



Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 232

1st Session

35th Legislature

BLUES

Thursday, March 20, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Jeremy Harper

NOTE

This document, referred to as the "Blues", is the preliminary issue of the Hansard of the Yukon Legislative Assembly and has not been edited fully. It may be used as a reference only with the understanding that it will be superseded by the final, edited version, entitled "Hansard", at a later time.

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, March 20, 2025 — 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: Before proceeding with the Daily Routine, the Chair would like to make a statement regarding recent procedural events.

Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2, the order of private members' business on Wednesdays is determined on the previous sitting day. On Tuesday, March 18, 2025, the Third Party House Leader identified Bill No. 309 as the item of business standing in the name of a member of their party to be called.

Yesterday, the Official Opposition items of business were dealt with in position 1 and 2, and Bill No. 309 was called at position 3 in the roster after 5:00 p.m.

The Leader of the Third Party then moved the motion for second reading of the bill. Instead of delivering a speech on the bill, she immediately moved a motion to adjourn debate. This was not procedurally correct, as a member may only have one motion before the House at any one time. A request for unanimous consent would have been the appropriate action.

Given that there was no objection to debate being adjourned and that the Leader of the Third Party was given incorrect procedural advice that she could move adjournment of debate, the Chair has decided that debate on Bill No. 309 will remain adjourned in the name of the Leader of the Third Party at position 3 in the roster of the opposition private members' business unless a new item is chosen, and in that case, we will be in position 4 to start on April 2, 2025.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of Visitors.
Visitors introduced

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of 45th Annual Kilrich Yukon Native Hockey Tournament

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament. The puck drop for the 45th Annual Kilrich Yukon Native Hockey Tournament, presented by Finning Canada, was today. Held since 1977, this perennial tournament is circled in pen on the sport fans' calendar. Every year, players, friends, and family members from all over the Yukon and Outside gather in the capital for a

weekend of competition and reconnection. This year, we are joined by teams from British Columbia and the Northwest Territories for a total of 60 teams and 1,020 players across eight divisions. This includes the youth division and the women's division, which debuted last year.

It is not just the hockey games that the young players will enjoy. This year, a meet and greet will bring together young athletes and top Indigenous hockey mentors for an afternoon of inspiration. The rising stars will hear from former NHL players like Andrew Ference, who is here with us today, and coaches and community leaders as they share their experiences and offer guidance to the next generation of players.

The reach of this tournament is truly remarkable and we welcome all of the visiting teams. With an incredible number of people arriving in Whitehorse, we acknowledge the immense effort that goes into making this event a success and the incredible economic impact.

Thank you to the Yukon First Nations Hockey Association for bringing us this tournament year after year.

We are proud to be able to support this vision with a funding agreement from the community development fund that is helping to put on this year's tournament and next. We also recognize the many volunteers who are the backbone of our sporting community. The commitment that you show is truly what makes our sport seem so vibrant.

Lastly, I would like to extend my gratitude to the community sponsors, of which there are many. Like the efforts of the volunteers, your contributions ensure that the Yukon has a strong sports culture.

I encourage everyone here today to take in one of the many hockey games this weekend. The energy in the arena is going to be electric and, as always, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Applause

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize the 45th Annual Kilrich Yukon Native Hockey Tournament, presented by Finning this year and taking place at the Canada Games Centre and Takhini Arena this weekend.

The celebration of Indigenous talent and culture has been a highly anticipated event for 45 years now, bringing together teams from all corners of the Yukon, BC, and NWT and players from all around Canada. Starting early this morning — around 6:00 a.m. — teams from eight divisions lace up and face off with a shared passion for hockey. We have teams competing from A, B, and C divisions, old-timers and women's, as well as Jamboree A and B and youth divisions.

For hockey fans, this weekend never disappoints. Arenas are filled with friends and families reunited and community members looking to take in some high-caliber hockey.

The tournament means so much to Whitehorse and the Yukon beyond the ice as well. Hotels are full, restaurants have called in reinforcements, and local businesses get a huge boost in business this weekend. Every year, we see the positive ripple effects throughout our community.

Beyond the economic benefits, Yukon has the chance to showcase itself as a vibrant and welcoming destination. The Yukon Party caucus is once again proud to support the youth division this year for the tournament and offer our best wishes to all eight teams, some of which have already played a game or two this morning.

I know that some youth players aren't able to participate this year because they are down in Kelowna with the U13 Northstar Mustangs representing Yukon at the tier 2 BC provincials. That team will actually be making history tonight when they appear in the gold medal game at 7:00 p.m. against the hometown Kelowna team.

We would also like to offer our sincere thanks to the Yukon First Nations Hockey Association for everything that they do to make this tournament possible year after year. Thank you so much to the board and volunteers specifically for all of the incredible work organizing. They are certainly deserving of some London Fogs and steeped tea. A huge thanks as well to all title and division sponsors and all of the incredible volunteers who make this event possible.

To the players, the fans, performers, and the organizers, have fun this weekend, stay safe, and fill the rinks with the sweet sounds of hockey.

Applause

MLA Tredger: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP to add our voices in celebration of the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament. This event is a proud celebration of Indigenous culture, community, and love of hockey. Each year, this event brings together teams from across the Yukon and far beyond, showcasing the incredible talent and passion of their athletes. Spectators and participants alike are treated to thrilling matches where the spirit of competition is matched by the camaraderie, respect, and mentorship. It's a platform for athletes to shine, demonstrating their skills and dedication on the ice.

The Yukon Native Hockey Tournament also serves as a reminder of the rich cultural heritage that these communities bring to the sport. From the opening ceremonies to the final whistle, the event is infused with the vibrant traditions and values that define Indigenous identity. It is a time for celebration and the forging of lasting connections. Through the cheers and the triumphs, the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament embodies a spirit of community and enduring love for the game.

The logistics to pull off an event of this scale are truly mind-boggling, so I want to give a huge thank you to the board, to all of the organizers, and to the volunteers who make this event happen. Thank you to the sponsors that provide the support to get this off the ground.

To all the athletes, coaches, and spectators, have an amazing weekend.

Applause

In recognition of International Day of La Francophonie

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Monsieur le Président, en ma qualité de ministre responsable de la Direction des services en français, c'est avec fierté que je prends la parole à l'occasion de la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, célébrée tous les ans le 20 mars, pour rendre hommage à la communauté francophone florissante du Yukon.

Cette année, nous soulignons la 55^e édition de la Journée internationale de la Francophonie, qui met en valeur la communauté francophone mondiale et son importance immuable à l'enrichissement de notre paysage culturel, social et économique.

Profitons de cette occasion pour apprécier la richesse et la diversité de la langue et de la culture francophones ici, au Yukon, et partout dans le monde. Organisés au Canada, les Rendez-vous de la Francophonie sont une célébration pancanadienne qui a lieu chaque année en mars, en marge de la Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Le thème de cette année est « Cultive tes racines ». Il nous encourage à célébrer la francophonie dynamique du Canada, à la vivre, à la cultiver et à la partager avec les autres.

La francophonie yukonnaise est l'incarnation même du thème de cette année.

Le Yukon se classe au troisième rang des provinces et territoires bilingues au Canada, et il est le seul endroit au pays où le nombre de francophones ne cesse d'augmenter.

L'expression des différents accents du français parlé au Yukon est une belle affirmation au quotidien de notre communauté francophone croissante et dynamique.

Chaque voix est porteuse de récits, d'expériences, de traditions et d'origines, s'entrelaçant pour composer une mosaïque culturelle riche et diversifiée qui façonne notre territoire.

Je tiens à reconnaître les organismes communautaires qui partagent et cultivent une riche francophonie dans le territoire.

À l'Association franco-yukonnaise, aux Essentielles, à la Fabrique d'improvisation du Nord, à la Société d'histoire francophone du Yukon et aux nombreux autres organismes francophones, je dis merci de contribuer à créer une francophonie dynamique.

Pour célébrer nos talents locaux, j'invite les Yukonnais et les Yukonnaises à participer aux activités des Rendez-vous de la Francophonie qui se dérouleront jusqu'à la fin du mois.

Il y aura un spectacle multidisciplinaire mettant en vedette des artistes francophones locaux, un match d'improvisation et une célébration du théâtre francophone.

Que vous assistiez à l'une ou l'autre de ces activités ou que vous fêtiez la francophonie yukonnaise autrement, Monsieur le Président, je vous souhaite une bonne Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Applause

Ms. Clarke: I rise on behalf of the Yukon Party Official Opposition to recognize International Day of La Francophonie, which takes place annually on March 20.

Yukon Francophonie Day takes place on May 15, and as we won't have the opportunity to tribute that day of observance here in the House, I want to use this opportunity to highlight our wonderful francophone population here in the Yukon.

French culture has a long history in our territory and is now more vibrant and widespread than ever. We are the third largest bilingual region in Canada, with over 14 percent of Yukon's population speaking French. This number will continue to grow thanks to quality French education in the territory and a focus on francophone immigration.

Aside from our recreational activities and pristine wilderness environment, it is due in great part to our French community organizations that Yukon remains a desirable place for francophones to make home. There are so many incredible organizations that provide services to the francophone community in areas such as government, media, education, health, and more.

