted on the website. I don't know if there is — at this moment, we couldn't do it. We just don't have the ability to roll it up. Our data isn't organized enough and our systems aren't organized enough. It is a direction that we are moving in and it's going to take us a little while to get there, but I would certainly like to be able to do it. It's not something that we are capable of doing right now with the systems we have and the way our data is organized, so we can't publish that.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that. I guess this is something that I am encouraging. It sounds like there is interest to collect more data and make that more readily available.

As an example, I worked at a mine site where there were two fatalities, which is brutal. They both happened after I had left, but there were probably indications that things weren't safe before that. Anytime we can make sure that someone has that knowledge going into a situation, I think that would be better.

A great number of years ago, a lot of the public information campaigns were really visible in the community. There were the big billboards. For example, coming down Two Mile Hill, on the right side, I think it was at Northern Metallic where there was a great big sign. There was also a great big sign on Main Street, I think, in the Shoppers Plaza, if that's what the building is called. There used to be these great big billboards, and I have to tell you that I remember the billboards. I remember some of the slogans, because if you drive past it enough, it really gets in there. To me, it seems like an effective campaign. If you see it so often that you can remember the slogan, and that slogan is "keep each other safe" or "young workers, know your rights" and how you are able to refuse unsafe work, those things are really important. I know that there has been a push to move toward different kinds of ways, but I have noticed in the last number of years that those billboards aren't up anymore.

Does the board continue to inform workers of their rights — and young workers of those rights — through safety campaigns and young worker safety programs? If they do, how do they do that? How is that information being shared widely and across the spectrum?

Mr. Dieckmann: Yes, I love those billboards too. Unfortunately, we were not able to continue to put them up. I am not sure why, but we had to actually go and take them all down from the properties. I think that it had something to do with them not being related to the businesses that had allowed us to put them up on their properties. No, we are not going to be doing that again anytime soon, but what we are doing, as I said earlier, is really trying to look at how we reach people where they are. That is why we have moved into the social media space — to try to reach youth where they are. There is a lot of programming that we do with youth.

We regularly have our staff going to the schools and doing a number of programs. We have a program, "Work Shouldn't Hurt", that is targeted at the youth who are entering into the workforce, so it's part of the Planning 10 program that they have in schools. We have different programs set up for the K to 3, and the 4 to 6, I believe, and then the junior high, and then the Planning 10 piece. We have programs that are actually age-appropriate safety messages targeted to the classrooms. We try to make it to every single school in the territory at least every two years. We will go every second year to some of the smaller schools simply because, if you do the K to 3, and K to 3 is the classroom, then going every year, you are doing the same thing for the same kids regularly. So we split it up.

We go to other schools at least once a year, and sometimes we will go two or three times a year, depending on how many classes they have of each cohort. So, lots of stuff is being done with youth.

We also have a young worker code of practice that is posted on our website, which is designed to explain to employers what they need to do when training and orientating new and young workers who come into their workplaces. That is a big piece.

It would be great if we were able to sort of push a little bit further into some of the areas where we know we are not reaching the youth. Kids who have dropped out of school is a difficult demographic for us to find and to provide training for, but I do think that we are working very hard, and I think we are doing a really good job on getting to the youth who are still in the schools.

Ms. White: Those school visits — is it all schools, including rural Yukon?

Mr. Dieckmann: Yes, we visit rural Yukon and communities. We go to all communities, including Old Crow.

Ms. White: That is probably why I don't see the young worker advertising anymore, because I am no longer a young worker or in any of the schools. But that sounds like probably one of the most glorious jobs ever, being able to travel out to do that.

It was touched on before, the board-sponsored health and safety program through the Yukon Outfitters Association website. The reason I bring that up is — well, actually, there are a couple of different angles. In 2009, one of my really close friends was working as a staker with an exploration company and actually died on April 28 when he was attacked by a bear just outside of Ross River. So, seeing that there are pretty specific things about outfitters, like remote work and solo work, and having gone through that, one of the things that has always troubled me with Jean-François' death is that it felt like it didn't actually change anything, to be honest. It didn't feel like the staking industry, after 2009, with his death — people weren't being sent out together. Things didn't really change. It didn't feel like a change. It didn't feel like a change to his family. It still doesn't feel like it really changed for me.

So, when an incident like that happens, one of the things is that you hope that the industry will change. Knowing that this program has been developed, for example, for Yukon outfitters, are there similar programs that have been developed for industries like the exploration industry? Knowing that, on a regular, if we are still doing exploration by individuals, we are dropping one person off at a time by helicopter into the middle of nowhere and they stake their line and get picked up at the other end. You know, it's a pretty glorious opportunity to be out in the woods like that, but again, I unfortunately know the real downfalls, because a friend of mine died. Have there been programs developed similar to the one for the Outfitters Association for industries, for example, like mine exploration?

Mr. Dieckmann: Yes, I remember that day very well, and after that, we actually did develop a guideline for safety in the exploration industry, but that raises a very good point. I should see if we still have that published somewhere, because that was before digital, and we had it developed in a booklet. I will follow up at the office and see if we still have that.

We have also worked very closely with the placer mining industry to help them with the development of a safety manual

for the placer industry, as well, under a similar situation. I mean, some serious incidents occurred; their costs were starting to climb significantly. They were actually the first ones we worked collaboratively with to develop something industry-specific.

The board of directors and the staff at the board are always willing to entertain proposals from industries that want to make a difference and do something specific. The other place where we have invested a lot of effort is in the construction industry, initially with setting up the Yukon Construction Safety Association which then transformed into the Northern Safety Network Yukon, which has programming that is available for all employers. One of the things that we are doing right now is working with the Northern Safety Network Yukon to take all of the content of the training courses that we have worked collaboratively on to develop and getting them turned into digital so that they can go on to a digital platform and then be more available to all workers and employers throughout the territory.

We're constantly trying to develop and deliver more material to stakeholders. We also do a lot of work with the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety to develop specific courses and programs for Yukon employers and Yukon workers that are available on their digital platform. We just recently worked with Yukon University to develop a first-line supervisor program for certifying supervisors in the mining industry to increase their safety knowledge and their abilities to deliver safe programming in the mining industry. It's stuff that we're continually working on. The Yukon University program is a certificate program that is now available through the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining.

Ms. White: I do thank the witness for that. It was a terrible time. It was the first time I attended the ceremony, in 2010. I haven't stopped going since. Just knowing that if we do have that information developed and make it readily available online — in a lot of industries, whether it's in-person training or digital training, you have to go through different training modules to be able to go out in the field on your own. I guess I would say that anything that is high risk like that — or high consequence maybe — is something for which I would encourage us to figure out some kind of training requirement — for example, just basic training on how to use a satellite phone. I work as a mountain bike instructor and guide. I can tell you that using bear spray is something that everyone should try before they are in the woods and they need to use it, because it's not what you anticipate it's going to be like, and it was only because my employer insisted that we know how to use bear spray as the people who are responsible for others. I think anytime we can make safety a bigger priority is important.

Have the witnesses read an article from CBC entitled “Wildland firefighters in many parts of Canada struggle to get compensated for serious illness”. It was an article from September 25, 2023. I just wanted to know if they are familiar with this article.

Mr. Dieckmann: Actually, I haven't read that article.

Ms. White: I will say it here so that it is on record, but it is definitely something that I would suggest. Just for Hansard's

purposes, it is entitled: “Wildland firefighters in many parts of Canada struggle to get compensated for serious illness”, and it's dated September 25, 2023.

I have brought up the issue of presumptive cancer coverage for wildland firefighters before, which no one right now is surprised that I am probably veering to here, but this article from September 25, 2023, is important. In part, Mr. Pike said that we are seeing changing landscapes of jobs based on climate change. One of those things that we are seeing with climate change is an increase to the wildfire season. We saw that in Canada this year. We even saw that right here at home — the change and what that looks like. This article is important because it does a cross-jurisdictional scan, and in it, it talks about the jurisdictions that have presumptive coverage for wildland firefighters and it is more than it was when we first started having this conversation.

There is just one part of the article that I want to quote. It's under the title “Presumptions ‘absolutely vital’” — and it says: “Neil McMillan, the director of science and research for the Occupational Health, Safety and Medicine Division of the International Association of Firefighters, said the legislation governing presumptions needs to be more encompassing to recognize the science and include wildland firefighters. ‘A fire is a fire is a fire,’ he said. ‘We've seen through the studies done in the U.S., Canada and elsewhere that the toxic chemicals and carcinogens that come from biomass burning contribute to illness. It's absolutely vital,’ he said.”

The reason I want to bring this up is that, in May of this year, Manitoba passed amendments to its act to offer wildland firefighters presumptive coverage for heart injury and some cancers. Both Québec and New Brunswick do not distinguish between wildland and structural firefighters. Nova Scotia wildland firefighters are eligible for some of the same presumptions as structural fire. British Columbia has made changes.

A number of years ago, the witnesses told me that this was something that would be investigated so I am looking for an update to that investigation.

Mr. Dieckmann: I hadn't seen this particular article but we do regularly look at the scientific articles on presumptive cancers for wildland firefighters. One of the things that we have noticed is that there isn't a lot of data on wildland firefighters, but there are studies that are underway. So, as we get those studies, we will continue to inform the minister of what our findings are.

One of the things, though, that I do find challenging about the conversation is — well, there are a couple of things. One is that anybody who suffers a work-related injury — whether it's a firefighter or anyone else — is eligible for compensation. We have a presumption built into our legislation already that says that, on a balance of probabilities, if it's equally weighted, the injury is presumed to be work-related. There is a presumption built into our legislation. I am paraphrasing there; I'm not quoting the legislation, because I can't remember the exact wording in it.

But the part of the conversation that disappoints me is that there is no conversation about prevention. When we met with

the IAFF on the original presumption for the structural firefighters, one of the predominant pieces of the conversation was: How do we better protect structural firefighters from injury? There were a few things that came out of those discussions which have led to substantial changes in firefighting right across North America — across the world, for that matter — things like: proper washing facilities for turnout gear so that when they go to a fire, the first thing that they can do is wash their turnout gear so they don't continue to have carcinogenic materials on it; better use and training of self-contained breathing apparatus — the IAFF was the one that told us that a lot of firefighters, especially old-time firefighters, would go into fire situations without wearing their self-contained breathing apparatus — so a lot more training around that; a lot better turnout gear that was more resistant to the penetration of the hazardous chemicals and those kinds of things.

It was a part and parcel of the conversation, and I don't dispute for a minute that anytime you burn anything, there are going to be carcinogenic materials in it. The question that we really should be asking ourselves is: How do we adequately protect those wildland firefighters from exposures that are going to cause the cancers? I would like to introduce that into the conversation as well.

Ms. White: Deputy Chair, what does the witness suggest? If we are talking about making wildland firefighters safer — and in his capacity — what influence can we expect to see?

Mr. Dieckmann: First of all, there needs to be some research done on what effective methods there are to protect the wildland firefighters. It hasn't entered the conversation, so we, as a small jurisdiction, aren't going to influence the IAFF and the broader piece of the conversation. I think we need to look at how we can effectively put preventive methods in place. There is no way that you can have wildland firefighters running around out in the field with self-contained breathing apparatus. Carrying a tank that lasts for half an hour isn't going to be effective, but there have to be other ways to better protect them. What we have been doing is looking to see if there are effective methods, but there is no research to really show us what would be effective so it's really difficult for us to even start having the conversation. We couldn't issue an order to do something if we don't know that it's going to be effective; it could end up being more harmful. I would like to see that enter into some of the discussion.

What I have been doing, and what some of my counterparts have been doing on the national level, is starting those conversations and seeing where we can influence and where we can get some of that research happening. But, quite frankly, that is work that has to be done at a national level.

Ms. White: I thank the witness for that.

There have been changes since this conversation first started here about presumptive coverage for wildland firefighters. I just said that Manitoba passed amendments in May of this year; Victoria, Australia, wildland fire got presumptive coverage last year in November — and you can imagine that wildland fire in Australia is a pretty big deal.

Although I appreciate that the witness has just said that it's about safety equipment and that we're too small a jurisdiction, if I was told by the same witness previously that they would look into it and see what it would mean — I guess I am just asking for what that update has been.

The minister was very clear when he lobbied industry to send in letters about why we shouldn't cover wildland firefighters — because it would affect their rates. I just want to know what research has been done from the aspect of the people who are responsible for the safety of workers.

Mr. Dieckmann: We don't do the research but we do continue to monitor the research. As I said earlier, there is no real new research on wildland firefighters that shows increased levels of exposure or that is demonstrating an increased incidence of cancers.

There was one report that was recently done on occupational exposure as a firefighter. The IARC — the International Agency for Research on Cancer — did a thorough review of all the literature out there. The conclusion they came back with was that all fires should be considered as having hazards, but what they also say in that research is that you have to distinguish between “hazard” and “risk”. There isn't enough research on the wildland firefighters to make a determination of what the risk level is. I understand, if you want to apply the precautionary principle, that where there is risk, there should be some measures put in place, but it doesn't distinguish between preventive measures. It doesn't speak to presumptions or anything like that in that research.

Ms. White: I appreciate that the people here at the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board themselves aren't doing the research, but there was an indication that there would be further investigation. As an example, I was told that there would be a drastic increase in the cost of people's coverage in different industries. Maybe the witness can let me know how it was decided that there would be the increase and that different industries would have drastic increases in the cost of coverage.

Mr. Dieckmann: Deputy Chair, one of the challenges with occupational disease is that exposure does not lead to disease immediately. A good example is smoking. Some people smoke their whole life and never get cancer; others start smoking and within a year or two they get cancer. It's an occupational disease. The latency periods and body's reactions to it are not easy to predict. Because of that, if a presumption is put in place — which happened with the structural firefighters — what that triggers is the actuaries having to calculate a reserve that has to be kept to pay for any cancers that may occur in the future, and up to 20 or 30 years, from the exposures that occur now. So, we have to book a liability.

The liability that they look at, and the way they look at the liability that they book — they actually look at the general population and the occurrence of those cancers in the general population and extrapolate that, if you have this many firefighters, you can expect to have this many cancers occur in the next X number of years. Then that liability gets booked. We have to collect all the money for that the day that a presumption comes into place, we have to collect that money. That means

the rate that whatever that group falls into gets billed immediately for that liability.

When the structural firefighter presumptions were put in place, all of them work for governments — municipal governments, territorial governments, or First Nation governments — so the entire liability was applied to the government rate and the government's rate jumped when that presumption was put in place. When the cancers were expanded, we applied the cost of that immediately to the government rate.