I would like to highlight two very important French organizations in our community that offer a wide range of services. L'Association franco-yukonnaise offers numerous programs and services and helps to make the Yukon a quality destination for French-speaking individuals and families to lay their roots and, of course, Les Essentielles, which dedicates so much to represent francophone women in the Yukon and to promote awareness for community and women's issues.

Thank you to our entire francophone community for sharing your language and your culture with us all.

Bonne Journée internationale de la Francophonie.

Applause

Ms. White: Merci Monsieur le Président, je suis fière de prendre la parole au nom du NPD pour célébrer la Journée de la Francophonie et témoignant de l'importance pour moi de la francophonie yukonnaise.

La journée de la francophonie est une occasion unique de découvrir et de célébrer la langue française, la culture francophone et de souligner l'histoire et la vitalité de la Franco-Yukonnie.

Les francophones ont eu une grande importance au Yukon depuis les années 1800. Joseph Juneau, Émilie Tremblay et Jean Ladue ne sont que quelques exemples de pionniers francophones qui ont marqué l'histoire du Yukon.

Et cette histoire et cette contribution continuent toujours. La communauté francophone du Yukon continue à ouvrir ses portes pour les autres. Tout leur travail pour s'assurer que la communauté francophone a accès à des services en français, aide aussi les autres groupes linguistiques à accéder à des services dans leur langue maternelle.

Aujourd'hui, c'est grâce au travail de la communauté francophone que chacun peut accéder à des services de traduction dans plus de 250 langues.

La diversité de la communauté franco-yukonnaise ne cesse de s'enrichir avec de nouveaux arrivants des quatre coins du globe. Cette diversité renforce la communauté francophone qui

elle-même contribue à renforcer et à unir la population yukonnaise dans sa diversité.

Je remercie tous ceux et celles qui continuent à jouer un rôle important au sein de la communauté.

En terminant, comme toujours, je me dois d'adresser un merci tout spécial à mes professeurs dans le programme d'immersion française, comme monsieur Herry, grâce à qui je peux m'adresser à vous dans la langue de Molière.

Je veux aussi donner une grande félicitation au ministre pour son effort continu en support de la communauté francophone.

Alors merci et bonne Journée de la Francophonie à tous et à toutes.

Applause

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of visitors outside of the usual proceedings.

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Ms. McLean: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling today a legislative return regarding outstanding questions from November 12, 2024, when we had the Yukon University attend as a witness.

I also have the newest report entitled *Breaking the Dawn — Reimagining reconciliation through re-education*, which is a report from the Yukon University.

Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, I have for tabling a letter dated February 15 addressed to me from five surgeons with the Yukon Surgical Clinic.

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

THAT this House congratulates Kirsty Coventry of Zimbabwe on her election as the 10th International Olympic Committee president, becoming the first female president in International Olympic Committee history.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada to sign a new pharmacare funding agreement that includes coverage for diabetes medication, diabetes supplies, and contraceptive medication and devices.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to produce an annual report on which of the 43 recommendations from the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* have been completed.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic

Mr. Istchenko: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I asked the Premier about why the federal government has ignored the Yukon in its announcement about investing in Canada's military presence in the north. My colleagues and I have long advocated for the Government of Canada to increase its investment in our military and especially here in the Yukon.

However, it was noticeable to many Yukoners that the federal government was making significant investments in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut but had completely ignored the Yukon. Can the Premier tell us why the federal Liberal government's announcement about northern military investment completely ignored the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: Mr. Speaker, our hope is that this is the first of many announcements. We know that there has been a focus on the eastern part of the Arctic with Iqaluit. I know that there was the earlier announcement around north, strong and free, which was, I think, a total of \$73 billion over a period, I believe, of 20 years. Some of what I heard last week seemed to be reannouncements, part of it talking about Inuvik, and there had been work that started in Yellowknife.

Of course, what we have communicated to the federal government is that there needs to be more investment when it comes to defence here in the Yukon. We're happy that there is work being done. We think that having a reserve unit that can branch out into opportunities in both — not just the navy but the army and air force are things that are good. We feel that this commitment was significant because it has been long overdue. But again, we are looking to see hard investments here in the Yukon and waiting to hear those announcements. Definitely we as Yukoners all believe the Yukon should see those investments coming from the federal government.

Mr. Istchenko: Following an announcement by the federal government that they would be investing hundreds of millions of dollars to create three new northern military hubs in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, both other territorial premiers issued statements. The Premier of the Northwest Territories issued a statement about how great it would be for the Northwest Territories communities. The Premier of Nunavut issued a statement about how these hubs would bolster search and rescue capabilities in that territory and would help save lives.

However, we noticed that there was no comment from the Premier of the Yukon. Yesterday, the Premier said that he had spoken to the Minister of National Defence by phone about this announcement. Can he tell us if he expressed his concern that the Yukon was ignored, and if so, what did the minister say?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: As I reflected yesterday in my answer, I received a call from the Minister of Defence previous to the announcement, and what was reflected to me was that the announcements that were going to be made later that day were the first of a series of announcements toward forward-operating bases for the north and the Arctic.

Mr. Istchenko: We are aware that the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada have made loose commitments to feasibility studies for some type of Arctic security institute and some very early stage commitments about a possible naval reserve, but the commitment to the naval reserve is only a letter of intent to do a study, which was just, in the words of our Member of Parliament — I'll quote: "... the beginning of the exploration of the feasibility." Meanwhile, the federal government is investing hundreds of millions in the other two territories for hard assets, real infrastructure, and a year-round military presence in the north.

Can the Premier explain why all the Yukon is getting is the possibility of some studies, when our neighbours are seeing real investment?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I think that there are a number of items that we should continue to talk about in the Assembly. The first is that we need to get visibility around the Over-the-Horizon commitment that was also made and what that means for the Yukon for investment. I think that is something that is key that I have requested.

We have also reached out to the Department of Defence and have asked for a number of things to be looked at. We think that one of the projects would be a potential partnership with Air North. We think that a hangar that could be dual use — it's something that we have talked to Air North about; it's something that we believe is needed here but also that there is further investment into infrastructure. We have sent off clear communication from my office to the minister's office.

Again, we want to see that money move into those territories. I know that my work as chair of the Northern Premiers' — it's something that the three of us are always consistently wanting to see that commitment not just for defence but, of course, for infrastructure and dual-use infrastructure.

Again, we will continue to see how the \$73 billion rolls out. There have been commitments made from the minister that there would be further investment here — and happy to share with the House that the next step around the naval reserve is that there will be individuals coming here this spring, and we have offered up office space for them to work from.

Question re: Yukon convention centre

Ms. Van Bibber: On October 16 of last year, I asked the minister of tourism about the plans for the new convention centre in Whitehorse and whether or not the Yukon government would be providing any financial support for construction. At that time, the minister said — quote: "... I hope that the members opposite will support this. The way to do that is to support our budget as it comes forward and the capital planning that is in place."

Can the minister tell us how much capital funding is in this budget for the convention centre?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I'll look back to see what we last said about this, but I believe that the last things that we talked about with respect to the convention centre is that we had been working with the federal government around support or investment in the convention centre. That is the thing that we are working on right now.

I want to again acknowledge the great work of Chu Níikwán Limited Partnership in developing this proposal and also the Yukon Convention Bureau and all the work that they have been doing to prepare us for this.

In my conversations that I have often with the tourism industry organizations, they continue to say that investing in a convention centre is the number-one priority. Again, I should just mention that tourism numbers are way up here in the Yukon, so just a shout-out to the industry overall, but we think that the convention centre will raise it to the next level for the Yukon.

Ms. Van Bibber: In 2023, the Yukon government issued an RFP for the development of the convention centre. The successful proponent was Chu Níikwán Development Corporation. When I asked the minister in October, he congratulated them and said that there was work underway.

Yesterday, Chu Níikwán announced on social media that this project has been postponed due to lack of funding. Can the minister explain what this means for the project? What is the new timeline? What are next steps?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I think what I just answered is what the member just asked about.

We've been working — and what Chu Níikwán put out in their post is exactly what we're talking about. We're working to secure federal funding. We are putting skin in the game as well as a territory, but these are big investments. I know that we've indicated this priority to the federal government, and they're well aware of this priority. We have been in close contact with Chu Níikwán.

So, right now, we're working on securing that support. I don't have an announcement today here on the Assembly floor, but I can certainly say that we have not changed our position that this is the priority, and we will work toward it.

Ms. Van Bibber: One concern that we have heard from the various companies that have been associated with the various bids on the initial RFP is that the Yukon government seemed to give the impression that there was funding secured for this project. Many companies spent a lot of money and a lot of time and effort put into the bids because it was a process sanctioned and supported by the Yukon government. They assumed that the government had some assurances of funding.

Can the minister tell us whether or not the federal government ever actually committed to this project? Did the Government of Yukon ever get a commitment in writing from the feds to support this, and how much money did they pledge to commit?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I have never heard such words. What we have said is that it's a priority. In fact, the federal Minister of Tourism came to the Yukon last spring and came

away with this great sense of what the Yukon is like. She experienced the hospitality of this place, and in all of my conversations with her, they have always been positive.