The majority of wildland firefighters work for the First Nations fire service. They are not part of the government rate group. They sit in another rate group, so introducing that presumption would mean that rate group would get hit with that liability. The firefighter coverage expansion — that was what applied a \$3 million — the last one, the expansion of the cancer coverage — we applied a \$3-million rate increase to the government rate group for that coverage when it was introduced. That is why it would hit an industry group.

Ms. White: I do thank the witnesses, and I could probably go on for another multitude of hours about this, but I recognize that we are close to running out of time, so I will thank you for the time today, and I look forward to further conversations with the minister about this topic.

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Are there any further questions for the witnesses?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Deputy Chair, I would like to thank the two representatives from WSCB for coming in and spending their afternoon with us. I also thank the opposition for their thoughtful questions.

Deputy Chair: Thank you. The witnesses are now excused.

Witnesses excused

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

Also, pursuant to Committee of the Whole Motion No. 12 adopted earlier today, witnesses appeared before Committee of the Whole to answer questions regarding the operations of the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

The following document was filed October 26, 2023:

35-1-159

Audit of the consolidated financial statements, letter re (dated October 19, 2023) from Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada, to Currie Dixon, Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Dixon)



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 149

1st Session

35th Legislature

HANSARD

Monday, October 30, 2023 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

YUKON LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

2023 Fall 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

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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

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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
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Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Monday, October 30, 2023 — 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. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I am asking my colleagues to help me in welcoming to the gallery today folks who are here for the 30 years of the Yukon First Nations Health Programs tribute, beginning with Al Lucier, the chair of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board of Directors. We also have Myra Iles, who is a member of the Yukon Hospital Corporation Board of Directors. Within the First Nations Health Programs staff, we have Laura Salmon, director. We also have Krystal Olito, manager, and we also have Ann Swan, Nicole Dillman, Dawn Coles from Dawson City, Michele Thompson, Naomi McDougall, Adanchilla Pauls, and Darla-Jean Lindstrom.

Applause

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, for the tribute to the 10th anniversary of the Heart of Riverdale, we have the honour of welcoming to the gallery Andrea Simpson-Fowler, who is the executive director, Michelle FisherMayr, Grace Simpson-Fowler, Oleksii Ogarov, and Violetta Umanes. Welcome.

Applause

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to please help me welcome a life-long friend, Grant Pauls, to the Legislature today. Grant is visiting from Vancouver but is a long-time Yukoner and a well-known artisan, jeweller, and a member of my nation, the Tahltan Nation. Welcome.

Applause

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to ask the Assembly to help welcome a few members of my family. My dad, Jim Tredger, is here — he is no stranger to the Assembly — my mom, Carole Kroening, and it is a special treat to welcome my aunt, Judy Tredger Campbell, who is visiting from Alberta.

Applause

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, I ask all members to join me in welcoming Joe Iles, who is here with his wife today.

Applause

Speaker: Tributes.

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Yukon First Nations Health Programs

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House on behalf of the Yukon Liberal government to pay tribute to the Yukon First Nations Health Programs.

First, I would like to recognize and congratulate the First Nations Health Programs on 30 years of devoted service in the Yukon. Secondly, I would like to thank the organization and all those who have worked with the First Nations Health Programs during its valuable time.

This organization, run out of Whitehorse General Hospital, Dawson City Community Hospital, and Watson Lake Community Hospital, provides and supports compassionate care for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people in the Yukon. Their empathetic care is based on First Nation culture and values and is shared with the people facing some of the most difficult times in their lives.

Within this House, many of us have either needed hospital care or visited loved ones in the hospital. We all know that it can be an extremely stressful time, especially when you don't know what to expect. The First Nations Health Programs give people some peace of mind. The program staff support and advocate for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people who use hospital services. This helps clients know that their health needs are being met from the moment they arrive to the moment that they are back in the comfort of their own home.

The First Nations Health Programs staff offer emotional, spiritual, and social support. They help communicate between client, family, and hospital staff as well. They provide reassurance about hospital care, such as a client's diagnosis, treatment, and surgical procedures. If you come to the hospital with mental health concerns, a First Nation mental health advocate can support and encourage you to get the help that you need. They arrange for traditional Indigenous foods like moose, caribou, bison, and bannock. They also arrange for traditional Indigenous medicines in the hospitals and are part of the role of gathering medicine from the land. They also make hospital discharge plans for clients when it is time to return home.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, Yukon Hospital Corporation launched an Indigenous workforce initiative to increase the number of Yukon First Nations working in all areas of our hospitals. This inspiring workforce initiative is aimed to recruit and to retain more Indigenous team members and offer supports to improve Indigenous professional development opportunities.

We are very fortunate to have such caring and compassionate community individuals who have kept this work going for 30 years. I wish the First Nations Health Programs another successful 30 years.

Applause

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize both the 30th anniversary of the Yukon Hospital Corporation running Whitehorse General Hospital and the 30th anniversary of the First Nations Health Programs.

This year marks a significant milestone for both. For the Yukon Hospital Corporation, we celebrate 30 years of providing hospital care by Yukoners for Yukoners as, in April 1993, management of the hospital was transferred to the Yukon Hospital Corporation. That resulted from the Yukon Hospital Corporation operations, which had begun in 1990 in preparation for the first phase transfer agreement for health services between the Yukon territorial government and the federal government. The devolution of health services from the federal government to the Yukon was a major step forward in the constitutional development of the Yukon as we gained local control over this important area, including the ability to better reflect the needs and culture of the Yukon.

This year, as I mentioned, also marks the 30th anniversary of the First Nations Health Programs. In the last three decades, it has been offering quality patient-centred, culturally appropriate care for patients and their families. This program is in fact nationally recognized for its innovative approach and best practices in care for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. It includes in-hospital patient support, assistance with personal care, discharge assistance and planning, traditional food and medicine components, language interpretation, and family support.

The traditional foods program includes wild game donated by local hunters, outfitters, and conservation officers, and, of course, the services it provides are available at all three of our hospitals in Whitehorse, Watson Lake, and Dawson City.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all of the health professionals and staff of the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the First Nations Health Programs for all that each of you do to take care of the needs of Yukoners and to support them in receiving the health care services that they need. I would also like to thank the members of the board of trustees, including those who have joined us today, as well as the staff who have joined us here today.

Applause

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to pay tribute to the First Nations Health Programs' 30th anniversary. The First Nations Health Programs is based on the foundational work of so many of our matriarchs, including Ida Calmegane, Agnes Mills, Doris McLean, Betsy Jackson, Mary Battaja, and Marilyn Jensen, all of whom paved the way to ensure that Yukon First Nation culture and traditions are reflected in all parts of the work of the First Nations Health Programs and hospital settings.

I had the privilege of working with the First Nations Health Programs between 2010 and 2017. I came to truly understand the positive impacts that the First Nations Health Programs make in terms of patients' experiences. I saw the daily collaboration that occurs between the liaison workers, the physicians, nursing, and extended specialists who may be a part of the patient's journey. I witnessed the ability of the incredible staff of this program to break down barriers and address systemic racism while respectfully working in the best interests of all patients.

The staff work closely with family members and First Nation governments to ensure that hospitals are culturally safe spaces for all people. All cultural ceremonies are welcomed into the spaces of those who are palliative and nearing the end of life.

The First Nations Health Programs is nationally recognized for improving quality, efficiency, and effectiveness with its ability to organize patients' care and enhance the experiences and outcomes of all Indigenous folks accessing care at any of the Yukon hospitals. This incredible work is done daily by the 16 staff at Whitehorse General Hospital, two staff at Dawson City hospital, and one staff at the Watson Lake hospital.

The staff who work with the First Nations Health Programs show up daily with their heart on their sleeves and ready to support anyone who walks through the hospital doors. I commend all the incredible staff of the First Nations Health Programs who contribute to the well-being of our hospital systems and patients who access the care that they need.

I thank our past leaders and matriarchs for the hard work they have done to ensure that hospitals are a safe space for all Indigenous people, no matter where they are coming from. Mahsi' cho.

Applause

In recognition of the Heart of Riverdale

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a place that embodies the very essence of creativity — the Heart of Riverdale.

For a decade, the Heart of Riverdale has offered a range of artistic programming for Yukon youth to discover, learn, and explore. As they state in their own words: "At the Heart we teach skilled artistic expression with an emphasis on creative development. Our goal is to nurture community-minded artists and to guide them to realize their limitless potential in art and in life." Whether that be through dance, music, theatre, or visual art, creativity and artistic expression are celebrated and encouraged.

Beyond artistic programming, the Heart of Riverdale plays an essential role in the community of Riverdale, providing drop-in space for youth, play space for children, and hosting community events that bring neighbours together.

Congratulations to Andrea Simpson-Fowler on the 10th anniversary of the Heart of Riverdale. Andrea was born and raised in Riverdale. Her idea of repurposing the old Fraser's building in the Riverdale Plaza came from her seeing the need for a positive space for the young people in her community and her desire to build what she wished she had as a kid growing up in the Yukon. It was Andrea's dream to create a space where people of all ages could come together to participate in programming and to nurture children and youth to grow and develop in positive and healthy ways and to experience a sense of belonging by participating in activities that promote healthy lifestyles.

Mr. Speaker, a wonderful myriad of performing arts is available to discover through offerings at the Heart of Riverdale with an international, multi-cultural group of instructors and

staff. Each year, we look forward to many performances including *Art from the Heart* at the Yukon Arts Centre, *Polar Night*, the Cypherfest street art festival, and this past weekend's haunted house.

It is so important for kids to have opportunities and exposure to the creative and cultural industries. It teaches them how to express themselves and to work together to have discipline and develop a sense of pride and responsibility toward themselves and to others. It also encourages them to try new things and overcome challenges, fostering not only the next generation of arts creators and appreciators but also future leaders.

Mr. Speaker, because of the Heart of Riverdale, it is more than just a place of instruction; it is a true community. It is where friendships are formed, where support is given, and where dreams are shared. Here, artists aren't just taught; they are empowered to take their creativity to the next level, to realize their full potential not only in their art but also in life itself.

Thank you again to Andrea and to all the staff and instructors. May the Heart of Riverdale continue to inspire, nurture, and guide the limitless potential in all who pass through its doors.

Applause

Mr. Kent: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the Heart of Riverdale community centre — or “the Heart” — as they celebrate their 10th anniversary. Although music, dance, and visual arts are the core components of the all-ages programming at the Heart, they also offer a wide variety of other programs, including after-school care and full meals and snacks at the café available to students.

One project the Heart has undertaken that could use some help is the purchase of a vehicle to support their after-school program. They have a van picked out and Mister Jamie is ready to drive it. They need some funding from the community to make it happen. Please visit their GoFundMe page to help them make this purchase a reality.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the Heart, the vision of Andrea Simpson-Fowler cannot be overlooked. Her advocacy efforts started well over a decade ago with former Riverdale MLAs Ted Staffen and Glenn Hart and have continued through to today. Without her dedication and passion, the Heart would not be the success that it is. Thank you, Andrea, for your years of work.

I would like to conclude by thanking all of those staff, volunteers, and students who have helped make the Heart the success that it is. Congratulations on your 10th anniversary.

Applause

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP caucus to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the little community space that could. The Heart of Riverdale sits quite literally in the heart of Riverdale and is so much more than what you can see from the outside. The building holds so much more than just a studio, play, and art space. It is an incubator of

creativity and has the wraparound supports to make dreams a reality.

Andrea Simpson-Fowler grew up in the Yukon and was nurtured to be the artist that she is by this community. In turn, she has supported, mentored, and taught generations of dancers and performers through her dance company, Leaping Feats. I met Andrea when I was a teenager. She was so cool then and she is still so cool now. Even way back when, she knew that not every kid would find purpose in traditional sporting activities and that some of us needed other environments in which to thrive. She has made it her life's work to build up community and help young people forge their paths.

After years of teaching, supporting, and tying together resources for the creative arts, Andrea knew that people of all ages needed an environment in which to grow and thrive. The Heart provides that outlet for people of all ages. I remember our first conversation about her dream for the Heart. She saw the opportunity for a thriving, full-service community centre where some of us saw a building where the old Chinese food restaurant used to be on the top floor. Despite all the setbacks, the community that was inspired by her vision never wavered. They knew that there were endless possibilities to nurture community-minded artists and guide them to realize their limitless potential in art and, most importantly, in life.

After what must have felt like a million conversations, grant proposals, endless meetings, and so many tours, it finally happened. You can now find a beautiful, open, and welcoming space for all ages right in the heart of Riverdale — a space that nurtures creativity, builds confidence, and gives wings to dreams. So, congratulations on 10 great years of “Heart”, and I look forward to many more.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today two legislative returns that are in reference to Committee of the Whole Vote 3 on Education during our recent debate.

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a legislative return relating to a question from the Member for Watson Lake.

Speaker: Are there any reports of committees?

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling the *Tenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees*.

Speaker: Are there any further reports of committees? Are there any petitions?

PETITIONS

Petition No. 21 — received

Clerk: Mr. Speaker and honourable members of the Assembly: I have had the honour to review a petition, being Petition No. 21 of the First Session of the 35th Legislative Assembly, as presented by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin on October 26, 2023.

The petition presented by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin meets the requirements as to form of the Standing Orders of the Yukon Legislative Assembly. However, eight pages of the petition are not in the correct form and will be returned to the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

Speaker: Accordingly, I declare Petition No. 21 is deemed to be read and received. Pursuant to Standing Order 67, the Executive Council shall provide a response to a petition which has been read and received within eight sitting days of its representation. Therefore, the Executive Council response to Petition No. 21 shall be provided on or before November 9, 2023.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motions?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House congratulates the newly elected Yukon Employees' Union executive: President Justin Lemphers; Vice-President Lisa Vollans-Leduc; and Vice-President, Communities Julie Anne Abel.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates Yukon Brewing for their recent success at the Canada Beer Cup, winning silver for their rye IPA in the category of contemporary IPAs and silver for their lead dog olde English ale among all English-style olde ales, Scottish wee heavies, and Scottish ales.

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

THAT this House thanks the past president of the Yukon Employees' Union, Steve Geick, for his years of service.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House congratulates the Yukon Employees' Union for their successful convention and election of a new executive.

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

THAT this House urges the Minister of Environment to respond to families who would like a playground at the Lake Laberge campground by determining an appropriate location for it and installing playground equipment.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Carbon tax

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, last week, the Prime Minister announced significant changes to the Liberals' signature carbon tax policy. What is clear, though, is that the announcement and the policy change are overwhelmingly targeted to benefit one region: Atlantic Canada.