I will start by saying that — all along, we have been transparent about this — we were working to secure this funding, and that hasn't changed. Please, if I've said something different, point it out to me and I'll correct the record of my own words.

The thing that has been happening here with tourism, Mr. Speaker — 2024 — we just got the numbers recently — tourism total spending in the Yukon is up 45 percent over 2019. It is the part of our economy that is just doing amazing, and so a shout-out to all the folks. I Zoomed into the Klondike Visitors Association AGM last night and we were talking about how strong tourism is doing, and we know that a convention centre is the next step for us as a territory.

Question re: Universal pharmacare program

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, last year, the federal government announced its universal pharmacare legislation. Up until then, Canada was the only country in the world that had a universal health care system without universal pharmacare coverage. Multiple studies and commissions have been recommending universal pharmacare coverage since 1964.

One of those reports found that Canadians spent more per person per year on prescription medications than citizens of almost every other country with a universal health care program, so this is a really big deal for all Canadians. Unfortunately, the Yukon has not joined the provinces who have already signed on. While the Yukon Liberals hem and haw about this, Yukoners are the ones literally paying the price.

Can the minister explain the reasons for the delays in signing on to Canada's universal pharmacare program?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. There is no delay with the Yukon signing on. In February of 2024, the federal government announced new pharmacare measures, and then the draft legislation, Bill C-64, received royal assent in October of 2024. So, just a few months ago, it became law. The act respecting pharmacare sets out a framework for a national pharmacare program. The federal government is working on phase 1 to provide coverage for contraception and diabetes medication and supplies.

Health and Social Services have been working with the federal government and our counterparts to understand how the program could be implemented here in the territory and how these new measures can strengthen our existing pharmacare and extended health care program benefits.

I met with the federal Minister of Health and his officials in December in person in Ottawa. We spoke about this program, and we also spoke about drugs for rare diseases, for which we have managed to complete negotiations with the federal government and announced that recently. We have also discussed a number of other top health priorities. We are working on gathering the completed information. I hope that everyone will stay tuned. This is a project that we are working on daily.

Ms. White: Right now in the Yukon, there is limited coverage for diabetes medication and devices. Only some Yukoners are eligible and only some of what they need is covered. People can apply for exceptions, but it is a difficult process with no guarantees. They face delays and stress while they wait to find out if they will get an exception. If they don't, it means hard choices about whether to pay out of pocket or go without. A universal pharmacare plan would change that, but so far, the Yukon isn't accessing it.

When will Yukoners living with diabetes benefit from the national pharmacare program?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Currently, coverage for contraceptives is available to youth enrolled in the children's drug and optical program and for social assistance recipients, so there is some coverage there. Access to birth control is also available through the Yukon Sexual Health Clinic. We are pleased to be able to support that.

All supplies required to manage diabetes and medication, such as insulin, insulin syringes, pumps, lancets, test strips, and glucometers, are currently covered through Insured Health Services. More work is anticipated to understand the details of the coverage for how the federal program will dovetail with the Yukon's current program and availability.

I can also indicate that there is medication and supplies for diabetes covered through the chronic illness program in the Department of Health and Social Services, so there is some coverage. We also look forward to there being broader coverage for those kinds of medications for Yukoners and we are working on a daily basis with the federal government to resolve the final conversations.

Ms. White: Mr. Speaker, I will mention again that not all diabetes medication and not all diabetes devices are actually covered in the Yukon. Access to contraceptives is an issue of fundamental freedom, because it is essential that women have control over their own bodies. Currently, contraceptives are covered for some Yukoners in some cases. That includes social assistance, the children's drug and optical program, and the patients of the Yukon Sexual Health Clinic, but for those who do not fit into those special cases, the high prices for different types of contraceptives are a significant burden. It means that people are forced to make health choices based on cost rather than what works best for them.

So, will the minister explain why Yukoners without extended health care benefits are still paying out of pocket for birth control when a universal pharmacare plan would cover them?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Mr. Speaker, maybe I haven't been clear about this. Our government completely supports the federal government pharmacare program in phase 1. A couple of provinces — three, I think — have signed on already to that in phase 1. There is funding set aside for that. There will be future phase 2 and phase 3 programs, as I understand it, as the federal government continues to speak with provinces and territories and negotiate their circumstances in the way in which this agreement will benefit all Canadians.

What I want to be clear about saying is that we are having those discussions. We are currently having those discussions on

a daily basis with the federal government to determine how Yukoners can benefit from this program.

We currently have three other benefit programs that are disease- or age-based. Diabetic medications are covered here in the territory under the chronic disease and disability benefits program, and there is contraceptive coverage in some cases.

We agree that the federal and Yukon pharmacare program partnership will benefit Yukoners. We are working to have that resolved as quickly as possible so that Yukoners can benefit from this new program.

Question re: Forestry industry

Mr. Cathers: We've heard from numerous Yukoners in the log-home-building industry about significant issues that they have in getting access to the necessary supply of logs. This government has a very poor record when it comes to allowing this local industry to access the necessary supply of pretty much any kind of timber, from fuelwood to home-building logs.

Just yesterday, the EMR minister told the Legislature — quote: "The Yukon Wood Products Association has about 25 hard-working members. We are talking about smaller operators, family outfits, working to make a living to provide good local jobs and practising sustainable forestry. The association is keen to recruit more members, whether they are folks out harvesting wood fuel or sawlogs or crafting fine value-added wood products to sell."

Can the minister tell us what work he has done to ensure that log-home builders will actually be able to access enough logs to keep them working this year?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking the member opposite for agreeing with and acknowledging the great work that the Yukon Wood Products Association is doing. I couldn't agree with him more.

There are several ways in which we are working on promoting more timber harvesting projects around the territory. So, what I have as a note is that, in 2021, we had about 10,000 cubic metres cut. In 2024, we were at 17,600 cubic metres cut, so it's moving in the right direction, but there are still portions that we are concerned about. In particular, the member has talked about wood for log-home building. Typically, that wood was coming from the southeast Yukon, from the Watson Lake area. We have been working with the Liard First Nation to allow for up to 17,000 cubic metres of timber harvest in the Scoby Creek timber harvest plan, and we're working to try to move some timber harvest in the Southern Lakes area. I'll add to my response as we move forward.

Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, the minister claims to support responsible forestry harvesting and use of locally grown timber, but this Liberal government has a record of making it harder for local companies to get permits to harvest, including harvesting standing deadwood after a forest fire.

The Yukon is larger than almost every country in Europe and our homes are surrounded by boreal forest, yet this government is forcing local log-home construction companies to choose between shutting down and importing logs from BC.

On top of that, when two local log-home builders tried to meet with the Premier, he refused to meet with them and

brushed them off to meet with an official. There is still no indication that they will be able to source Yukon logs in time for the construction season.

Can the minister please explain what, if anything, he plans to do to fix the problem?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The Premier did pass across notes that he had gotten from local log-home builders. I didn't see in them any request to meet, but let me just say right now to those folks: I'm happy to sit down with them; I'm happy to bring in the deputy minister; I'm happy to bring in the Forest Management branch to talk through these things. I hope that they are in contact with the branch, and I hope that they are working closely together.

There are some issues around timber; I acknowledge it, and we meet regularly to try to see about how we can increase — for a while there, the issue was around fuelwood. I think that is in a better place, but now what we're looking to deal with is both biomass and saw-logs. I have asked the department to make extra efforts to increase those areas, and there are delays at times, but I have asked the department to identify what those delays are and how we can work through them.

Overall, what I will say is that the department is working hard to address the issues of supply.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Mr. Speaker, log-home builders asked very clearly to meet with the Premier, and the Premier very clearly brushed them off.

Log-home builders who are my constituents and constituents of some of my colleagues want to get logs from the Watson Lake area, as those are the most suitable for home construction. They tell us that areas that have been burnt are ideal for harvesting saw-logs and that it's best to harvest that in about two years after a forest fire. Waiting too long results in some trees starting to rot, and harvesting promptly also avoids damaging revegetation, but the Premier and minister haven't taken this seriously, have not allowed enough permits to be issued, and even took the step of blocking a Watson Lake harvester from selling logs to home builders across the Yukon with a restrictive provision in his permit.

Will the minister finally agree to take action to fix this problem and make permits available so that log-home builders can buy locally grown logs and hire staff to build homes this summer?

Hon. Mr. Pillai: I would just ask the Member for Lake Laberge, later today, if he wants to provide me with the two companies, because I have actually had extensive discussions with an operation that sits right in his riding. I think my last discussion with the principal of that company was in the last five days, again, discussing how many people work within that particular riding of Lake Laberge, what the structure is, how it's moved, what is the supply chain of logs, understanding, I think, that's an incredible business that Yukoner has built.

Again, I think, just to set the record straight — please, if there are two companies whom I did not talk to who were missed, happy to talk to them. I'm just making sure that there wasn't a misinformation and that the Member for Lake Laberge isn't up to date before coming in to ask questions today.