The consensus is that it is for two reasons: The Liberals are down in the polls there, and Atlantic Canadian politicians have been speaking out about the impact that the carbon tax is having on the cost of living in that region.

Mr. Speaker, the federal Liberals are down in the polls here too, but what we have lacked is a Premier who is willing to speak up and advocate on behalf of Yukoners. We have been urging the Premier over and over to tell the federal government about the impact of the federal carbon tax on the cost of living here in the Yukon. What has he done? Nothing.

Why has the Premier refused to stand up for Yukoners against federal policy that is hurting the north?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I will disagree with the member opposite as far as the Yukon Liberals doing nothing. Since the pan-Canadian framework forward, we have been arguing for regional-specific exemptions and reductions all along the way, within a certain parameter. We are very disappointed with the federal government's backtracking on policy initiatives intended to fight climate change.

We believe that last week's announcement from the federal government shows a profound lack of understanding of the realities of living in the north, and we expect better from the federal government.

We have been able to make significant progress toward addressing environmental concerns and reducing carbon emissions locally while also ensuring that every single dollar collected from a federal carbon-pricing mechanism gets returned to Yukon individuals, businesses, and governments.

We disagree with the members opposite about carbon pricing, obviously. I will remind folks as well that it was the Yukon Party that signed the Vancouver Declaration to get Yukon on board for a carbon-pricing mechanism. We keep hearing from the opposition what they don't want to see, but we have still yet to see their carbon-pricing plan.

Again, I am very disappointed with the federal government not looking at the whole country and also changing from a price-signal mechanism.

Mr. Hassard: So, earlier this year, all four Atlantic premiers jointly wrote to the Prime Minister to make him aware of the significant impact that the carbon tax was having on their region. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador even wrote a follow-up letter to specifically highlight his concerns.

Along with the Atlantic MPs, they have made the case that Atlantic Canada cannot afford the increasing impact of the carbon tax on their cost of living. However, despite the fact that the Yukon has been leading the country on cost of living and that the north has been more affected by the carbon tax than any other region in the country, we have heard nothing from this Liberal government.

Why has the Yukon Liberal government refused to stand up for Yukon interests and advocate for changes to federal policy that actually hurts the north?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear anything new in the second part of that question, but I will again disagree and say that we are also leading the country in unemployment. We are also leading the country in GDP growth. We are doing a lot of great things here in the Yukon, and we also have a lot of mechanisms and money that have been dedicated to inflation to make sure that Yukoners can live to their best potential.

We are also committed to returning all of the revenues returned from the federal government, and we are equally committed to reducing carbon emissions in the territory. Federal policies need to be predictable in this arena — stable as well — and broadly applied in order to succeed in the transition to a net-zero economy. We don't hear anything about a net-zero economy from the members opposite in the Yukon Party.

Our Clean Future strategy, for example, indicated that 21 percent of Yukon emissions are related to building heating. We have implemented numerous programs based upon setting a goal of increasing the share of homes heated by renewable energy from 26 percent to 50 percent by 2030. This ambitious goal will be challenged without a price on carbon.

We are also providing low-interest loans and grants to encourage the switch to renewable heating while, at the same time, investing in renewable energy, such as wind, solar, and battery storage, to meet the increasing demand as well.

Mr. Hassard: Mr. Speaker, we have been calling on the Premier to stand up and let the federal government know that Yukoners can't afford more Liberal tax increases for years now. We have asked questions in the Legislature and even passed a motion calling on the federal government to do almost exactly what they have just announced, but when it was proposed by us, this Liberal government in the Yukon said no. They voted against our motion and the Minister of Community Services even said that it was an assault on carbon pricing. The Minister of Finance said that day that cutting the carbon tax on home heating fuel would be the same as subsidizing fossil fuels.

I would like to give the Minister of Finance a chance to explain: Why did he vote against our motion last year to do exactly what the federal Liberals have just announced?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I think it comes down to a fundamental theory or philosophy, which is that I don't think taxpayers should be paying for climate change; I think that polluters should be paying for climate change.

I agree with Alberta's NDP leader, Rachel Notley, when she said — and I quote: "To apply a carbon price to only some regions and some fuels is totally unacceptable." But I also agree with the Canadian Climate Institute's concerns — and I quote: "It sends the signal to emitters — and investors — that policy can be weakened in the future..."

We need to be stalwart in our approach to fighting climate change. Carbon pricing is the most cost-effective manner in which we can do that as a nation and as a region. We need to keep moving forward, because I don't want to see taxpayers paying for forest fires and floods. I want to see polluter pay and I want to see federal programming and policy that mirrors that.

Again, when we see a regional-specific caving on a policy, I have concerns with that, for sure.

Question re: Carbon tax

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, for much of this year, the Yukon has led the country in cost-of-living increases, and despite this, the federal Liberal government has increased the carbon tax and is now heaping on a new clean fuel standard, which many are calling a second carbon tax. Yukoners cannot afford any more federal tax increases. The federal Liberals have now shown that carve-outs and exemptions on the carbon tax are possible but only if they are put under pressure. The three territories bear the brunt of the carbon tax more than any region in the country.

Will the Premier stand up to the federal government and insist on a northern carve-out to the carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, rising inflation and an elevated cost of living continue to present challenges around the world and that is no different here in the Yukon — absolutely — and we know that this is a very challenging time for many people. That is why we have put lots of money in the budget to compete against inflationary times.

The members opposite forget all of the conversations that we have had, from the pan-Canadian framework forward. We fought at every turn for regional-specific exemptions and rebates that make sense in the context of what a carbon-pricing mechanism is, and we will continue to do that.

You have to consider carbon leakage, which means mining companies going to other countries where the environmental policies and the human rights policies are not there. You have to consider the cost of living in northern areas and we have considered that as well. You have to consider the unique situation of our placer industry as well, where there are not a lot of alternatives.

We always argued within the policy definition. When the five-year review came out, those considerations changed from the federal government and they doubled down on price signal. So, we argued within that — in the House here, in the Legislative Assembly, we all voted in favour of the new changes that would allow us to keep our Yukon carbon-pricing mechanism. I thank the members of the opposition for that, but to say that we have done nothing — that is just clearly inaccurate.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I think that the Finance minister ignores the fact that the policy has changed and now the federal government is entertaining new exemptions. The Yukon Party has led the call for an exemption from the carbon tax for the north since the federal government announced it in 2016. We have consistently made the case that a carbon tax only serves to make life more expensive for northerners and that is what we have seen since the Liberals forced it on us.

It is not just us saying that, Mr. Speaker. We have seen other northern leaders — like outgoing Northwest Territories Premier Caroline Cochrane — say that; we have seen past premiers of both other territories say that, but the lone northern supporter has always been the territorial Liberals.

So, when the Premier attends the meeting of premiers next week in Halifax, will he change his stance, stand up for northerners, and make the case that the territories should be exempt from the carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Silver: The member opposite is only telling parts of the story as well. Every jurisdiction has a different option for carbon pricing. In the Northwest Territories, they said yes — and in Alberta — to not having their home fuel rebate, which is very problematic for them right now because the federal government went forward without considering their situation — they are in an election as well — so that is going to be very problematic.

The Yukon Party is also not telling people that in the Yukon, 100 percent of the money that is raised from the federal government on carbon pricing goes back into Yukoners' pockets, which is not necessarily the same thing in every other jurisdiction in Canada. We don't keep any of this money, even if there is a price on carbon.

Now, for the interest of people who are paying attention now, there are things that we do need to consider. Canada also announced a rural top-up for the climate action incentive, so that means that federal rebates in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador will permanently increase from 10 percent to 20 percent effective on April 1, 2024. I will add that this is something that the federal government borrowed from Yukon because we already offer that. If the general money back that you get as an individual is \$400, in a rural community, it is \$440 per person right now. So, we are looking to see and reviewing to see how this will impact the Yukon and we will make appropriate adjustments, if needed.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the simplest thing to do would be to get rid of the carbon tax altogether for the entire Canadian north. The carbon tax affects the price of pretty much everything in the north. It affects the price of food, housing, and transportation. Throughout this year, the Yukon has led the country in increases to our cost of living. Despite this, the Liberal government increased the carbon tax by 30 percent this year, but now the door has been opened to changes to the policy and hopefully an approach that reflects the needs of the Yukon. This is the perfect time to make the case for a northern exemption from the Liberal carbon tax, but the only way to convince the federal government, as we've seen in Atlantic Canada, is if the Premier speaks up. So, will the Premier call for a northern exemption to the carbon tax?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Yes, over the last number of days, we have engaged with the federal government and certainly have tabled our displeasure to what we saw last week. What we are waiting to see now is: What will the changes be? The door does seem to be open for some flexibility. We think that there needs to be a level playing field, and we think that going regionally into Atlantic Canada with a reduction that we have seen is not the appropriate way forward.

I will ask the member opposite — maybe we will have an opportunity to table the Yukon Party's plan to deal with climate change, other than just an exemption. This is a real problem.

We know what we're dealing with when it comes to fires, we know what we're dealing with when it comes to floods, and we know that we have not seen, openly, another system tabled anywhere in this country and we certainly have not seen another system tabled by the leader of the opposition. The Yukon Party signed on to the Vancouver accord. The member opposite said that there would be a made-in-Yukon carbon-pricing system that he would table in the 2021 election. We have not heard the details of that now, but, again, we are not pleased with the change and we will continue to ensure that all the funds that come through this system go back to Yukoners.

Question re: Public transit funding

MLA Tredger: The Minister of Community Services has told Yukoners that there is no additional money for free transit despite the City of Whitehorse saying more money would be needed in coming years to make it happen. This is a real disappointment to Yukoners who have been waiting for free transit. It would help Yukoners reduce their carbon emissions by driving less.

Despite the minister claiming there isn't enough money to make it happen, he somehow found an extra million dollars in his department's budget to help pay for an ore dock. That money was cut from the Better Buildings program budget, a program meant to help Yukoners cut greenhouse gas emissions by funding home retrofits.

Why is the minister okay with moving money from climate initiatives to pay for private mining interests but not to fulfill his commitment for free public transit?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I will take exception to the assertions of the member opposite. We are committed to working with the City of Whitehorse and the Yukon NDP caucus to explore replacing fair generated revenue to make public transit free in Whitehorse. We have a transit working group made up of one Yukon NDP MLA and a representative from the City of Whitehorse. The working group is an important place for these conversations to happen.

Our government has allocated a total of \$1.5 million for free transit as per the confidence and supply agreement that we have entered into with the Yukon New Democratic Party. We want to make sure that the free transit initiative that was put forward by the Yukon NDP through the confidence and supply agreement sticks to the budget of \$1.5 million. We're going to do that.

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, free transit is not just about climate action. It would also make transportation more affordable for Yukoners. Yukoners who already use public transit save a lot of money on monthly passes or bus tickets. Those who own a car could save a lot of money by choosing the bus instead. Our initiative is a win-win for everyone.

But instead of helping low-income Yukoners, this government is giving over a million dollars through their landlord subsidy to people who already own multiple homes. Adding a million dollars to the free-transit budget would be more than enough to make it happen.

Instead of helping Yukoners meet rising transportation costs, the Liberals chose to subsidize those who already have the most.

Why won't the minister take real action on affordability by fully funding free transit?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Once again, I will say that we are fully prepared to honour — and want to honour — the agreement we have with the Yukon New Democratic Party through the confidence and supply agreement to provide free transit for Whitehorse.

The budget for that initiative, agreed to with the Yukon New Democratic Party caucus at the time of the confidence and supply agreement, was \$1.5 million. We have that money, and we are prepared to spend it on free transit.

I am aware of the proposal that the Yukon NDP caucus has sent to us and to the City of Whitehorse. I have not heard back from the City of Whitehorse. I know the City of Whitehorse is currently in the midst of doing a study on free transit. That study will be done in January and February. That may inform the city and inform us on ways forward.

As I said, as a government, we are working very hard on many fronts to ensure that we are supporting Yukoners as much as possible while making responsible financial decisions on behalf of all Yukoners, and the working group is an important place for these conversations to happen. I look forward to the next meeting of that working group.

MLA Tredger: So, here we have it. This Liberal government found millions in leftover money that they couldn't spend on climate action, housing, and infrastructure projects. They are happy to give that money to private companies to build an ore dock in Skagway. They are happy to give money to landlords who already own multiple homes, but somehow there is no additional money for free transit. They are weaseling out of their commitment to Yukoners by pretending their hands are tied and they are killing a plan to deliver action on climate change and affordability.

Why doesn't the minister think that climate action and affordability are worthwhile investments?

Hon. Mr. Mostyn: Mr. Speaker, I will be perfectly clear for the member opposite. We made a commitment through the confidence and supply agreement to put aside \$1.5 million for free transit. We still have \$1.5 million for free transit. We have a transit working group working with the City of Whitehorse to come to some sort of arrangement. The City of Whitehorse has acknowledged that \$1.5 million is a lot of money for the City of Whitehorse for a free transit initiative. It doesn't cover all the costs of transit. We have had these meetings inside that committee.

I would like to clarify that the CASA commitment that the member opposite has been referring to — the confidence and supply agreement states: "6.a. continue investing in renewable energy infrastructure through an additional targeted investment of \$5 million per year."

The Yukon NDP is proposing moving money away from renewable energy projects to pay for their transit proposal. Let me say that again, Mr. Speaker. They want to take money away from renewable energy for the transit initiative in Whitehorse.

We don't think that's a smart approach. I am surprised by this approach, to say the least.

The Yukon NDP is very keen to see us reach our goal of 45-percent emission reductions. Renewable energy projects are a key component on how we will reach these reductions. I am not saying that we are not willing to support free transit; I am saying that we are willing to do it within the budget.

Question re: Midwifery in Yukon

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, when talking about the lack of midwives in the Yukon in November 2021, the minister indicated that Yukoners could get a midwife in another province or territory. That doesn't make sense when we know it would be a lot cheaper to fund birthing options in Yukon communities. We saw this in Nunavut in 2022 when their government had to pay over \$30,000 for every birth outside of people's home communities.

Can the minister tell Yukoners how much it costs this government every time a Yukoner accesses midwifery services out of territory?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Yukon is committed to providing Yukoners with an additional option for safe, accessible, and high-quality maternity care without having to pay out of pocket, so maternity services here in the territory are, in fact, free at the midwifery clinic. The Yukon midwifery program is experiencing the impacts of the local and global shortages of health care workers and has experienced significant staffing challenges. As a result of the staffing shortages, the Yukon midwifery program had to temporarily shut down services of birthing services and transfer clients to Solstice Maternity while the recruitment of additional midwives and other mitigation strategies are underway.