Again, there is a lot of talking from across the way when the record is corrected, but again, happy to support this industry. I think it's incredible, the work they do. Again, we want to make sure that there is feedstock available and that they're not shipping logs in from British Columbia but that we are accessing some of the best logs that are available, which are in southeast Yukon.

Question re: Resource Gateway project

Mr. Hassard: So, in September 2017, former Prime Minister Trudeau travelled to the Yukon to announce \$360 million in funding for resource roads under the gateway resource program. Since then, only one project has seen significant work.

Almost five years ago, back in April 2020, a project agreement was signed for two projects within the traditional territory of the Ross River Dena Council, one of which was for bridge upgrades and safety improvements on the North Canol. This road is used by many Yukon residents and companies for recreation, tourism, and mining purposes.

In their February bulletin, Fireweed Metals referenced the North Canol, saying — quote: "... the corridor's poor condition is a primary constraint for the development of Mactung and Macpass."

We have received several complaints over the past number of years regarding the state of the North Canol. Can the minister tell us when we can expect to see the gateway money for the North Canol spent and what the total budget is for that work?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: The Yukon Resource Gateway project supports infrastructure upgrades for up to 650 kilometres of existing roads and areas with high mineral potential and active mining in the Yukon. Jointly funded by the Government of Yukon, the Government of Canada, and the mining industry, the program aims to improve safety, reliability, and accessibility of Yukon's road networks. These upgrades will create short- and long-term employment, training opportunities, and benefits for Yukon First Nations, Yukoners, local communities, and industry.

In January 2025, we awarded two contracts to a Ross River Dena Council business for highway right-of-way clearing and salvage between kilometre 366 and kilometre 368.1 of the Robert Campbell Highway. Ross River Dena Council businesses were also invited to bid on those procurement opportunities to support local businesses and promote opportunities in the community.

In August of 2024, we awarded a contract to replace a culvert at kilometre 23.2 —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Hassard: Unfortunately for Yukoners listening, we are trying to talk about the North Canol and the South Canol today, not the Campbell Highway or the Silver Trail — maybe if the minister could focus a little bit here.

The 2025-26 budget documents show that the maintenance for the Canol Road is down \$100,000 from last year. This applies to both the North Canol and the South Canol. This news will be disappointing to many Yukon individuals and companies. Can the minister provide us with a breakdown of

maintenance budgets for each portion of the Canol Road? Further, can he explain why he decided to cut the budget for these roads this year?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I look forward to having an in-depth discussion with respect to the maintenance schedule of all Yukon roads with the member opposite in a scant few hours in the Committee of the Whole debate when Highways and Public Works is here and we can have that discussion.

Anyway, I will continue with respect to the Resource Gateway but can confirm that the South Canol is not a priority with respect to the Resource Gateway program. In August of 2024, as I indicated, we awarded a contract to replace a culvert at kilometre 23.2 on the Silver Trail to the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun. The existing culvert at this location was putting the road at an increased risk of washout. The \$4.2-million Yukon Resource Gateway program budget will be fully spent this year. The 2024-25 fiscal budget also funded Silver Trail heritage studies, fish studies, and an engineering assessment of the Mayo River bridge.

In October of 2024, we submitted the Silver Trail component between kilometre 0 and kilometre 57 to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board. The project submitted to the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Board is currently in the assessment and evaluation process. It includes repairs to sections of the highway, rectifying areas with safety, geometric design —

Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Hassard: It almost makes a person wonder why they bother asking these questions, but we will continue, because that is what the Yukon taxpayers are paying us to do.

One of the mining companies working on the area, Fireweed Metals, has received funding from the Government of Canada in support of its critical minerals projects at Macpass. In the same bulletin referenced earlier, Fireweed stated that Canada is — and I quote again: "... offering support for infrastructure like roads and transmission lines." They go on to say — and I'll quote again: "... beginning to plan to undertake studies of the North Canol corridor in Summer 2025."

Given that the Yukon government is responsible for the North Canol and existing power infrastructure, can the minister tell us what support the Yukon government is offering to these studies?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: I met with the folks from Fireweed both at Roundup and at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada meetings in Toronto earlier this month. In both instances, we talked about the work that they're doing — it's feasibility work that is — they're looking at this and yes, both from the critical minerals infrastructure fund and from the US, have invested in this feasibility work. We have asked them: How can we be supportive of — one of our past staff is now working with them, so we have a good relationship or they know how we work as a government. We talked, for example, about aligning with the work — the critical minerals infrastructure fund — on the grid-connect between the Yukon and British Columbia. We talked about aligning with ongoing maintenance work that's happening with Highways and Public

Works. We talked about working with the Ross River Dena Council and their work around investigating for a protection or conservation area.

Yes, we did sit down with them; we have talked with them and asked about how we could be supportive of that work. We think that it's a great investment for the Yukon.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Deputy Chair (MLA Tredger): Order. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 8, Department of Justice, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

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. 216: *Third Appropriation Act* — continued

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 8, Department of Justice, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Justice

Deputy Chair: Is there any general debate?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Deputy Chair, I would like to thank the Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice, Mark Radke, for joining me here this afternoon as well as Luda Ayzenburg, the director of finance. Thank you very much for being here to support and help answer the questions. I am very pleased to present the Department of Justice *Supplementary Estimates No. 2* for 2024-25.

Throughout the fiscal year, the department and our partners have worked diligently to support the justice system that is responsive to the needs of Yukoners in a fiscally responsible manner. This is reflected in the second supplementary budget and continues to be our goal going forward.

Through continued strategic investments in our future, we are building a healthy, vibrant, safe, and sustainable Yukon. We

work to make improvements at all times with our expenditures and to make sure that we are serving Yukoners. The supplementary budget presented today enables the department to offer programming and support initiatives to meet those objectives on many occasions and in many different ways.

Capital and operation and maintenance expenditures here presented in the supplementary budget total \$3.839 million. There is a reduction in capital expenditures of \$1.289 million, so the total presented in this budget as an expenditure is \$2.55 million. There are many expenditures, including coroner's equipment and expenses, in that total, expenses for the coroner's inquests in 2024, Whitehorse Correctional Centre's expenses — costs related to the Whitehorse Correctional Centre psychiatric assessments, additional expenses for correctional officers and equipment for them, and the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. There are: funds for community impact statements, funds to enhance technology and information system needs, funds to provide additional materials for the law library, funds to deal with expenses regarding deputy judges, additional Court Services expenses due to jury trials, contracts for outside counsel, support for the Yukon Public Legal Education Association, Yukon Utilities Board core expenses, activities to counter drug-impaired driving, funds to provide a family courtworker framework, funds to support the sexualized assault response team, funds to support the victim services agreement with British Columbia, increases for 911 operators, and funds for legal aid.

I have a number of notes with respect to the expenditures and I will note some of those. Perhaps that will answer some questions, but I am happy to take questions as well.

There is an additional \$10,000 for equipment for the coroner's service. That expenditure is for specialized stretchers that will help communities and community coroners to deal with individuals who are deceased in a respectful way. It is for the respectful transportation of those deceased persons. That is a capital expense.

The Whitehorse Correctional Centre building and security communication system is also a capital expense. It is the one that is the reduction from 2024-25. The project is in procurement stages, with an open tender posted in the last quarter of 2024-25, and the work will begin in the first quarter of this year. So, the capital expense reduction of \$1,000,299 is showing here in this supplementary budget. It has been requested to reallocate the funds into this fiscal year 2025-26.

In July 2023, the governments of Yukon and Canada signed an agreement to advance the *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence*. This will bring \$16.4 million over four years to 16 initiatives designed to prevent violence in the territory and to support individuals who are victims of this horrible crime. To this end, we allocated a one-time funding increase of \$497,000 to carry forward unspent funds received from Women and Gender Equality Canada in 2023-24.

The Government of Yukon has allocated an increase of \$100,000 to support the Council of Yukon First Nations' continued implementation of their community impact statement program. There is an increased allocation of

\$170,000 for IT equipment and network licensing, reflecting an increase in technology costs.

We've also allocated an increase of \$240,000 to cover additional expenses due to the increased cost of law library materials. Equivalent services are available for the public in our law library and legal community and in other jurisdictions in Canada, but our law library is unique in the territory in that it is also a public law library. It is used by individuals in the legal community, sole practitioners, small law firms that might not have access to such materials, as well as university students and other members of the public.

The Yukon population is increasing and this has contributed to more matters coming before the courts. The Territorial Court relies on deputy judges from other jurisdictions to ensure that court matters proceed as scheduled and on a timely basis. Those timelines have been established firmly by the Supreme Court of Canada with respect to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. As a result, we have additional funding for that matter.

The timely resolution of criminal charges increases public safety and confidence in the administration of justice. So, we have allocated a one-time increase of \$400,000 to cover those costs.

More accused persons are choosing to be tried in the Supreme Court by judge and jury, as is their right, depending on the charges that are before the court. This has required an increase of \$50,000 in the 2024-25 second supplementary budget that is before us.