The new collective agreement for the government does have an impact on our attempts to recruit midwives. I look forward to more questions.

Ms. Blake: Midwives have been working in the NWT since 2005. Their program has at least 25 midwives. Nunavut's midwifery program has been running since 2011 and currently has 26 midwives. The other territories have made midwifery programs that work. This government has regulated midwifery in the Yukon for just two years. In that time, Yukoners have only had access to midwives for births for just six months. Now the program has collapsed again.

When will this government provide access to midwives for birthing in the Yukon?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I can indicate that the collective agreement most recently signed between the Yukon Employee's Union and the Government of Yukon established a new classification of midwives here in the territory, which is expected to assist in better attracting midwives to work within the existing model of service delivery. An ongoing competition for midwives is currently running on yukon.ca and we have aligned our wages with the collective agreement.

The Yukon midwifery program, along with the entire maternity care community, is committed to ensuring the safety and the well-being of clients. They do provide some services for pregnant people during their pregnancy and additional

services for clients who come. With respect to pre-birth care and midwifery care here in the territory — is aligned with standards and best practices included for patient safety.

We have budgeted \$1.35 million for the Yukon midwifery program in this budget. I look forward to another question.

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, 10 years ago, Nova Scotia's midwifery program was on the verge of collapse. The Nova Scotia government then conducted an external quality assurance assessment, which allowed them to understand what was wrong and how to make it better. Now their program is thriving.

We asked this minister to conduct an external quality assurance assessment last spring. Instead of taking our suggestion, the minister talked about ongoing internal assessments. Well, here we are with a failed midwifery program.

Why hasn't this government done an external quality assurance assessment to understand the root causes of the collapse of this program so that it can be fixed?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am concerned about the facts that are in this particular question. I can indicate that we are committed, as are the current staff of the midwifery program, to providing the best possible service to clients here in the territory. I can also indicate that ensuring the health and safety of our clients relies on a team of registered midwives who are able to provide the full scope of midwifery care. To provide 24/7 coverage, Mr. Speaker, the Yukon midwifery program offers, while complying with Yukon standards of practice for registered midwives — at non-hospital births, there always needs to be two staff from the midwifery team on call. We currently have two staff and are continuing to recruit more so that those midwives can operate and provide assistance in non-hospital births. To achieve the level of coverage that we need, the program needs to fill all four midwifery positions. We have been very close to doing that on separate occasions. What I am pleased to see is that the new classification and salaries should assist us in that goal.

Question re: Carbon tax and alternative heating subsidies

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, last week's announcement about the changes to the federal carbon tax have provoked some questions about what it will mean for Yukoners. Currently, the rebates provided to Yukoners from the carbon tax flow through the territorial government and are distributed pursuant to the Yukon government's *Carbon Price Rebate Amendments Act*.

Can the Yukon government tell us if changes to the act will be necessary to allow for what the federal government has described as a doubling of the rural rebate? Will these changes be in place for April 2024 when the federal government says the rural rebate will be increasing so that Yukoners can benefit from the federal Liberals' change in policy?

Hon. Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I believe I already answered this question earlier, but I can just speak to it again for the member opposite.

We do know that they did announce the rural top-up for the climate action incentive payments. If you are on a federal

backstop — or in your federal rebate in places like Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, it will permanently increase from 10 percent to 20 percent, effective April 1, 2024. I stated that already today. I already said, as well, that we are reviewing how this will impact the Yukon and how we need to make appropriate adjustments internally as well. I already mentioned that they borrowed this idea from the Yukon carbon-rebate mechanism.

Right now, on average, from the last numbers that we got through Public Accounts, Yukoners, as individuals, will get about \$400 back, unless you live in rural Yukon — then you get an extra \$40 back, bringing your total for the year to \$440.

We will continue to monitor. We have questions in to the federal government on a whole bunch of things about this new policy change. But that one is something that we already implemented in Yukon and it's something that we are discussing right now — looking at the numbers, how they come back to the First Nation governments, the municipalities, the businesses, the individuals and to see how that will affect the overall percentages.

Mr. Istchenko: So, hundreds of Yukon homes are heated using propane. In fact, the government has been actively switching buildings — their government buildings — from oil to propane. However, it was noticeable in the federal government's announcement that propane would not be treated the same as other fossil fuels under the revised carbon tax.

Will the Yukon government push for propane to be exempt from the carbon tax like it is for home heating fuel?

Hon. Mr. Silver: I think I also addressed that as well in earlier questions from the Yukon Party. Again, I agree with what the Leader of the NDP in Alberta said — and I'll quote her again: "To apply a carbon price to some regions, and some fuels ... is totally unacceptable."

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, let's hope that the Yukon government does push for propane to be exempt. The federal government has also announced that they were enhancing the support available for electric heat pumps but only in Atlantic Canada. The program that they announced offers an upfront payment of \$250 and increases to the total rebate for installing a heat pump. In the words of the Prime Minister's Office release, this program, it says — quote: "... would make the average heat pump free for lower income households..."

Can the Yukon government explain why Yukon was excluded from this new program and whether or not we will be pushing for a program that will actually work for Yukoners here in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, the Energy branch runs our program around heat pumps. They are good for Yukoners' homes; they work up until about minus 30 degrees, and then after that, they are just like an electric heater. But they really are great in that range of minus 15 degrees, where we often are, and they are twice the efficiency of regular heaters. We provide rebates up to \$8,000 for heat pumps; the federal program here offers rebates up to \$10,000, but they are considering whether or not to advance that.

We have been in conversation with the federal government about trying to deliver their programs to help Yukoners reduce red tape and get through that system more quickly. I know that the Premier has been in conversations with the federal government; I know that the department was in a meeting today around heat pumps. Overall, what we are working to do is to try to reduce Yukoners' dependency on fossil fuels — period. That is the work that we are doing; that is the work that we think is very important from an energy perspective and a climate perspective.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 32: Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023) — Second Reading

Clerk: Second reading, Bill No. 32, standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. McPhee.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I move that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that Bill No. 32, entitled *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to bring forward Bill No. 32, *Act to amend the Victims of Crime Act (2023)*, for second reading.

The Department of Justice continues to enhance support and protections for victims of crime. This is one more step in our work to do so. This bill introduces provisions to protect victim information from being uncovered through access-to-information requests submitted by anyone who presents a risk of harm for a victim.

The scope of the changes of this legislation are very narrow. It protects sensitive and personal information contained in victim records that are created in the provision of services for Victim Services' clients. We are trying to avoid attempts that we have seen to access information through the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and gain access to the personal information of a victim that is held in the files of Victim Services. Attempts have been made to do so, and these amendments apply only to access requests. All other provisions of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, of course, continue to apply with respect to this information. These protections exist in other Canadian jurisdictions, so we are, at this point, aligning with them for the protection of victims' rights.

The Department of Justice is very pleased to bring forward these legislative amendments to improve our services for victims of crime and ensure that victims have safe and confidential access to Victim Services.

Mr. Cathers: I am pleased to rise to speak to this as the Official Opposition Justice critic.

I would note that this is intended to enhance victim protection by ensuring that victim records and any information included in those records can't be disclosed to offenders or alleged offenders in a circumstance where that disclosure could result in harm to the victim.

We believe that this is a reasonable exception, as long as it is implemented appropriately. I don't have any questions regarding it at this point. We will look forward to this legislation being supported here by the Assembly.

Ms. White: In speaking to Bill No. 32, I have to say that, for me, the briefing was eye-opening. Really, what we are seeing coming forward in these amendments to the *Victims of Crime Act* are actually changes to support victims of crime, because it turns out that there are those who will use an access-to-information request to find out if they have been named as an aggressor or as an offender. In these cases of domestic violence, it's totally unacceptable to know that victims of crime could then be made vulnerable by even sharing an ATIPP document that is entirely redacted, but it would be enough of an indication to know that there was information there.

We look forward to debate and possibly the minister expanding more, but we really have very few questions on the amendments as they stand.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, she will close debate. Does any other member wish to be heard?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very pleased by the comments by the members opposite. I am happy to send our thanks to the officials at the Department of Justice who provided the briefing to the members opposite and answered some of their questions. I look forward to Committee of the Whole, and if there are others, we can speak about them together.

This is a very narrow piece of legislation. It is designed to protect victims of crime. I certainly look forward to the support of the members opposite as we move this small but important piece of legislation through the House.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question? Are you agreed?

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.

Ms. Clarke: 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.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 18 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it.

I declare the motion carried.

Motion for second reading of Bill No. 32 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

The matter now before the committee is general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 211: *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — continued

Chair: The matter now before Committee is general debate on Vote No. 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Department of Environment

Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, I would like to introduce to the House the persons I have in support today. To my left is Manon Moreau, who is the Deputy Minister of the Department of Environment, and to my left is Briar Young, who is one of the assistant deputy ministers at the Department of Environment.

I stand before this Assembly as the Minister of Environment to give an update on the Department of Environment's work to advance initiatives that are protecting the Yukon's environment and building more resilient, thriving Yukon communities. The supplementary estimates that I am presenting today highlight an increase of just over \$3.6 million to the Department of Environment's budget. These additional funds are due to an increase in the operation and maintenance budget, while the capital budget has not changed. Of this amount, over \$2.1 million is attributed to the collective agreement increases, and the remaining \$1.58 million is completely recoverable through our partnership with the Government of Canada. These additional funds are supporting several Department of Environment initiatives that will advance our conservation work, help us better prepare and respond to climate change, and increase our knowledge of the territory's wildlife.

Communities around the globe are experiencing the impacts of climate change, and here at home, we are seeing changes in temperature and precipitation, which in turn are driving changes in ecosystems, flooding, wildfires, and permafrost thaw. Over the past years, our territory has seen increased flooding and fires — a familiar story that can be heard in jurisdictions across the country and around the world.

As we work to reduce our emissions, we must also invest in building communities that are more resilient to increased severe weather. The time to do that work is now and the Department of Environment has been focusing on just that. In 2022, Government of Yukon released the *Assessing Climate Change Risk and Resilience in the Yukon* report. The report evaluated the climate change impacts that pose the highest risk to Yukoners and provides recommendations to address climate change impacts that pose a risk to Yukoners. These recommendations fell under seven priority areas, which include: transportation infrastructure; floods and fires; permafrost thaw; ecosystems and biodiversity; changing conditions on the land; health and well-being; and economy and livelihood.

Findings from the report also noted that much of the Yukon's current resilience to climate impacts stems from our community values, strong relationships, values of self-sufficiency, communities working together, ongoing connections to the land, and making the most of limited resources.

The supplementary estimates include \$382,000, which is fully funded by the Government of Canada, to continue our work of addressing the seven priority areas that emerged from this assessment. We will continue to build on our adaptation commitments like this and others in *Our Clean Future* while working with the federal government, stakeholders, experts, and knowledge-holders in order to advance climate resilience in the Yukon. We are pleased that our climate risk assessment aligns closely with Canada's national adaptation strategy, which was released in November 2022.

It is more important than ever that we plan ahead to prepare for and reduce the impacts of future climate events that could jeopardize our health, safety, and way of life in the Yukon. This

work will not only build communities that can better withstand the increasing impacts of climate change but would also help us reach our goals highlighted in *Our Clean Future*.

In addition to this funding, the increase to the 2023-24 supplementary estimates also includes \$890,000 in order to advance flood mapping projects across the territory. These maps will give the Yukon and Yukoners critical insights into how we can better coordinate and respond to flooding emergencies, understand climate change impacts, and assist with community and land infrastructure planning. As committed to in *Our Clean Future*, the Government of Yukon will produce flood maps for 14 flood-prone communities over the coming year. We know that many communities want to have a better understanding of the flooding risks and we have established a flood mapping advisory committee to help provide direction and input from local levels.

The flood mapping advisory committee includes representatives from various Yukon government departments, the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Assembly of First Nations Yukon, and the Association of Yukon Communities.

Due to the amount of work involved, we are taking a phased approach that prioritizes communities based upon multiple criteria, including risk and readiness.

As official flood maps are developed, we will continue to work with all levels of government and the Yukon Emergency Measures Organization to support flood preparation, mitigation, and response. The first flood maps are being developed for the Southern Lakes area, Carmacks, and Teslin. Engagement on draft flood maps will occur this fall and winter, and final maps are expected in 2024. The Southern Lakes communities covered by the maps are Carcross, Tagish, Marsh Lake, and Lake Laberge. The Government of Yukon will be seeking feedback on draft flood hazard maps by holding a series of community open houses as well as online public engagement in order to ensure that the maps are accurate and reflect both community and Indigenous knowledge.

The next communities for flood hazard mapping will be Old Crow, Ross River, and Dawson and the Klondike area. As official flood maps are developed, we will continue to work with all levels of government and the Yukon Emergency Measures Organization to support flood preparation, mitigation, and response.

As we work to build stronger, more resilient communities, the Department of Environment is also working to better understand our territory's complex natural environment and the wildlife that calls it home.

This supplementary estimate also includes \$163,000 to further support the implementation of the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement*, which is guiding our work in conducting wildlife research projects, including Porcupine caribou research and monitoring.

The Government of Yukon is committed to ensuring that the *Inuvialuit Final Agreement* guides our shared work with Canada and the Inuvialuit with the purposes of conserving wildlife, their habitats, and traditional activities on the Yukon North Slope.

In order to further our work in monitoring the Porcupine caribou herd, we are investing an additional \$83,000 — all of which is recoverable through federal funding — to further our work with Polar Knowledge Canada to monitor moose and wolves in the Porcupine caribou range and the impact that they may have on this culturally important species.

The Government of Yukon will continue to work with our partners in Porcupine caribou management, which includes the governments of Canada, the Northwest Territories, the Inuvialuit, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun.

All the work that I have mentioned today is incredibly important to the success of our environment and communities across the territory. In order to conduct this important work that is protecting our environment and strengthening our communities, the Department of Environment has a diverse and talented workforce that is responsible for advancing environmental stewardship and initiatives while effectively managing the Yukon's natural resources.

The Government of Yukon values this work. The supplementary estimate includes over \$2.1 million in order to fulfill the commitments under the new collective agreement between the Yukon and the Yukon Employees' Union that was ratified this past June.