We have also allocated a one-time increase of \$250,000 for outside counsel costs, litigation, legislative drafting, and other matters requiring specialized legal expertise that is not available here in the territory at the Department of Justice or otherwise. Workload issues contribute to the outside counsel costs, as do legal matters being heard outside of the Yukon.

The Yukon Public Legal Education Association has been allocated a one-time increase of \$100,000 to support the objectives of the access-to-justice agreement. This fund is 50-percent recoverable from the Government of Canada.

The coroner's office is experiencing a 15-percent increase in cases this year, resulting in increased costs for autopsies, increased costs for community coroners' honoraria, increased costs due to travel to communities, increased contract costs for investigative experts, and increased rental expenses. The increase of \$225,000 has been allocated in response to the growth in those cases.

The 14-day coroner's inquest held in early 2024-25 cost \$200,000 more than the initial funding allocation provided in the main estimates. These additional costs were reflected in the secondary supplementary estimates. I should note that the coroner's inquest line item is generally quite low in that it's not known at the beginning of the main budgets whether or not there will be any inquests in that particular year. Additionally, when costs do arise, then they have to come in supplementary budgets.

Inquests are held at the sole discretion of the chief coroner and on occasion the Minister of Justice, depending on the

situation, and the inquests are an important way to learn from past tragedies so that we might avoid future ones.

Next, we have increases associated with the Yukon Utilities Board and they include an increase of \$125,000 for expenses — a one-time request to cover hearing costs. This is 100-percent recoverable from the public utilities appearing before the board following the hearings.

The Drug Impaired Driving contribution agreement receives an increase in this supplementary budget of \$58,000 to the funding envelope for fiscal year 2024-25.

The Whitehorse Correctional Centre requires an increase of \$452,000 to cover the costs of utilities, health service contracts, and other facility contracts, including physicians, psychologists, dentists, and building security communication system services. Part of those costs are noted to be the steady increase in some vendor prices like fuel usage and contract costs.

The Integrated Restorative Justice unit will receive \$54,000 in fiscal year 2024-25 — should this supplemental budget pass — from the Government of Canada to build on the framework that was developed in 2023-24 for a Yukon Indigenous family courtworker program — continues to support that work.

The Yukon Women's Transition Home Society is a sexualized response team contributor that has been operating the sexualized assault support line since 2020. This service is supported through a transfer payment agreement with the Women and Gender Equity Directorate. Those costs are shown here.

Through an agreement with the Government of British Columbia, Yukon Victim Services provides service to victims of crime in Atlin and Lower Post, British Columbia. An increase of \$10,000 in time-limited funding for the British Columbia victim services agreement is 100-percent recoverable from the Government of British Columbia.

In September of 2024, the Whitehorse Correctional Centre received a treatment order from the Territorial Court ordering a transfer of an inmate from the Yukon to Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences in Whitby, Ontario. This order included a requirement for the inmate to return to Whitehorse to attend an in-person court appearance in October 2024. The Whitehorse Correctional Centre is requesting an increase of \$285,000 to cover the costs required to support the safe transfer of this inmate to and from Ontario Shores, inclusive of inpatient fees at Ontario Shores, travel costs, and staff expenses.

The Whitehorse Correctional Centre is also seeking a further \$167,000 to outfit correctional officers with vests to increase employee safety.

The second round of RCMP collective bargaining resulted in an increase of \$102,000 to the RCMP 911 agreement. The Government of Yukon pays 100 percent of the cost for dispatchers assigned to 911 positions who answer calls to 911 and coordinate emergency responses.

A time-limited increase of \$169,000 until March of 2027 is being sought here to support the Yukon Legal Services Society's operation of a new legal aid clinic. In December of 2024, the Government of Canada provided an additional

\$2,387,000 in funding over three fiscal years to support the delivery of legal aid services. This reflects the Legal Services Society's intention to continue the excellent work being done through this legal aid clinic. The total budget for the Yukon Legal Services Society for 2024-25 comes to \$3,426,820.

Deputy Chair, thank you for allowing me to outline the expenditures here. Some of them would be considered small, but I think that it's important for Yukoners to know the details of a supplementary budget and just how carefully it is prepared by the individuals and the leaders who work at the Department of Justice and the director of finance there. I would like to thank all those who work so hard to ensure that this budget comes before you in an accurate and understandable and explanatory way. I would also like to thank those in the Department of Justice who work so hard to administer the justice system here in the territory for the benefit of Yukoners.

We continue to build relationships with our partners to support good governance, encourage innovation, foster safe communities, and support culturally relevant services, recognizing that this is a continuous process of improvement.

I look forward to answering questions from my colleagues about this supplementary budget for the Department of Justice.

Mr. Cathers: I would first of all thank officials as well for attending and for the briefing.

I want to note that the minister, in her introductory remarks, said — and I believe I'm quoting her correctly. If I've missed a word, I would refer to the Blues for that, but I believe she said — quote: "... we are building a healthy, vibrant, safe, and sustainable Yukon."

Deputy Chair, that statement, while a laudable goal — to suggest that is a reality is really not reflecting what we're hearing from Yukoners, especially people in the downtown area as well as in a number of neighbourhoods and communities who are very concerned about the increase in property crime.

It's also not reflective of statements made by the RCMP recently, including an article that was in the *Yukon News* on March 13 entitled "Organized crime bigger, more lucrative than previously understood in Yukon", which contains a number of quotes from the RCMP about an increase in organized crime activity in the territory.

I would note that recently I saw — as did many of my colleagues — a video that went viral from a recent incident. I believe it was on the weekend on Main Street, where there was activity involving a group of what appeared to be youths or young adults shouting at each other and what appeared to be guns pulled, although it was hard for me to tell from the video whether they were, in fact, real firearms or replicas, such as pellet guns. But again, for the minister to suggest that the government is building a healthy, vibrant, safe, and sustainable Yukon is really ignoring the reality on the ground, which is that the situation is actually getting worse.

I will move on to asking some specific questions about organized crime a little later on, but I want to first move to the question of the Yukon RCMP and their role in the Yukon going forward. As the minister will be well aware, ex-Prime Minister Justice Trudeau released, just shortly before leaving office, a white paper entitled *A New Policing Vision for Canada:*

Modernizing the RCMP. That announcement was clearly a shock to a number of RCMP members. The Chief Superintendent of the Yukon RCMP told CBC, in an article dated March 11, 2025 — and I quote: “‘My reaction was one of surprise,’ said Chief Supt. Lindsay Ellis, commanding officer for Yukon RCMP, about Trudeau’s proposal.”

That is concerning to see this proposal coming out from the federal Liberal government suggesting a massive change to the RCMP that would dramatically change the structure of policing across the country and move away from contract policing, which is absolutely depended on in the Yukon and other jurisdictions. So, it is not clear at this point in time whether that statement reflects the views and visions of an outgoing prime minister or whether it is the current policy position of the federal Liberal government under newly anointed Prime Minister Mark Carney and whether, in fact, Yukoners can expect that, should the Liberals federally continue to be in government, that they will perhaps gut the RCMP across the country.

The question for the minister is: What does she know about this white paper? What discussions has she or the Premier had with the federal government regarding it, and are they clear at this point in time on whether Prime Minister Carney plans to implement that white paper announced by the ex-Prime Minister Trudeau?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I appreciate the question. On March 10, former Prime Minister Trudeau did release a white paper of his opinion regarding modernizing the RCMP. I can advise that we, the Department of Justice here in the territory and our local M Division RCMP leadership, have been engaged in discussing the transformation of federal policing for several years — certainly during the time in which I have been involved here and in more recent years.

Back in the fall of 2023, in fact, our deputy minister and the Assistant Deputy Minister of Community Justice and Public Safety and some Yukon officials met with the Deputy Commissioner of Federal Policing to share concerns and speak about this very issue about the Federal Policing transformation. We are extremely engaged. It is certainly a topic on all of the agendas. I have spoken to my counterparts across the country. I have had the opportunity to meet with Commissioner Mike Duheme, and we spoke about this issue when we met here in person in the Yukon. He subsequently issued a statement, after the statement in March by the former Prime Minister, saying that the RCMP was not consulted in the development of the white paper and that the RCMP, of course, was working on their own plan and presented a plan to Public Safety Canada about RCMP operations. That was done several months ago.

Our government is aware of ongoing conversations about the shifting landscape of public safety threats affecting Canadians and the need for effective federal policing capacity to respond to the issues such as cyber security and cross-border crime. Those are certainly important issues to Yukoners as well as Canadians.

But this must be balanced with the fact that Yukoners and Canadians also need effective models of community policing that respond to day-to-day realities. The member opposite and

Yukoners who have heard the interview with CO Ellis will know that she was very clear that she and the top management of the RCMP had spoken about this in the interest of contract policing here in the Yukon. I think her quote was: We’re not going anywhere — if I can paraphrase that.

The RCMP will be contract police service providers for many years to come. We are assured in all of our conversations that they understand the context of the importance of having M Division here in the territory and the services that it provides to Yukoners.

We will, however, continue our conversations with the Government of Canada and with the Yukon RCMP M Division to continue to ensure that we are an integral part of those conversations and that Yukoners receive effective, accountable policing responsive to the needs and priorities of Yukon communities.