I want to highlight that a lot of the funding that I announced today, as mentioned, is fully recoverable through the Government of Canada. This additional funding that is being brought to our territory to advance these important initiatives is directly due to the hard work of Department of Environment staff who continue to advocate for support of these important initiatives that are helping us to advance our environmental goals in a cost-effective manner.

I am proud of this department's work over the past years to advance projects that are helping our territory meet its climate targets. These projects include our work to sign the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, releasing a policy for the stewardship of Yukon wetlands, implementing a single-use plastic and paper bag ban, passing the *Clean Energy Act*, and the *Animal Protection and Control Act*, releasing the Yukon climate risk assessment, signing bilateral water management agreements with the Government of Northwest Territories, upgrading camping infrastructure, adding campsites across the territory, and much more.

I look forward to continuing to see the work that comes out of this department, some of which I have highlighted today.

Again, thank you to all the hard-working Environment staff who are committed to ensure that our land, air, wildlife, habitats, water, and climate continue to thrive and support our way of life. This work is ensuring that future generations of Yukoners will have an opportunity to appreciate our territory's natural beauty, just as we are fortunate to do every single day.

I know that for many Yukoners, our territory's natural environment is rooted in their way of life, whether it be going out on the land to harvest their food, participating in one of the many recreational activities that our unique environment supports, or appreciating the natural beauty that surrounds us.

Our connection to nature is what often makes us proudly call ourselves “Yukoners”.

Before I end, I also wanted to take a moment to thank all Yukoners who are taking steps every day to reduce their impact on the environment and to strengthen their connection with nature.

Madam Chair, thank you for allowing me to have the time today to highlight some of the critical work that the Department of Environment is undertaking in order to protect our natural spaces and to ensure the success of our territory.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I look forward to answering questions from the members opposite.

Mr. Istchenko: I want to welcome the staff who are here today and the staff who are listening to the radio and are ready to text answers or more information, if required. I will get started right away. I want to thank the minister for his opening remarks also.

As you know, the mining industry is probably one of the biggest economic drivers in the Yukon. It creates a lot of jobs; it is part of our history. So, of course, when they heard about the minister signing a bilateral nature agreement, they were concerned because they will be affected by this agreement.

I do have a couple of questions here. I want to know how they have been consulted and who has been consulted with. Do they have a seat at the planning and implementation table, and who else has a seat at that table? I also believe that maybe there were to be more staff as part of this work — so, if the minister can answer those questions and also tell us if they have had to hire any new employees and if they are permanent or not.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Perhaps just to provide a little bit of background for the House — I’m sure that I’ve provided some of these comments before, but just to be clear about the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* — and then I will provide some high-level detail about the accord — and then I will also endeavour to answer the member opposite’s specific question.

The *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* is a three-year agreement that supports Indigenous leadership and conservation, increased protection of sensitive habitat, recovery actions for species at risk, and the protection and conservation of new lands and waters in the Yukon. I think I have said before that the Yukon has already conserved approximately 19.3 percent of territory and is working toward meeting Canada’s 25-percent target by 2025.

Additionally, this agreement will support how the Yukon can make meaningful contributions toward Canada’s 30-percent target by 2030. We will make these contributions by building on existing commitments — such as those established through First Nation final agreements, which include parks and habitat protection areas — and by supporting Indigenous governments and groups identifying additional conservation and protection areas. Any new area identified for protection and conservation will require the support of Indigenous governments and groups. The \$20.6 million in funding from the agreement will also support effective land use planning, which is our main mechanism to support additional protection of wildlife spaces and biodiversity.

The *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* and its objectives of increasing protected land while enabling Indigenous leadership and conservation are elevating discussions on Indigenous protected and conserved areas among some Yukon First Nations. We have a goal of creating certainty and clarity for Indigenous partners, for municipalities, and for industry by clearly identifying the areas we mean to protect and those with opportunities for resource development.

We are pleased to collaborate with the Government of Canada on planning for the future and ensuring the responsible management and sustainable use of our lands and resources for future generations.

Specifically to the Member for Kluane’s question, mining companies initially have not been specifically engaged on the agreement itself, but any newly identified protected areas will go through the land use planning or park planning engagement that will include opportunities for public and stakeholder engagement. The nature agreement has provided fully recoverable funding from the federal government for term positions — in this instance, 13.7 full-time equivalents for this year — and, as indicated, it is fully recoverable.

We are just in the process of identifying and hiring those positions but are certainly cognizant of the fact that the mining industry — and certainly the mining industry in the Klondike area has been involved in Dawson regional land use planning and will continue to be involved in that process. The purpose of the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* was to provide some more, I would say, horsepower for the department and for impacted First Nations in order to continue the process and to move the land use planning — certainly in the Dawson area — further along. But certainly, I hear the Member for Kluane loud and clear with respect to the fact that the mining industry wishes to be involved, which I would believe they have been with respect to land use planning so far.

Specifically with respect to the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, as far as what has already been implemented, the nature agreement supported several initiatives this past field season in order to increase our monitoring and surveys of fish, wildlife, and habitat. For example, the agreement supported work to increase our understanding of northern mountain caribou through the deployment of GPS collars on several Yukon herds and also to assess and monitor biodiversity and the distribution of rare plants and rare ecosystems. This monitoring and these surveys will provide data and information that will inform land use future planning processes.

As well, the Yukon government is starting work with interested Indigenous partners to support capacity toward an Indigenous lens on management approaches for species at risk in the Yukon. As well, in the coming months, a call for an expression of interest will be going out to Yukon First Nations and other transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to enable funding opportunities for projects that will support the agreement’s objective: to protect and conserve land and water in the Yukon. We anticipate that there will be workshops in order to support Indigenous leadership and conservation early in 2024.

The specific answer is 13.75 positions. Hiring is starting right now. I can hopefully provide the member opposite with some details as to how that hiring process is going, but some of the positions will be, for instance, a wildlife biologist, technicians, park planner, director, project coordinator, and policy analyst.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that answer.

One of the most sought-after, happy, awesome — there are a lot of words that you could use about it — that Yukoners love about the Yukon is their campgrounds. They really like their campgrounds. I know they were a little bit disappointed when the minister said that he wasn't going to build a big one with 150 stalls.

But anyway, can the minister provide a little bit more information about the planned upgrades that he is talking about — future infill in some of our current campgrounds — and how many sites were added this summer, where they were added, and what the cost of adding them was?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I can certainly agree wholeheartedly and endorse the comments from the Member for Kluane as to the fact that Yukoners and visitors to the Yukon certainly are very excited and love the Yukon camping experience. I had the honour to be able to travel around the territory this summer to various campsites, which I will get into, but, of course, the big announcement was about Congdon Creek where now there are an additional 41 sites. I understand, in speaking to Parks staff there and also in my travels with Parks staff, that it is becoming a very popular site. In fact, I believe that it is now actually — it's close between the Yukon River campsite in Dawson and Congdon, but it's neck and neck as to which is the largest campsite.

But, yes, the feedback that we receive from both Yukoners and from national and international visitors is very positive with respect to Yukon Parks. I will just provide some background which I think will answer a number of the questions that the Member for Kluane had.

Yukon Parks had a busy 2023 summer season and delivered another fantastic camping experience for Yukoners and visitors. Campgrounds opened on May 4, 2023, ready for Yukoners to enjoy spring camping and a third extended campground season. The Tombstone Interpretive Centre opened on May 13, with the Tombstone Territorial Park backcountry campgrounds opening on June 29.

It was a very exciting season for the Tombstone Territorial Park. This year, the park hosted their first cultural camp with great success, opened its new gallery and exhibition space, and held numerous fireside chats with local elders and community members. I had the opportunity to visit the Tombstone Interpretive Centre in August of this year, and I can confirm that it was all happening. In 2023, the Tombstone Interpretive Centre welcomed 21,435 visitors with 1,840 participating in programs. Tombstone backcountry online reservations for the 2024 season will open in March 2024.

As the 2023 camping season has now wrapped up, Parks staff are working hard to process all of the payments and information received, per the summary, to be shared with the public. In 2024, the Department of Environment will launch a

new online campground reservation system pilot project that will allow campers to book sites ahead of time at selected road-accessible campgrounds.

Parks has invested \$2.4 million in infrastructure upgrades this year to complete improvements to our campgrounds and recreational areas. Improvements to date include the new playgrounds at Marsh Lake, Wolf Creek, and Congdon Creek, and I certainly heard from the Member for Lake Laberge that there seems to be some desire for improvements or a better playground experience at Lake Laberge, which I will certainly direct my team to have a look at. I also know that the Parks staff did a fantastic job at Pine Lake last year and in Dawson as well.

As well, Yukoners will know that five campgrounds received new boat launches this summer and new docks were installed at another three campgrounds. They are those light-brown floating docks, but I saw pictures and they look absolutely fantastic, including at Pine Lake. In July of this year, we opened 41 additional campsites at Congdon Creek. In addition, four walk-in tenting sites at Wolf Creek have recently been installed, and additional sites for Ethel Lake and campground reconstruction there have been delayed but are planned for the spring of 2024, as there were issues of heritage mitigation.

We will continue to improve our park infrastructure, including more boat launch replacements and dock systems in the future. Yukon Parks remains committed to completing the boat launch program while working in partnership with Community Services to deliver on these programs. For the record, Madam Chair, new boat launches were installed at Twin Lakes, Otter Falls, Aishihik Lake, Frenchman Lake, and Ethel Lake. Nunatuk Lake is still underway and is expected to be completed by October 31, which would have to be tomorrow, but we will see. We will keep the House posted as to whether that occurs, but it says "subject to material delivery to the contractor".

New docks were installed at Pine Lake, Squanga Lake, and the Twin Lakes campground. The Dezadeash Lake and Pine Lake boat launches were replaced in 2021, and the Tagish River boat launch was replaced in 2022. We don't have the stats for this camping season but certainly anticipate to receive those soon. I will look forward to being in a position to report on those stats for the 2024 Spring Sitting.

During the 2022 camping season, we hosted 79,620 visitors for 57,886 campsite nights at our road-accessible campgrounds. This is — not surprisingly, I suppose — a 55-percent increase from 2021 and is only eight percent below the 2019 season, which, of course, was before the COVID pandemic. It will be fascinating to see what our numbers are for 2023. I would say that I will have my fingers crossed that we are now at or even slightly above the 2019 season.

Some of the highlights include the boat launch replacement program. There were supply chain issues and other delivery issues. It got off to a bit of a slow start in 2021-22, but I can certainly commend staff and independent contractors because it was, in my view, quite a banner year for boat launch replacements this year. I know that Yukoners appreciate the work that was done there.

I have more, but for now, that's the high-level survey.

Mr. Istchenko: The minister talked about the 41 sites at the Congdon Creek campground. I think I was actually part of building some of those sites when I worked for the department a while ago. Can he confirm whether they were old sites that were just redone and reopened or if they were actually new sites? Can he also confirm if he consulted with the Kluane First Nation and local RV parks and business owners in the area about that? One of the reasons I do ask this is because, quite often, our campgrounds — that campground being one of the main ones — are often closed due to bear activity. I think I am a little concerned about that, so I just want to know what work was done with the local governments there and the business community and how the bear activity has affected closures this summer — and maybe at all the different campgrounds when it comes to bear activity.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I think I can be fairly brief on these answers. I am advised that they were old sites that were refurbished, but they had been closed for approximately 20 years — for some period of time.

Also, in my travels when I was there for the official opening of the new, refurbished sites, I was advised by some of the wildlife technicians that the male or the female — I think that perhaps all soapberries were removed from the area and those were deemed to be significant attractants.

Also, with respect to the question of the Kluane First Nation, the Department of Environment reached out to the Kluane First Nation, but they advised that they did not have the interest or capacity to engage but thanked the Department of Environment for contacting their government.

I am seeing a note here which is consistent with my experience when I attended at Congdon Creek. Regarding bears, the Department of Environment removed the soapberry plants near the campground. However, there were still requests for persons to continue to use hard-side trailers and otherwise to stay within the electric fence area.

In my tour of Congdon Creek as well, as I recall, the electric fence is largely powered by solar power and, from my recollection, it does not actually require that much power to be a deterrent. Of course, there would be a battery backup as well.

The other question that the Member for Kluane had — and I am not familiar with this business operation, but perhaps the Member for Kluane can provide some elaboration if he has some additional information. The Cottonwood campground, which I gather was a private business at one point, is not currently operational or is not open, so there was no opportunity to engage with them, but perhaps there is another business that is in the area.

So, the loop had been closed for 20 years. Most, if not all, soapberries were removed — female soapberries. It was one or the other, but it was the female soapberries that were removed.

There was outreach to the Kluane First Nation. Department staff also reached out to the White River First Nation and they did not receive a response.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that.

There's a new RV park being put in at the south end of Kluane Lake, and there is also an RV park in Destruction Bay.

Anyway, I'm going to move on to roads — the roads that access our campgrounds — such as the Kusawa Lake Road, Watson Lake campground, and many of the other roads.

It's the Department of Environment that advertises and promotes campgrounds and a great camping experience. What they don't tell people is that sometimes the roads aren't very good. It's the Department of Highways and Public Works that does the maintenance on those roads. Of course, the Department of Highways and Public Works — those roads are not priority roads for them. Their priority roads are the main infrastructure loops — and also, they are responsible for the airports, so that would be wintertime snow removal and things like that.

As we increasingly see more of the northern lights and more of a winter tourism season, we're starting to see more people wanting access to the campgrounds year-round.

When it comes to the maintenance of these roads, I'm curious to see what the budget is. I'll give you a really good example of the issues that we have. The busy times for our campgrounds are mainly long weekends. A lot of the times, then, the Highways and Public Works department will go out the day or two before. They will go blade and calcium the road because they want everybody to drive on a smooth road. Everybody drives through this calcium, and their motorhomes and everything are completely covered in dirt and they are unhappy.

Highways and Public Works is trying to get as much done as they can with the limited budget that they see. I'm curious to see if the department is looking at increasing the budget for this, getting on a more regular schedule, or just looking at other maintenance options such as the private sector.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: What I would say, at a high level, is that certainly we would anticipate being in a position to answer some of the specific budget questions when Highways and Public Works returns to Committee of the Whole, as the budget is within Highways and Public Works.

The Department of Environment does not have a dedicated budget for this. We work with the Department of Highways and Public Works to prioritize maintenance of the roads, where possible, and I am advised that we do use the private sector to maintain roads, specifically in the Watson Lake area and particularly when Highways and Public Works does not have capacity.