I can also indicate, since we are talking about budgets today, that the Government of Yukon continues to invest significant resources in the Yukon’s RCMP, including funding for specialized units that investigate homicides, drug trafficking, and organized crime. In addition, we’ve increased investigational capacity under the safer communities and neighbourhoods unit, supported community safety planning and crime prevention through environmental design initiatives, and increased the use of restorative justice processes. It takes all kinds of responses to make sure that the Yukon community is as safe as possible and that we are supporting the RCMP.

To be clear, it’s an opportunity for us to continue our discussions about long-term vision for contract policing. Those conversations will continue with the provinces and territories. There are other places, of course, in Canada where contract policing is the service provider for communities and none of that is expected to change, despite the opinion of the former Prime Minister.

At the same time, we continue to make sure that the RCMP is equipped with the tools that it needs here to carry out their important community work and to fend off national security threats.

We have continued, again, to have conversations with the RCMP about contract policing and our territorial priorities and policing services that have been — and those conversations have been ongoing for several years. We have maintained our position, as have many other jurisdictions, that contract policing is essential, and our partnership is strong.

I have not spoken to Prime Minister Carney about this particular issue. I have spoken to Minister McGuinty, in charge of public safety, with respect to these issues. I know that the deputy minister has spoken with the Deputy Minister of Public Safety and the deputy ministers of Justice. I know that these conversations, as I have said — I would consider us to be extremely engaged on them. I have all of the assurances that I can have at the moment from the RCMP — both at the M Division level and all the way up to Commissioner Duheme’s level — that Yukon’s concerns are heard, that there will not be any drastic changes, and that contract policing is alive and well here in the territory, and I look forward to our future

relationship with M Division leadership and the services that they provide for Yukoners here.

Mr. Cathers: I appreciate the information that the minister provided. I would also like to thank Chief Superintendent Lindsay Ellis for her strong statements on this subject and reinforcing her belief in the importance of RCMP continuing to serve our communities, as quoted in the *Yukon News* article dated March 17 entitled “Top Yukon RCMP officer won’t direct removal of police force from communities”. Chief Superintendent Ellis is quoted as making comments about it, including: “I heard from many people from the communities, from Whitehorse, from within the Yukon, in various roles, about their support of the RCMP after the white paper was released, and at times, absolute anger for some of the suggestion of the RCMP perhaps not being here beyond 2032 when our contract is renegotiated with the territory,” she said.

“Ellis agreed with her predecessor, recently retired Commanding Officer Scott Sheppard, that it would be a giant step backwards to depart from the national police force’s presence on the front lines.

“Ellis indicated the Yukon RCMP currently can move experienced police officers between national policing responsibilities and to areas of crisis and concern and share physical assets.

“We’re facing unprecedented challenges as a country to our sovereignty, to our security and to our economy, and any destabilization of the national police service would be disastrous to some of those challenges that we’re are facing,” she said.”

I am pleased to hear the minister indicate that the government’s position is that contract policing is essential. Again, we were quite concerned by the proposal made by Prime Minister Trudeau to move away from contract policing. The paper itself is quite explicit, saying in that white paper *A New Policing Vision for Canada* — quote: “The federal government should be committed to working closely with Provinces to support a transition away from contract policing...” On that same page further on, it also makes reference to saying that the federal government should — quote: “... collaborate with Territorial leaders and Indigenous partners to define a new policing model...”

I am happy to hear the minister’s comments. The concern, of course, from our perspective is that, while we applaud the RCMP for their strong continued commitment here to the Yukon, decisions made by the federal government could create a situation where neither the Yukon government nor the Yukon RCMP are able to act in a way that they believe is necessary.

I appreciate that the minister indicated that she had spoken to federal Minister McGuinty. Would she please confirm, at the Premier’s upcoming meeting with new Prime Minister Mark Carney, that he will be raising the issue of the RCMP and urging him to clarify whether the incoming Prime Minister supports the recently departed Prime Minister’s vision for ending contract policing or if Prime Minister Carney will disavow the white paper that Trudeau issued and abandon any proposal to slash contract policing across the country?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am not privy to the agenda items on the Council of the Federation meeting, which I understand is imminent. As such, I can’t assure you that it will be raised with Prime Minister Carney. What I can say is that this is a critically important issue for the Yukon. We have expressed it at every table that we can. We will continue to do so. We have all the assurances that we can have at the moment from the leadership of the RCMP and the federal ministers whom we have spoken to that this will not be a change that is made in relation to contract policing here in the territory.

As I have answered on the previous opportunity to stand, I have given quite a bit of information about the details of where we are. I am sorry, specifically with respect to the question now about the agenda of the Council of the Federation — I am just not aware of what that is. I don’t speculate with respect to situations or answers here in the Legislative Assembly, but, of course, we are all aware that border security, the security of Canada, and Canadian sovereignty are all key important issues, and the role that our public safety officials play in that will quite likely be part of the conversations, but it’s not specific knowledge of the agenda that I have.

Mr. Cathers: I acknowledge the minister’s comments. If she is not clear about what’s on the Council of the Federation agenda, I will certainly accept that for the time being, but I would urge her, as well as the Premier, to both be clear at every opportunity with the federal government that they oppose the Trudeau white paper proposing ending contract policing by the RCMP. I would also specifically ask that the minister commit to either her or the Premier or both writing a clear letter to the federal government stating opposition to the Trudeau RCMP white paper and asking for a clear and specific commitment from Prime Minister Carney that he will not implement the Trudeau vision for slashing RCMP contract policing, if elected to government.

We do not know at this point — at least I do not know — what current Prime Minister Carney’s position is on the RCMP white paper released by Mr. Trudeau, but we do know that the Cabinet under Mr. Carney is virtually the same as the Cabinet under former Prime Minister Trudeau. It is not clear to us whether that white paper was a reflection just of the outgoing Prime Minister’s view or is, in fact, a reflection of the Cabinet view of the federal Liberal government. If it is indeed an idea that has favour within the federal Liberal Cabinet, then indeed there is the concern for people, including for us, that perhaps after a federal election, if Prime Minister Carney is successful in staying in office, that indeed we might all face the very nasty surprise that he may intend to implement Trudeau’s vision for gutting RCMP contract policing across the country, which would have very serious negative consequences here in the Yukon.

So, I would again — as I noted at the start — specifically urge the minister and the Premier to, at every opportunity, raise this issue with the federal government. And I would ask her to commit that either she or the Premier or both will write a clear letter to their federal counterparts opposing the Trudeau white paper on gutting RCMP contract policing and asking Prime Minister Carney or the current federal minister for the portfolio

to provide a very clear and very specific commitment that they are disavowing the Trudeau RCMP white paper and will not implement it if they remain in office.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I have no issue with the commitment. I appreciate the suggestion, but our letters are already being drafted. This one's from me. I will speak to the Premier about writing to his counterpart, but it's important, of course — as I have said, I think, through all of the answers today so far — this is critical for the Yukon Territory. I do not expect it to change significantly. We have all the assurances we can from senior RCMP that this is not their opinion of the future of the RCMP here in Canada. As a result, they have recognized contract policing as being key. We will convey that information and our position here in the Yukon, representing Yukoners, through correspondence to our counterparts.

Mr. Cathers: Deputy Chair, I appreciate the commitment from the minister. This is, as I noted, a topic of concern. While I accept and appreciate that the territorial government, as well as the RCMP, are opposed to the vision of gutting contract policing released by former Prime Minister Trudeau just shortly before leaving office, as I mentioned, there is the concern and the risk that if indeed Prime Minister Carney supports that agenda, the actions taken by the federal government could be beyond the control of the RCMP and against the recommendations of the RCMP and beyond the ability of the territorial government to do anything about it, either.

I appreciate the commitment to write a letter. I do also want to just briefly acknowledge, since we're talking about the role of the RCMP — and it was touched on by the commanding officer — about the importance to national security and sovereignty. Some people may not be aware of it, but we here in the territory — our borders with Alaska are the result of the North-West Mounted Police and their actions in asserting sovereignty and defining our borders during the gold rush. We all owe them our appreciation for that work and the excellent service that members have provided since that time throughout the territory as well as the risk that they take personally each and every day in serving the public and dealing with criminals.

Moving on, I want to talk about the issues around organized crime. That is something — as the minister knows, there was recently a report that some information was shared by the RCMP with media that is in contrast to the previous report. The report was shared, I believe, in its entirety with media as well as the public. I understand the explanation that has been provided, as quoted in the *Yukon News* in an article dated March 13 entitled “Organized crime bigger, more lucrative than previously understood in Yukon.” That article references the RCMP saying, “RCMP won't release the full 2025 report to the *News* or the public due to the ‘sensitive information’ it contains, according to Yukon RCMP communications.”

While that is somewhat disappointing, I would give them the benefit of the doubt that there is probably a good reason for that.

The article also notes that — quote: “A new report on organized crime has concluded that the Yukon's illegal drug

market may be more expansive and lucrative than previously believed as organized crime groups in British Columbia and Alberta expand their drug lines into the Yukon, according to an RCMP statement on March 13.