I was asked — even during this Sitting — about Kusawa Lake. I take the Member for Kluane's point that a lot of the secondary roads, like the Kusawa Lake Road, the Aishihik Lake access road, and Annie Lake Road — a lot of the fairly significant secondary roads in the Yukon — can sometimes be in absolutely wonderful condition, but with some precipitation and heavy use, the rutting and washboarding can happen, in my experience, fairly quickly. I did provide a response even during this Sitting from Highways and Public Works that Kusawa Lake Road, during the last few weeks, had just been bladed. Obviously, sometimes it is a matter of timing.

For the Department of Environment, the roads that have been deemed to be priority roads are Kusawa, Little Salmon, Watson Lake, and Ethel Lake. I know that the Kusawa access

and the Ethel Lake access are quite a number of kilometres, so they do represent a challenge.

What I would say, as far as having had discussions about using some of the Yukon campgrounds even past the shoulder seasons and into the winter, is that I know that Highways and Public Works works with the Department of Environment and some private contractors sometimes in Dawson at the Yukon River campground, and it has been plowed in the winter to allow for cross-country ski trails. That is a good cross-departmental use there.

I also heard — I was in Dawson a few times this summer — when I was at the Klondike River campground, they had a lot of challenges this late spring and early summer. They had, I think, two floods causing significant washouts and they also had a mini — it was pretty close to a tornado. Walking through there, some significant-sized trees had come down. That's sort of answering the question, but at that point, as I understand it, Highways and Public Works did jump into action quite quickly and on a multi-departmental level. We were able to keep the Klondike River campground open. I have also been on the Aishihik campground access road, and I know that some parts of that road were just built into a mountain and there isn't really the proper foundation for the road in places.

It's the Yukon. There are challenges and I know that the staff at the Department of Environment and the hard-working staff at the Department of Highways and Public Works certainly do their best, but as the Member for Kluane well knows, sometimes it really is just timing. It's rain events, and when the calcium chloride comes down and then there is a rain event — and then a certain volume and rutting.

I will certainly do my best to provide additional information, wearing my Highways and Public Works hat with respect to the prioritization, the budgeting, and a bit of a survey or summary as to how it went this past summer with respect to the camping access roads. Anyway, kudos to Highways and Public Works and to the Department of Environment in working together in some of those areas where there were significant challenges brought upon — in the Klondike, the flooding events. I think that there were two flooding events in that valley that had to be dealt with.

I take the Member for Kluane's point with respect to prioritizing and with respect to doing our best to have the roads in the best shape possible at most times in the summer.

Mr. Istchenko: Just to stay on that, I know that in my community, I have organized — with a bunch of friends — a pretty big snowmobile race out on Pine Lake for years. It is a short road, but it has always been kept open for the locals and it is quite busy, but now the department — we are happy to see — has actually hired a local private sector guy to keep that campground road open and then, when it is time for the big race day or some of the community events, the private sector will go in there and volunteer their time and equipment for free to do a bit of that work. Maybe that is something we could look at. When the minister mentioned capacity issues, maybe the private sector could help with this bit of an issue too. That is just a little bit more information for the minister.

I want to switch now to my favourite things: hunting and fishing and loving every day and hunting and trapping and everything that goes with it. The minister committed to new hunting opportunities at the Fish and Game Association banquet last year. Can he elaborate now a little bit on what some of the new opportunities were for this past hunting season and maybe what is coming for the next hunting season? Also, did the minister work with all of the boards — the Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the local renewable resources councils, the Yukon Trappers Association, the Yukon Fish and Game Association, the Yukon Outfitters Association? There are a lot of good associations that all believe in those opportunities for hunting for conservation. Can the minister just elaborate a little bit on that?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Government of Yukon is committed to sustainable management of the Yukon's wildlife to ensure that populations remain healthy and resilient now and for future generations. We are committed to expanding hunting opportunities for Yukoners in areas and for species where conservation concerns do not exist. The Department of Environment is currently undertaking an internal review of all existing hunting restrictions both by species and area. The conservation status of these populations will be evaluated and compared against targeted surveys with a view to easing hunting restrictions where possible.

As a result of this review, we anticipate being able to offer additional hunting opportunities to Yukoners in the 2024-25 season. In the Sifton-Miners Range, survey results in the Sifton-Miners Range moose management unit show the number of moose in this area to be greater than expected. As a result, we were able to increase the number of permits available in that area from 12 to 24. As well, eight new permits for hunting elk in the Takhini valley were made available in 2022 and were once again offered in 2023. These adaptive *Wildlife Act* elk permits are restricted to the harvest of a bull elk with five-point antlers or fewer. These additional permits are part of a two-year pilot project to reduce conflict between elk and agricultural landowners in the Takhini valley.

I will provide a bit of background with respect to surveys. The Department of Environment is committed to collecting robust wildlife population data to evaluate harvest sustainability. We survey and monitor wildlife populations and consider information from licensed harvesters and First Nation, Inuvialuit, and community partners to make informed decisions about harvest opportunities for resident and non-resident hunters.

The Department of Environment does not survey and probably wouldn't be in a position to survey all wildlife populations every year and relies on reports from Yukoners and First Nation and Inuvialuit governments to evaluate harvest sustainability and guide decision-making until the next population survey.

The Department of Environment has dedicated significant resources to collecting and analyzing data to support evidence-based decisions about wildlife populations. We carry out population inventories, collect harvest data from hunters, and perform ecological assessments to gather up-to-date

information. We prioritize areas to survey based on a combination of factors, including harvest levels, access, community concerns, land use planning needs, and the date of the last survey and human activity. There is quite a list of surveys which are occurring.

In 2022, the Department of Environment allocated approximately \$448,000 for three moose-related surveys and \$865,000 for 12 caribou-related projects. I can get the 2023 numbers as well.

We have completed or are in the process of completing wildlife surveys for moose and caribou. The caribou surveys are substantially complete, and wildlife surveys for elk, bison, and deer are in the works.

Surveys for sheep, grizzly bear, black bear, fish, pikas, bats, and ground squirrels were completed this year. We are also researching elk and deer populations in the Takhini valley to better understand their ecology and behaviour. We also track ungulates and other species through the use of cameras deployed in the valley. The data gathered from cameras and collars will help us to manage populations and determine if there is an opportunity to expand Yukon's deer hunt.

I have certainly asked the department — to the member's question — to do a bit of a deep dive on that, because there are certainly anecdotal stories indicating that the now invasive deer population that's coming north appears to be healthy. But I'm certainly not a wildlife biologist and I am not specialist. What I can say for the Assembly today is that, yes, I've heard these anecdotal stories and questions about the possibility of opening up more opportunities for a deer hunt.

The Department of Environment conducts regular engagement with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and the Yukon Fish and Game Association. I have met fairly regularly with the fish and game and I believe I have a meeting scheduled in the near future with fish and game.

Over the course of the summer, I met with Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Teslin Tlingit Council, Kluane First Nation, Selkirk First Nation, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation. There may have been others, but certainly I met with leadership for all of those First Nations. Wildlife and hunting opportunities were not the only topic, but certainly they were topics that were raised.

Department of Environment keeps all partners informed by sharing survey results and keeping in touch through our regional biologists. In discussions with my officials, I have certainly asked for précis or summaries of the surveys to be made available sooner than they have historically been made available, because that provides credibility with respect to any assertions that I make with respect to either there being additional opportunities or abundance or there being conservation concerns, as I have certainly heard from the Member for Kluane over the course of the last two and a half years.

Mr. Istchenko: Let's stay on that, then — absolutely. The minister was talking about surveys that were done. I do have a copy of the surveys that they were doing because it was provided in his briefing binder from last year, but I want to talk a little bit more about the surveys and the areas that they survey.

Before I ask the minister the question, I will throw the deer population in. The deer population is increasing in game zone 7, 8, and all around Whitehorse and basically Watson Lake. Deer followed farming when the Alaska Highway was built and there are a lot more out there and a lot more opportunities. I will say that I remember maybe a previous minister — it might have been me — asked about that. They needed to come up with a population — so it sounds like you guys are doing that study and a survey, which is great. That would be a great hunting opportunity.

But when it comes to actually doing the surveys in the air, whether in a helicopter or a plane, my question is: Who does the department pick as the observers and spotters in these planes? The other question is: With this information that the department will gather as it comes in after the survey is done — I'm looking for timelines for when the Department of Environment gets the information and they can share it with the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, the renewable resources councils, Yukon Trappers Association, Yukon Fish and Game Association, the Yukon Outfitters Association, or the many other organizations. Because the process laid out under the *Umbrella Final Agreement* where you go through the regulation change proposal to do things like these increased hunting opportunities — that information needs to be provided in a timely manner to these organizations. What assurances can the minister give me that these people will get this information so that they can start working on these processes? Also, who are the observers and spotters when they're out doing the surveys?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Just to back up with respect to the deer permits — just for the record, the Government of Yukon currently offers 12 deer permits per year. Through the permit hunt authorization process in the 2022-23 hunting season, eight deer were harvested in the Yukon. The Yukon's first-ever deer project is currently underway — I guess, tracking project — utilizing both trail cameras and collaring.

The Department of Environment is in the process of accurately determining information on population size and distribution, but I think I provided the message loud and clear that this appears to be a potentially significant opportunity, and we would like to have an assessment available sooner rather than later.

The one response with respect to the time that I have asked the department to strive to work with is a turnaround time for the preliminary two-page summary of between three and six months, and I will certainly be pushing for that to be possible. I think that with more information available sooner, we are certainly in a position to provide that information to all interested parties, including the regional renewable resources councils, impacted First Nations, Yukon Fish and Game Association, and Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board.

While I am on my feet, I will just say that I attended the AGM of the renewable resources councils in Whitehorse. It's a blur as to the time, but it was this year and it was at the Sternwheeler. I certainly applaud the members of the various renewable resources councils for the work that they do.

This is a fairly technical answer here, but once surveys are completed, staff in the Fish and Wildlife branch compile and error-check the data, create the necessary spatial layers for the survey areas, analyze the data, review the results, and draft a report and accompanying summary documents. The report is then reviewed by management, and preliminary results are shared with affected First Nations and renewable resources councils prior to distribution to the public. But I am cognizant of the fact that the Yukon government — and by extension the Department of Environment — has dedicated pretty significant funds in the last two or maybe even three fiscal years for surveys. It's my view that it's important that this information — with the appropriate checks and balances, which I have here — be provided as soon as it can reasonably be provided. We have heard from our partners in wildlife management that public access to summary survey results is desired and we are working toward that.

With respect to the survey question, I am advised that First Nation governments and First Nation administrations are approached and opportunities are provided to First Nation citizens where possible. Sometimes that is not possible. I am advised that typically surveys are led by Yukon government biologists, and they include First Nation government staff or citizens. Participation in aerial surveys requires certain skillsets and experience in order to ensure that quality survey data is acquired. So, sometimes yes and sometimes no — but attempts are made to engage with First Nation citizens to participate in surveys.

I am advised that the regional resources council AGM was in April. That's when I went to the regional resources council AGM in Whitehorse and met with various council members there.

Mr. Istchenko: I have a question about the Kluane sheep hunt. It was cancelled last year because of conservation efforts and concerns from the First Nation. One of the good things about this hunt is the fact that the proceeds from the hunt go to conservation efforts and things that they can do in the community to help with conservation, like trapping incentives. There are many things that it can be put toward. In light of that, the resident hunter tag was cancelled, too.

Can the minister give me an update — if this will be happening again and the status of that?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Kluane First Nation Chief Bob Dickson wrote to the department, to me, in March sharing the Kluane First Nation's concerns and requesting that the Department of Environment take management action under the *Wildlife Act* to help protect sheep populations in the Kluane First Nation traditional territory. In consequence of that, as the member opposite has indicated, the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary sheep permit was not offered this hunting season. The Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board indicated their support for this cancellation in a letter sent to the director of Fish and Wildlife on April 6 of this year — 2023.

When the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary was surveyed for sheep in 2014 and 2018, our survey results in adjacent areas of Kluane Park and Brooks Arm also showed low sheep estimates.

We surveyed these areas again in July 2022 and found similar results to previous surveys.

In fact, we have observed the lowest number of sheep in Brooks Arm since we started monitoring in 1974.

Similarly, Parks Canada recently reported low adult sheep populations in the Tachäl Dhäl survey area — the lowest since their monitoring program began in 1977. Our Alaskan counterparts note similar patterns on the Alaska side of Kluane National Park, particularly in recent years.

In the summer of 2023, we conducted further aerial surveys of the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary and the Brooks Arm, Ruby Range, Donjek, Nutzotin, and Flat Top sheep management units. We will continue our long-term monitoring of population estimates and recruitment rates across these areas to determine the need for further management actions.

However, specifically with respect to the question that the member opposite asked, due to stated conservation concerns and some of the data that we are in receipt of, the Kluane First Nation cancelled their auction of the Kluane Wildlife Sanctuary sheep permit for the 2023-24 season. In a spirit of co-management, the Yukon government also cancelled the 2023-24 lottery for single-permit hunt authorization. There is a request for this to be at least for a period of two seasons, which will include next season.

The Yukon government will work with affected First Nations in southwest Yukon, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, and stakeholders to amend the wildlife regulations accordingly. We are committed to working with our Yukon First Nation partners and the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board to develop a sheep management plan for the southwest Yukon in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of sheep in the area.

This summer, I had the opportunity to meet with Kluane First Nation Chief and Council in Burwash on this very topic and we certainly have committed to continue an active dialogue on this file. I know that surveys took place in the summer of 2023, as well, and I hope to be in a position to provide that data in the near future.

With respect to some of the areas, 2022 was the first time that there had been a survey in quite a number of years. So, in consequence of that, the department took the position that, in order to solidify the results, it would be a good idea to survey some of the impacted areas again in 2023.

The specific answer to the Member for Kluane's question on the wildlife sanctuary sheep permit is that there is a request from Kluane First Nation for that not to proceed again in the upcoming hunting season and there will be a request for the Yukon government to take the same action again for this season.

Mr. Istchenko: Madam Chair, I thank the minister for that answer.

The government stopped doing multi-year quotas for outfitters because of a legal opinion that they got that is contradictory to the *Wildlife Act*. Now, multi-year quotas are one of the most important things for outfitters because people often book hunts years in advance. The current situation creates

a lack of certainty. It's also very positive from a wildlife management standpoint.

Will the minister agree to table or show us the legal opinion and also propose an act change through the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board process to reinstate this multi-year quota for outfitters?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, we recognize that there continues to be a few outstanding issues of concern between the outfitters and the Department of Environment. We are committed to resolving them collaboratively with the outfitting industry. In order to improve support for the outfitting community, the Department of Environment hired an outfitter liaison officer in May of 2023. The outfitter liaison officer has been proactively working with Yukon outfitters and the Yukon Outfitters Association in order to answer questions, address specific issues of concern, and identify potential ways to resolve them.

We recognize the certainty that multi-year quotas provide to Yukon outfitters; however, as indicated, multi-year and over-harvest quotas do not comply with the *Wildlife Act*. I have reviewed the legal opinion, received advice, and asked for a follow-up briefing on this, and this is the conclusion reached based on statutory interpretation.

As the member opposite knows, the Department of Environment has implemented an interim solution to provide certainty, flexibility, and predictability to outfitters. The interim process states that, unless the legal, environmental, or socio-economic factor necessitates a change in the non-resident allocation, quotas will remain unchanged until we have a new process in place to establish quotas. I understand that in the discussions that have occurred between my officials and the Yukon Outfitters Association that, first of all, the so-called letter of comfort states that unless a legal, environmental, or socio-economic factor necessitates a change in the non-resident allocation, quotas will remain unchanged until we have a new process in place. Also, over the course of the last year and perhaps even longer, if there is an alternate legal opinion, our legal department would certainly review same, but we haven't been provided with an alternate legal opinion that indicates that the current provisions provide for multi-year quotas. This interim process also allows outfitters who had quota agreements prior to 2022 to access unused moose and caribou quotas from the previous four years, up to a maximum value.

We remain committed to working with the outfitting industry, renewable resources councils, the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board, licenced hunters, and Yukon First Nations in order to ensure a fair, transparent, and sustainable solution.

The Department of Environment's perspective is that there is flexibility and that it does provide certainty and that it is unlikely that quotas would be changed — or can be changed, really, even legally — unless certain preconditions are met.

We agree at a high level that the modernization of guidelines is necessary for a variety of reasons, including that they conform with the Yukon *Wildlife Act*, address Yukon's legal obligations to consult with First Nations, and to better

align them with how wildlife management is conducted in the Yukon.

The Member for Kluane did ask me a question about the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. If the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board does engage in this process, it will be a comprehensive consultation process that will take some time and, of course, Yukon outfitters will be significantly involved in that process. With respect to that consultation — any possible *Wildlife Act* change will, of course, involve policy work on many topics and it will take some time to reach recommendations.

Mr. Istchenko: The minister said that he received another legal opinion. I am wondering if it has been shared with the industry. I don't know if the minister understands how important having certainty in the outfitting industry is. Before this change, I think, over the past decades, there was one appeal. There are appeals everywhere now, which isn't good for the industry. There is no certainty for the industry. So, the question I asked — if the minister would just share that information, his legal opinion, and look at what needs to be changed in the act, let the outfitters do what the outfitters do, and go through the process set out in the *Umbrella Final Agreement* in chapter 16 where you go through the regulation change proposal — a simple proposal put forward by the minister would solve this problem.

I will move on. I asked this question in the House about the request from the Fish and Wildlife Management Board to the Premier requesting that the outfitter guidelines be reviewed. The minister said that the correspondence had been received. It's in the process of being reviewed and there will be due consideration as to the next steps moving forward.

I want to ask the question again like I did before. I want to ask him because the uncertainty in the industry right now is not good. We just talked about that. I just want to ask him if he has accepted the recommendations in the letter that he has received. If so, has that launch been reviewed, and what is the timeline for this review, and — I am hoping — will the industry be involved?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will keep my response fairly brief here, but absolutely, the Department of Environment and I recognize the importance of certainty. The two parties may disagree as to the comfort letter providing certainty. It seems to be providing some level of certainty, but obviously, reasonable people can disagree on that.

With respect to the legal opinion, I'm advised that, in consultation with the Yukon outfitter liaison committee, the summary of the legal opinion has been provided multiple times to the industry, and the relevant sections and the relevant interpretation of those sections have been communicated to the outfitter liaison committee on numerous occasions. There is no mystery as to what the concern is.

Madam Chair, I can also advise, for the record, that the Department of Environment has met with the outfitter liaison committee on numerous occasions — just for the record: October 26, 2021; February 16, 2022; May 3, 2022; December 13, 2022; March 17, 2023; May 11, 2023; and a planned meeting in early December 2023.

Certainly, the Department of Environment is in regular contact. I will just repeat myself, but for the record, we agree that modernization of the guidelines is necessary for a variety of reasons, including to ensure that they conform with the Yukon *Wildlife Act* and address the Yukon's legal obligation to consult First Nations to better align with how wildlife management is conducted in the Yukon.

The Government of Yukon has responded to the board inviting them to initiate the review — the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board. As far as the clarity, like I said, I think people can disagree, but with respect to multi-year quotas, the interim process states that unless there is a legal, environmental, or socio-economic factor that necessitates a change in the non-resident allocation, quotas will remain unchanged until we have a new process in place to establish quotas. It also allows outfitters who had quota agreements prior to 2022 to access unused moose and caribou quotas from the previous four years, up to a maximum value. That has been the status quo for the last two and a half years.

The legal advice is that the *Wildlife Act* was being misinterpreted and had been misinterpreted for many, many, many years. So, yes — does it require some work? It absolutely does. If there is this consultation process with respect to proposed amendments to the *Wildlife Act*, it will in all likelihood be a multi-year process. Yukon outfitters will absolutely be involved, as will be a number of other parties.

My advice is that officials from the Department of Environment have met with the Yukon outfitters liaison committee on numerous occasions, and the summary of the legal opinion has been communicated.

If the Yukon Outfitters Association, as I indicated previously, were in a position to receive a different legal opinion that disagreed and said that it's evident from the current *Wildlife Act* that multi-year quotas can be implemented on the licence at the beginning of each YG fiscal year, each April 1 — I know we're not in the assuming game in this business, but I would think that — I won't assume — that opinion would have been forthcoming in the last two and a half years. I think that there generally has been a status quo and there is certainly a commitment to work with outfitters and many groups with respect to the modernization of the *Wildlife Act*. But as indicated, it's anticipated that the consultations will be multi-year with many interested parties and it will take some time, but there is certainly a commitment to have outfitters absolutely involved in the process.

Mr. Istchenko: I asked a question last year about the trapping cabin land application in the Yukon. The Yukon government lands department is treating the application like a house with a \$300,000 price tag, and actually, a line cabin is just a basic small little cabin, and this is causing hardship for the people who would like to build one — the time lines. For the trapper, it's about safety. It's about when it's cold and having a place to go. You get stuck and sometimes you get wet, hypothermia, or frostbite and the other dangers that come with trapping. Those cabins are very good. You have a breakdown and you need a place to stay. I would ask the minister to take immediate action to expedite the permitting process for these

trapping cabin land applications, especially for the line cabins. What work has the minister done since then so I can let the trappers know?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I had a brief conversation with my officials on this matter. I believe that this is an Energy, Mines and Resources issue. It's a fairly specific topic, but my recollection is that we have written to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources on this matter relatively recently. I am advised that there may have been a recent response as well, so I can certainly get back to the member opposite with respect to his specific question and his advocacy for this one trapper.

Just for the record, trapping is one of the Yukon's oldest industries and it plays an important role in the territory. Traditionally, it was practised by First Nations to provide food, clothing, and material for trade. The trapping industry in Yukon and elsewhere is undergoing change due to the industry's economic markets and social acceptance. We continue to support the Yukon Trappers Association, which provides a collective voice for trappers. The Conservation Officer Services branch offers a mandatory multi-day trapping workshop for those who would like to get a trapper or assistant trapper licence. This course covers several topics including harvest ethics, First Nation perspectives, safety and survival, and humane trapping methods. Trapper education helps to ensure compliance with trapping regulations and that trapping is done sustainably and respectfully.

The member opposite's question is specifically with respect to a trapper's cabin. I gather that the applicant wishes to have matters perhaps streamlined in a certain manner. I am just checking to see if there are any other notes with respect to this.

Recognizing that the safety of trappers is an important aspect of the trapping industry, trappers are offered the ability to apply for land for cabins through the trapping cabin land application policy. Applications under this policy can take time, as they are subject to regulatory review that includes consultation with affected First Nations — in this case, I am advised that it is the Carcross/Tagish First Nation — to examine impacts of a cabin location on wildlife and engage with stakeholders in the application area.

Occasionally, these types of applications trigger the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, but as indicated, I will endeavour to get back to the member opposite with respect to his specific question this afternoon.

Mr. Istchenko: I thank the minister for that. This will probably be my last question before we take a break, and so I do want to thank all the staff who are in here today, because after the break, we will turn it over to the Third Party.

I have a question about the Tagish River habitat protection plan. The minister had a big celebration last summer, but the implementation committee had not really completed their work yet, so I am wondering if the work has been done and if the landowners were given the opportunity to be heard. The big question for the landowners — and the uncertainty for those along the river who would like to either improve their existing docks or add new docks — is: Is that actually going to be a possibility?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: In November 2022, the Government of Yukon and the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and the Government of Canada signed the final management plan for the Tagish River Habitat Protection Area. The management plan will help conserve fish and wildlife populations and their habitats, including migratory waterfowl, while recognizing the relationship and connection to this important area by the Carcross/Tagish First Nation and community members.

The completion of the plan also marks a milestone in the implementation of the *Carcross/Tagish First Nation Final Agreement*. There was a community ceremony to celebrate this achievement, which took place this spring on April 1 in Tagish. I don't believe I was able to make that. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources was able to attend.

The steering community engaged extensively with stakeholders and the public to develop the recommended plan. The main issues raised by community members during the engagement was related, as the member opposite indicated, to a recommendation to reduce shoreline development and use and issues around docks.

An implementation committee has recently been formed consisting of members of the three parties and representatives from the Carcross/Tagish Renewable Resources Council and the Tagish Local Advisory Council. The implementation committee will develop a specific shoreline implementation plan with input from local residents to identify timely, creative, and workable ways to address concerns with shoreline development as these residents look to rebuild and repair following, among other things, recent flooding events.

I'm advised that the implementation committee has been formed, which includes the Tagish Local Advisory Council. The group has met several times, making good progress on a shoreline development guidance.

Through the implementation of the management plan, the Tagish River will continue to have a healthy ecosystem and wildlife populations, while providing clarity and certainty to land and water users in the area.

The implementation committee, formed by all three parties, will oversee and collaborate on the implementation of the management plan recommendations. Implementing the plan is a priority and it will take focused effort by all parties to work on a shoreline implementation plan and other important tasks as laid out in the management plan.

So, just to loop back, the implementation committee has been formed and the group has met several times, making good progress on shoreline development guidance.

Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

The matter before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 52, Department of Environment, in Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*.

Is there any further general debate?

MLA Tredger: I am delighted to be discussing the Department of Environment today. Thank you so much to the officials who are in the room for joining us. Thank you to the folks listening in as well. I am very much looking forward to the discussion.

I want to start by asking about something that the minister said on Thursday about the *Species at Risk Act*. This was in Question Period, and he was referring to the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. He said — quote: “This new funding will also support engagement with First Nations and Inuvialuit to build our shared understanding of species at risk, determine how we work together and how we manage species at risk moving forward, including if we should go ahead with legislation for species at risk...”

So, I was quite surprised to hear the “if” — “... if we should go ahead with ... species at risk...” I am wondering if the minister can confirm: Are we going ahead with species at risk legislation, or is that decision yet to be made?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will answer the question and then provide a bit of background. Yes, I think that we have had this exchange over the course of the last two years with respect to species at risk, but the bottom line is, yes, our intention is to proceed with the species at risk legislation, but we need to work with First Nations and many other partners, and we cannot assume the results of consultation.

I will just provide a bit of background.

As Yukoners, we have a unique connection to the territory's wildlife. We have a duty to monitor and protect species at risk, including mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, insects, and plants. The Yukon has 48 species currently listed as being at risk under the federal *Species at Risk Act*, while another 10 species are under review. There are specific legislative tools in place to list and conserve species at risk in other parts of Canada and this is a priority for the Government of Yukon as well.

In December 2022, we signed the bilateral *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*. This commits us to increased surveying and monitoring of species at risk and engaging with First Nations and the Inuvialuit on approaches to managing species at risk. As a result, Yukon's capacity and resources for collaborative work with other parties on species at risk matters are significantly increased over the next three years. This work will include, among other things: long-term monitoring of little brown bats in southern Yukon, including the installation and maintenance of bat houses to shelter and protect maternity colonies at risk in the boreal forest; the annual monitoring of collared pika at several hundred sites in Tombstone and Kusawa territorial parks; the investigation of the potential impacts of winter recreation like snowmobiling, dog mushing, and cross-country skiing on woodland caribou in southern Yukon; the monitoring of the Aishihik wood bison herd in the southwest Yukon and the transboundary Nordquist herd in the southeast Yukon; the remote camera trap monitoring of grizzly bears on the Klondike Plateau and in the South Beringia Priority Place; the monitoring of wolverine population trends using non-invasive camera traps in multiple areas of the Yukon;

and new and expanded monitoring of at-risk vascular plants and alpine meadow and dune ecosystems. This new funding will also support engagement with First Nations and Inuvialuit to build our shared understanding of species at risk, determine how we work together and how we manage species at risk, including if we should go ahead with legislation for species at risk in the Yukon.

That is the nub of the matter, Madam Chair. With this funding from the Canada-Yukon bilateral nature accord, we will build our shared understanding of species at risk, determine how we work together and how we manage species at risk moving forward, including if we should, in fact, go ahead with legislation for species at risk in the Yukon. But certainly, the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement* increases Yukon's capacity and resources to work collaboratively with other parties on a variety of species at risk matters over the next three years.

So, yes, intent to proceed — yes. These resources that we have will certainly assist and provide metaphorical additional horsepower in order to move this file forward, but certainly there will be a great deal of consultation and collaboration required.

MLA Tredger: I really appreciate the beginning and end of the minister's reply, because they were very direct to the question, and I am hoping we can have a pretty fast back-and-forth where we really stick to the questions. The rest of the information is very interesting, but I do have a lot that I am hoping to ask today.

I am happy to hear that it is this government's intent to proceed with species at risk legislation, assuming the agreement of their partners. That makes sense to me.

In annex 4 of the *Canada-Yukon Nature Agreement*, it lays out some of the specific commitments. Under "Develop species at risk legislation", it says that Cabinet approval — and this, I believe, is to formally begin legislative development — is to be sought in the fiscal year 2023-24. So, we have about six months of this fiscal year left.