“Between 2020 to 2024, five organized crime networks have been identified operating in the Yukon. That number remains unchanged from a 2022 report on organized crime.”

It further goes on to note: “An executive summary of the report has been made public in the RCMP statement.”

It also notes: “Further insights have emerged since the first report, according to the statement from Chief Supt. Lindsay Ellis, the Yukon RCMP's commanding officer.”

Further in the article — again attributed to Chief Superintendent Ellis, the article notes that the report has — quote: “... provided an overarching view of what many Yukoners have experienced over many years: the direct, and tragic impact of organized crime influence in our communities, including loss, violent crime, property crime, and overall sense of safety, shaken,” reads Ellis's statement.”

It further notes: “Fifteen to 20 kilograms of high purity cocaine is being supplied to and trafficked in the Yukon per month, as noted in the summary. That number is up 75 per cent from 2021...”

So, with that in mind — and I do appreciate that the government has a commitment in this year's budget for increased resources for the RCMP. As the minister knows, we have long supported that and urged the government to increase resources for the RCMP on multiple occasions over the past several years, including through a motion that we brought forward in this Assembly back some time ago, which was passed with the support of most members.

My question is regarding — can the minister talk about the state of organized criminal activity in the territory now and what steps the government and the RCMP are taking in response to that increase in organized crime activity?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The Yukon RCMP and the Department of Justice certainly recognize that organized crime and illicit drug trafficking have had and continue to have a devastating impact on families and friends and communities across the territory.

We are listening to communities to understand the impacts and we are working with partners across multiple sectors to address them. The Government of Yukon is investing significant resources in the RCMP, including a \$5.2 million increase in the 2025-26 budget that has been introduced and will be before this Legislative Assembly.

Having a strong policing presence is critical to respond to immediate safety and enforcement concerns. I appreciate the good work that the RCMP does to disrupt the activities of organized crime in the territory. I am not sure what sort of details the member opposite is expecting. I am happy to provide information that I can at a high level. Clearly, the RCMP did not — I have been asked about how they are responding and how the department is working with them to have them respond. I note that the specific report known as *Organized Crime in the Yukon: An Examination of Criminal Networks and the Associated Impacts* was not released publicly in its entirety.

Clearly, this is for the purpose of protecting security of those who work in this area — work to disrupt this kind of criminal activity — and the safety of those individuals must be paramount.

However, progress to meaningfully shift the landscape of crime and the markets for illicit drugs requires action on a complex level — on a complex attack on underlying social issues and support for individuals who get involved as addicts and users of illicit drugs in this complex matter. Our government remains committed to supporting those affected by these harms through a coordinated approach and strengthened enforcement while also addressing the root causes of crime. It is a multi-faceted approach that must be taken, including those related to substance use, mental health, housing, and social inequities.

Work is ongoing under the downtown Whitehorse safety response action plan and the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* containing actions aimed at a holistic response to address treatment and recovery, prevention, harm reduction, and community safety and well-being — the pillars of action in the *Substance Use Health Emergency Strategy* — to support those most at risk and helping to build safer and healthier communities.

When we have those safer and healthier communities — always the goal — I note that there were some comments at the beginning of this session today questioning my statement about the dedication of the workers at the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Justice and all of those who are involved in the concepts of community safety and policing and ultimately assisting in a harm-reduction approach. Those criticisms from the other side of this Legislative Assembly, I think, go to the heart often of our workers, our dedicated professionals in the Department of Justice, and I think that this is probably not what was intended despite the fact that is their goal on a daily basis — to make a safer, healthier, more just community here in the territory.

We have increased investments at RCMP M Division significantly, and I will come to that in just a moment. The investments that we made in the first supplementary budget, in this supplementary budget, and in the 2025-26 budget that has a current increase of \$5.2 million for RCMP funding — these investments have included many new front-line officers for the RCMP, including new officers in the Whitehorse detachment and for specialized units, such as the emergency response team and making permanent the work of Car 867, which has been very successful in responding to incidents in Whitehorse where appropriate mental health and well-being supports are an important part of the response. I can also indicate that we have increased funding for the crime reduction unit. We have increased funding for the safer communities and neighbourhoods unit. The 2025-26 budget — the Government of Yukon is providing an increase to the *Territorial Policing Service Agreement*. That brings the total funding for the RCMP in 2025-26 to \$47 million.

I was very pleased to hear from the member opposite that the member is in favour of increased funding to the RCMP. I truly hope, as I always do, that they could see their way clear

as a party to supporting the budget that is before this Legislative Assembly. I appreciate that they think they have historical and other reasons to not do so, but it is really hard for them to stand and say: We support funding to the RCMP — and absolutely never, ever vote for it.

We have increased funding to the RCMP significantly since 2018 on an ongoing and higher rate. This year, \$1.8 million of the increased funding will support eight new RCMP positions and one public service employee, while \$3.4 million will be used for critical equipment, operational costs, and RCMP pay raise increases per the collective bargaining agreement.

The increases to the RCMP budget are triple the 2024-25 investment, which came in at \$1.7 million, but this demonstrates our commitment to properly resource the RCMP to address crime and protect Yukoners from critical threats. I think I was asked specifically about the activities that have been aimed at crime reduction. I only have a minute or so, but I can add that there are a number of those. I am happy to continue to indicate what those are and the funding that goes toward those in the Yukon, but there certainly are specific things that are aimed at crime reduction here in the territory.

Mr. Cathers: I would like to ask the minister some questions regarding the harm-reduction programs operated by the government. While I know that many of these would be from the Health and Social Services side, the thrust of my question is regarding the possible negative unintended consequences of well-meaning harm-reduction policies. This includes that recently the BC NDP government made a major announcement regarding its so-called “safe supply” program of drugs. They made a major change to it. For the reference of Hansard, I am quoting an online article from *CTV News Vancouver* dated February 19, 2025. In talking about this announcement, I will just quote a few of the comments from it — quote: Last month “... former solicitor general Mike Farnworth and the RCMP’s commanding officer in B.C. both said there was no evidence of ‘widespread’ diversion.

“But earlier this month, a leaked Ministry of Health briefing for police said a ‘significant portion’ of opioids prescribed in B.C. were being diverted, and prescribed alternatives were being trafficked provincially, nationally and internationally.

“Osborne said an investigation into diversion was started by a Ministry of Health investigative unit last June.

“The B.C. Association of Chiefs of Police welcomed the witnessed-only model and said ‘additional safeguards around safe supply programs’ would prevent diversion of prescription medication.”

So, again, with that specific reference there to saying that so-called “safe supply” drugs from BC were being diverted “provincially, nationally and internationally”, that brings to mind a couple questions.

The first is: Does the minister currently have any information on what portion of BC’s so-called “safe supply” drugs may have been diverted into the Yukon market? What harms may be associated with that?

Secondly, could the minister indicate and compare and contrast how the Yukon's program compares to British Columbia's? What steps, if any, are being taken by the Yukon government following the BC government's major policy shift and admission that the BC NDP's policies around safe supply were causing serious negative unintended consequences to communities, as evidenced by the Premier and health minister abandoning elements of the policy and making a dramatic about-face?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I note that I was asked about this in the media a few days ago and was happy to confirm that we have no indication whatsoever that safe supply drugs from either BC or the Yukon Territory are in the street market here in the territory. I think that we are — back in 2020 and 2021 — sorry, 2022, after the substance use health emergency declaration — and in 2022 and 2023, we were very careful to watch what was happening in British Columbia. British Columbia had decriminalized a number of drugs, and they had different laws from the ones that we have here in the territory. Certainly, we met with our partners, with First Nation leadership, with the RCMP, with the substance use health emergency team at the Department of Health and Social Services. We spoke extensively. I had lots of lobbying requests and letters to decriminalize certain drugs here in the territory. We were always very careful to determine that we wanted to watch and see what was happening in British Columbia.

As a result, I think at this point, we are pleased that is, in fact, the case. There was no need for a reversal of the policies there or here, as has been the case in British Columbia. I think it comes from a number of things, not the least of which are very specific opportunities for opioid agonist therapies to be directed by medical professionals here in the territory — the amazing work done at the Referred Care Clinic by those physicians, nurses, and caregivers and the amazing work that they do, also, at 405 Alexander, because they operate there as well to support individuals, and the strict rules and policies around how such opioids are distributed to patients who need them.

According to Statistics Canada — and these are stats from 2023 — there were 50 police-reported criminal incidents of possession of illicit drugs in the Yukon in 2023 and 146 police-reported incidents for drug trafficking, production, or distribution.

According to the 2023 police-reported crime statistics, drug violations in the Yukon decreased by 21 percent — 242 incidents in 2022 to 196 incidents in 2023. I think that the decline observed in drug offences, particularly drug possession, may be due to changes in the police charging practices but also is in addition to the concept of our supervised consumption site being a safe place for individuals, to the increase of opioids agonist therapies, support by medical professionals, and by a number of our policies here in the territory.

I should note that the statistics from 2023 about criminal incidents of drug possession are not with respect to diverting drugs from any of the harm-reduction programs we have here.