Has that Cabinet approval already been sought, or is it on track to be decided by the end of the fiscal year?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I am advised that before the end of the fiscal year, the Department of Environment hopes to have funding agreements in place to support the work that was asked about and will then be seeking a Cabinet mandate on the management approach.

Calls for expressions of interest will be going out to Yukon First Nations and other transboundary Indigenous governments and groups to enable funding opportunities for projects that will support the agreement's objective to protect and conserve land and water in the Yukon. We anticipate that there will be workshops to support Indigenous leadership and conservation early in 2024.

To answer the specific question, it appears that we are generally on target with respect to the scheduled work plan.

MLA Tredger: That's great to hear. Congratulations to the minister and all his staff for pulling that off, because it's not an easy thing to stay on time, so I appreciate that.

I understand that the Dempster fibre line project experienced some significant deviations from what was

submitted to the YESAB — that instead of drilling underneath streams, large parts of vegetation along the rivers and creeks were mowed back, and this was on fish-bearing streams, which, of course, has the potential to impact wildlife, including fish. I'm wondering if the minister can tell me what the government has done to address this and what the steps will be going forward.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I'll try to keep it fairly brief and undertake to provide an answer to the specific question — from the Department of Environment.

But just briefly, for everyone — for Yukoners perhaps listening — with respect to the Dempster fibre, this year, installation work exceeded the targets set in the spring of 2023, and 780 kilometres of fibre have been installed as of the end of October 2023. The remaining work includes aerial attachments to existing power poles in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, splicing of the fibre, and testing and commissioning of the 800-kilometre line. Work is seasonal and most of the crews have demobilized for the winter now.

With respect to environmental protection, input from Yukon University scientists as well as First Nation traditional knowledge-keepers was incorporated to inform various environmental components during the design of the project. Environmental protection is a key value of this project. Stantec and Tetra Tech are subcontracted to mitigate the impacts of this project on the environment, particularly on permafrost. The contractor follows an environmental plan with specific directions that were approved through the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board process to protect values such as flora and fauna, wetlands and water bodies, and other sensitive environments.

A second round of environmental monitor training was provided to Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and Gwich'in Tribal Council citizens. There were 16 participants who successfully completed the training and are eligible to work on the Dempster fibre project as environmental monitors.

Just briefly — because I know that there were questions about aerial installations, and this won't take long — the preferred installation method, of course, is putting cable into the ground. This method offers the greatest protection to the cable and helps to preserve the landscape and environmental values such as wetlands and habitats. Specialized equipment is used to exert minimal ground pressure to create a shallow trench where the conduit is laid and immediately buried.

In areas where this equipment cannot be used, including river and roadway crossings, we use horizontal directional drilling. A small hole measuring approximately 75 millimetres is drilled below the surface where the fibre conduit is placed. This was used to assist in crossing under the Arctic Red, Peel, and Mackenzie rivers without disturbing the flow of the waters. This can only be done in suitable soil and not through rocky areas.

The last option — and the one that drew some attention — is the installation of new poles for an aerial installation, which is only used when we encounter hard rock or unstable, clay-like soil. Aerial installations are our last and least preferred option

and are used in rare instances only when all other installation methods will not be effective. I am also advised that it is the most cost-ineffective method. So, certainly from a contractual perspective, the GROL — the overall contractor — would not be interested in it.

I did have numbers with respect to the number of kilometres that had aerial installation, and they still remain at a low percentage of the 800 kilometres.

Stantec and Tetra Tech are subcontracted on the Environment file. I can likely provide some additional details to the Member for Whitehorse Centre should they wish to receive that, but the project is going well. We hope that it is — well, politicians making promises — operational by late 2024 or early 2025.

MLA Tredger: I really do appreciate the back-and-forth that we have going here.

Is the minister aware of any investigations into the environmental practices or environmental concerns related to the Dempster project by his government or any other levels of government?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Could the Member for Whitehorse Centre please repeat the question?

MLA Tredger: Is the minister aware of any investigations into environmental violations or concerns related to the project, either by his level of government or any other levels of government? I would be curious to know either about closed investigations or ongoing investigations.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I believe that if there is information available, it is likely more in the control or knowledge of the Department of Highways and Public Works. As I am the Minister of Highways and Public Works, I can commit to a legislative return answering that specific question.

MLA Tredger: Thank you to the minister. I would appreciate that. That would be great.

I would like to talk a little bit now about *Our Clean Future*. As per the latest report of the *Our Clean Future* committee, the next annual *Our Clean Future* report is expected in the fall of 2023. Looking outside, I would say that we are into winter now and I have not seen that report yet. It usually comes out in August, so we are getting quite late here. Does the minister have an updated timeline for that report?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Since the release of *Our Clean Future* in 2020, 43 actions have been completed, 87 are in progress, and six are yet to begin, but we have made significant progress on many of our commitments. There is still a lot of work required to meet our 45-percent greenhouse gas emission target reduction by 2030. We are working with industry to establish, as you know, a mining emission intensity target for quartz and placer mining operations. We will continue to build on *Our Clean Future* as we learn more and implement new actions. This will be reflected in future annual reports.

We will continue to work with experts, stakeholders, and partner governments across the territory and beyond to identify opportunities to accelerate and intensify our efforts to reach our ambitious targets.

As the member opposite will know, we established the Yukon Climate Leadership Council to provide advice and

perspective to support us in meeting our greenhouse gas emission targets. We are working to integrate the work of the council directly into *Our Clean Future* and to continue to implement existing actions that align with their recommendations.

Also, with the end of the second Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change in 2022, we are exploring how to continue mentorship opportunities on climate change for the important voice of youth.

The release is somewhat later than last year. My notes indicate — I believe that the cover said August, but the actual release date was September 12, 2022. Obviously, this release will be later. Our commitment is to release by the end of the year. Some of the additional complexities involve integrating the findings of the Yukon Climate Leadership Council and some of the recommendations from the second Yukon Youth Panel on Climate Change — so, yes, soon and, in any event, a commitment to release before the end of the year.

MLA Tredger: Lots of follow-up questions there — the minister said that there are 43 actions in progress and six that are yet to begin. Is that as reported in the 2022 report on the 2021 year, or is that the information that will be in the upcoming report?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I do not have the most recent annual report. I am advised that the annual report that will be released by the end of this year includes the status of actions from 2022, and these numbers, I believe, will be substantially what will be released, but I haven't seen the report card. As indicated, it will be released shortly.

MLA Tredger: It is a shame, because it is going to be spring 2024 before we can debate in this Legislature what happened in 2022 on these actions. That doesn't feel urgent, that doesn't feel like an emergency, and that doesn't feel like the intensity with which we need to be moving toward these actions. I do look forward to that report and I look forward to debating it in the spring or discussing it in the spring. I hope that it comes as quickly as possible.

The minister has mentioned that it will have responses to the Yukon Climate Leadership Council's report. I mean, that is good. They have been waiting for over a year on a reply. They have been waiting over a year for a response, as that happened last September. September 2022 was when the report came out. It looks like they will be waiting another month or two. I just can't really imagine pouring myself into that kind of work — they felt so passionate about it and called to — and putting my everything into producing this report and then to sit in silence for over a year.

I've said this many times in the Legislature, and I'm sure I will say it again — I hope I won't say it again, and I hope that we will have the report soon — but I just can't imagine that people who experienced that are going to want to come back and do work with this government again. I can't imagine that the people doing that are going to believe that their work matters. It does; it matters so much that we find ways forward and find ways to reach our goals as a territory and as a world, because it feels like, with every season, the climate anxiety and

climate dread mounts. The toll that climate change is taking on our world is mounting.

I want to pick up on another thing that the minister said, which is the intensity-based greenhouse gas reduction target. That's I9 in *Our Clean Future*. It reads: "Establish an intensity-based greenhouse gas reduction target for the Yukon mining industry and additional actions needed to reach the target by 2022" — so, 10 months ago. It lists Environment and EMR as the leads. I am hoping the minister can give me an update on that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: With respect to the Climate Leadership Council, first of all, their work is certainly very much appreciated. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources and I met with them on a number of occasions, but importantly, we also met with them on a few occasions after their report had been tabled and there were a number of debrief sessions. A lot of their work has been reviewed and analyzed and has been given scrutiny — and reported back to at least the chairs — as to the ability to implement some of their suggestions or their initiatives and which areas would meaningfully reduce greenhouse gas emissions and which ones would independent analyses reveal might be double-counting or maybe less effective in reducing greenhouse gases.

I don't disagree that it has taken a bit of time to integrate the Climate Leadership Council's work, but after their work was completed, as I indicated, there were one or two — perhaps the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources met even more times — with the Climate Leadership Council. There was feedback provided and scrutiny and analysis of their work, which was communicated to them. We were absolutely respectful of the time and energy that was spent on the valuable work that they accomplished.

With respect to the mining intensity targets, I will certainly urge the Member for Whitehorse Centre to direct follow-up questions in Committee of the Whole for Energy, Mines and Resources with the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Back to the Climate Leadership Council: The Climate Leadership Council recommendations were reviewed by Navius Research where they undertook a third-party verification of potential emissions reductions. From there, recommendations were reviewed using the eight decision-making criteria that were developed alongside municipal and Indigenous partners. That was an element of the scrutiny and analysis of the valuable work that the Climate Leadership Council did.

With respect to mining intensity targets, briefly, at a very high level, the Government of Yukon is working toward establishing an intensity-based target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions per unit of production in the mining sector. The Government of Yukon recognizes that our approach is unique and ambitious and we are taking the time needed to get it right. We are working with a consultant and the mining industry to set baselines and find solutions that enable industry to achieve the targets.

In any event, an intensity-based approach accounts for progress made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, encourages mine operators to innovate and adopt low carbon practices, and

accounts for the growth of substantial year-to-year fluctuations that occur in the Yukon's mining sector. The mining-intensity approach recognizes the difference between the types of activities undertaken by different quartz and placer operations throughout their mining lifecycles. Mining emissions are included in the economy-wide net-zero 2050 target legislated in the *Clean Energy Act*.

Briefly, back to the Climate Leadership Council, it's important to properly analyze and capture the recommendations from the Yukon Climate Leadership Council. This is the first year we have incorporated recommendations into new actions and we are committed to reflect their important work into the latest annual report.

We have worked closely with other departments to incorporate new actions into *Our Clean Future*. This work is critical to get right. I certainly understand the urgency of the matter. But the report will be released in due course and, in any event, before the end of the year.

MLA Tredger: In the 2021 annual report for *Our Clean Future*, which is the most recent publicly available report, it lists EMR and Environment as the leads on intensity-based greenhouse gas reductions action I9. Is Environment no longer lead on that action?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, to answer the question from the Member for Whitehorse Centre, yes, EMR is currently the lead on action I9, which is: "Establish an intensity-based greenhouse gas reduction target for Yukon's mining industry and additional actions needed to reach the target by 2022." EMR is closely connected with stakeholders that will be impacted by I9, and therefore, it makes more sense for EMR to lead this action.

The Climate Change Secretariat provides support for some of the more technical actions due to its significant network of professionals across Canada. Yes, so EMR does have the lead; Environment is in the background providing technical expertise and liaising with expertise from across the country.

MLA Tredger: That answer worries me, because I think the Department of Environment has a focus on protecting the environment. I think that, because that perspective is no longer a lead on this action, it is a concern. Does the minister think that having his department removed as the lead on this action is consistent with his action of serving the goal of protecting the environment?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Madam Chair, just to confirm, EMR has always been the lead on this file; they are the regulator of the industry, and Environment is here to support. That has been the situation from the get-go with respect to *Our Clean Future* and this action item. Many actions in *Our Clean Future* are collaborative; we play a role in implementing this action, given our role and coordination in reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. We continue to be committed to reaching our OCF goals regardless of which department is leading the actions. *Our Clean Future* is an all-of-government strategy and requires all of government to work together for climate change.

Energy, Mines and Resources has always been the department that has been negotiating the intensity-based targets with the industry. That is the situation; understand that.

MLA Tredger: I am going to try to squeeze in one more question here in a complete shift of topic to animal protection. Currently, as far as I know, all small animal care happens through humane societies in the Yukon or similar rescues. Now that there have been changes, is the government planning to run any of its own programs for small animals?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The new *Animal Protection and Control Act* modernizes the Yukon's animal protection and control framework to better protect Yukoners and animals in the territory. The new act strengthens enforcement of animal care and control, improves animal welfare standards, and regulates animal-related businesses.

While the act received assent in the 2022 Fall Sitting of the Legislative Assembly, the act will not come into force until the regulations are developed. We expect the regulations to be complete and the act to come into effect by the spring of 2024.

The act provides a broad framework for animal care and control, and regulations will provide the specific detail required to implement this new law. It's important that these regulations reflect Yukoners' values, our relationships with animals, and our way of life.

We have engaged broadly on the development of the *Animal Protection and Control Act* control regulations with industry associations, municipalities, First Nations, the public, and interest groups. The engagement focused on standards of care for domestic animals, exotic animals, control standards for livestock, and prohibited cosmetic surgeries. A report of what we heard during engagement will be released later this fall.

We are considering all feedback from the engagement process as we develop the regulations for the new *Animal Protection and Control Act*. Once the regulations are developed, we will consider how best to support communities and governments that are interested in taking on animal protection and control enforcement roles.

The answer to the member opposite's question is: At this juncture, the Department of Environment in the Yukon government is not interested in occupying the field, but certainly, as I indicated in my final comments, once the regulations are developed, we will consider how best to support communities, governments, and organizations that are interested in taking on animal protection and control enforcement roles.

That is, for now, the state of play. As I have indicated previously, discussions with the Humane Society Yukon are ongoing. They continue in this year.

However, Madam Chair, seeing the time, I move that you report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Ms. Blake: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 211, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

The House adjourned at 5:28 p.m.

The following sessional paper was tabled October 30, 2023:

35-1-121

Tenth Report of the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees (October 30, 2023) (Clarke, N.)

The following legislative returns were tabled October 30, 2023:

35-1-105

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — CSFY Dawson Program (McLean)

35-1-106

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Mr. Kent related to general debate on Vote 3, Department of Education, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — allocation for experiential learning spaces (McLean)

35-1-107

Response to matter outstanding from discussion with Ms. McLeod related to general debate on Vote 51, Department of Community Services, in Bill No. 211, *Second Appropriation Act 2023-24* — landfills receiving compactors (Mostyn)