Mr. Cathers: I think that I will move on from crime for the moment. I appreciate the information that the minister

provided to me there. We will, of course, once we get into the debate on the main budget itself, be asking a number of questions regarding it also. The increase in crime, both property crime and violence, is of great concern to many Yukoners and is something that we frequently hear from people about. Many Yukoners feel that, in the last several years, communities have become less safe and that their own sense of safety about where they live, as well as particularly in the downtown area, including Main Street and the surrounding area, is down. They do not feel safe like they used to, and many people ask us: What has happened to Whitehorse, and what has happened to the Yukon?

I want to move on to another matter that I had hoped could be addressed through letters alone, but unfortunately, that doesn't appear to be the case. As the minister knows, I wrote to her recently regarding the situation of a Yukon woman who meets the eligibility criteria for legal aid but has been denied by them. This lady needs legal advice to help her divorce her estranged husband, whom she testified against at his trial for a violent crime. The outcome of the trial was that he was convicted of murder.

In my letter to the Minister of Justice dated February 19, 2025 — which I copied to the Premier — I politely asked the minister to help this lady access support for the legal advice that she needs. I noted specifically — quote: "Whether any such funding originates from Yukon Legal Services Society, Victim Services Branch, or elsewhere - someone needs to help her get the legal advice and assistance she deserves."

The minister's reply to me, dated March 13, 2025, was quite disappointing, to say the least. In that letter, the minister also specifically suggested that I refer this lady to the executive director for Yukon Legal Services Society. However, as the minister should know, the current executive director of that society represented this lady's husband as one of his defense lawyers at trial. There is at the very least a reasonable perception of bias in this situation, and it looks like it may be a conflict of interest.

For both Legal Aid and then the Department of Justice to deny this lady help with the costs of legal advice to assist her with divorcing her estranged husband after she testified against him at his trial for one of the most serious offences under the *Criminal Code* is, in my view, completely unacceptable. I'm again asking the minister to reconsider the government's position regarding this request.

I would note that in the minister's letter to me dated March 13, it makes reference to the fact that, up to four hours of legal advice can be available through the independent legal advice program that is accessible through contacting Victim Services. I would suggest to the minister that one option would be to either make an exception to the policy or to change the policy for Victim Services to allow for the possibility of providing more than four hours of support for legal advice for someone in exceptional circumstances, such as this one.

Will the minister please commit to reconsidering this request and finding some way to help this lady receive the legal advice that she needs to proceed with her divorce from her husband, whom she testified against at his criminal trial?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I guess I should start by saying that I appreciated getting the letter from the member opposite. I had worked with the department to provide a specific response to that letter. I received that letter on February 19 or sometime after that — it is dated February 19. We responded on March 13. I appreciate that the member opposite or the person who he is trying to help may not like the entirety of the response given, but I have to be clear. This is not the government's position, and urging me to change the government's position is not a thing that can be done at all in this process.

It is a Legal Aid decision and there is a process for reconsideration of a decision made by Legal Aid. I think that it is also important to note that Legal Aid funds both sides of a dispute or if there is more than one — two parties — three sides of a dispute — if possible, on some occasions, all the time. This is not a situation where — I think that there was an allegation — perhaps of a bias — in the question about the director of Legal Aid and I think that we should be careful about throwing around those kinds of accusations. This decision by Legal Aid — while I am not privy to it, and I do not intend to interfere with it — as the Attorney General for the territory, it is not appropriate for me to do so — I can't do so in any way, and if I did, the first criticism would come from the member opposite, and rightly so, if I were to do that as the Attorney General and the Minister of Justice.

I cannot, as my letter said, interfere with that process, but what I can do — and not speaking about this particular case — is that I can — certainly, I can empathize with the details that were given to me in the letter, but it would not be appropriate for the territorial government to involve itself directly or even indirectly in private family law matters. There are routes for assistance for individuals who may find themselves in a situation where they are concerned about the answer that they received from the Yukon Legal Services Society — also known as "Legal Aid" — which is an independent organization operated under the *Legal Services Society Act* and provides legal aid services within the territory. The society establishes thresholds for eligibility for receiving legal aid, and there are mechanisms in place at the Legal Aid Society to have the society reconsider circumstances of individuals, exceptional and otherwise, and there is an appeals process in place for individuals who are denied coverage for legal aid to appeal a decision — as I understand — or the circumstances presented in the member's letter that there was a denial of a request for legal aid.

Legal aid coverage decisions can be appealed, and this decision gets presented on a case-by-case basis to their board of directors. I would certainly encourage the member opposite to assist anyone who would ask these kinds of questions needing legal aid to contact the Legal Services Society and inquire about the options that are available to them. There are also resources — as was mentioned in the question — at the Family Law Information Centre to support people who are representing themselves or who are navigating family law processes, and this is in the lobby of the Law Centre.

I am also unaware — and I'm not asking the details — as to whether or not the four hours of free legal advice available

to Yukoners was — if the individual or person whom the member opposite knows availed themselves of those services. Because certainly, sometimes I think there was a bit of a dismissal in the answer — that it wouldn't be enough — but a meeting with the individuals who are providing those kinds of services could always lead to information that might assist someone in resolving their concerns.

I am in no way dismissing the details of what has been presented in the letter that I received from the member opposite at all; I certainly empathize with the circumstances, should they be accurately portrayed in that letter, and I encourage individuals who find themselves in such a situation to avail themselves of all the services available at Legal Aid and other places in the territory for legal advice and for services. I have no method whatsoever to interfere or challenge or even ask about the decision of Legal Aid, and I am unable to do so. It would be completely inappropriate in my role as the Attorney General. So, this is not the avenue, but I hope that the letter that I responded to for the member opposite does, in fact, show them some avenues for assistance.

Mr. Cathers: Well, Deputy Chair, that answer is quite disappointing. Actually, the minister can help. The minister can change the policy for the Victim Services branch to allow funding and the provision for more than four hours of legal advice under exceptional circumstances. I am not asking the minister — and she knows I am not asking her — to interfere in the trial or in the civil matter. I am simply noting the situation where someone who testified at trial against their husband, who was subsequently convicted of one of the most serious violent offences under the *Criminal Code*, has been denied funding by Legal Aid and denied funding on appeal. The person has some serious questions about the possibility for bias on the part of the executive director of the Yukon Legal Services Society, considering that same person was one of the lawyers for her husband at the trial.

Contrary to the minister's assertion, I was very careful in my comments. I did not state that there was a conflict of interest or a breach of ethics. I did, however, say that there is a reasonable perception for bias and the perception of a possible conflict of interest in this situation. The bottom line is that she tells me that the Yukon Legal Services Society, also known as Legal Aid, has denied her application and denied her appeal. I provided the minister with a reasonable path forward to assist this lady. Again, the minister could simply change the policy for the Victim Services branch to allow them, under exceptional circumstances, to provide more legal advice to clients at their office.

As I stated in my initial letter to the minister: "No one should face obstacles to divorcing a violent offender who they testified against, or find that neither government nor legal aid will help them."

As I said in the letter, and I will reiterate today: "To be crystal clear, we see this as a matter of fundamental unfairness to the woman, as well as to her children." I would also remind the minister of my opening paragraph of the letter, which she is certainly demonstrating the reasons for today — quote: "Yukoners are growing increasingly concerned about ongoing

failures in the justice system, as far too often, repeat offenders end up back on the street just to commit more crimes. There is also a growing feeling among many citizens that the system prioritizes the rights and interests of offenders above public safety, and above the rights of victims and other members of society.”

I would remind the minister that, when the situation arose, she was able to find funding, which she has specifically requested in this budget, amounting to \$285,000 for a psychological assessment of one offender to cover the costs of their transfer to the Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences and back. So, the minister, in the case of an offender, can see her way clear to adding more than a quarter of a million dollars in the budget to provide for that person’s needs, but in the situation of a woman seeking divorce from her husband, who she testified against at his trial for one of the most serious violent crimes under the *Criminal Code*, the minister is denying my very reasonable suggestion that she simply change the policy at Victim Services branch to allow them to provide more legal advice to someone who is a client of the office in exceptional circumstances. I would urge her to rethink her position, because this situation is very serious, and if the government insists on digging in its heels on this, they will quite rightly be seen as callous.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I think that we are getting into the details of the specific case. It is not appropriate to discuss here. I would, as I said earlier, urge the individual whom the member opposite is speaking about to avail themselves of the services at Victim Services and the free allocated legal advice and determine if there is some assistance on those routes. I should note that unfortunately there is, in the last set of comments, the concept that somehow victims are not being helped but offenders are.

The particular circumstances that are mentioned, again, and the particular case that was mentioned by the member opposite was a court-ordered transfer of an individual that was required to be done, not a decision I made and not an opportunity for me to be involved in that in any way other than to be responsible for the costs by virtue of the responsibility of the Department of Justice.

Ms. White: I welcome, of course, the officials here for today’s budget debate and thank my colleague for his initial questions.

I am just following up around the questions of legal aid and legal aid services. Does the department have a plan to review the income threshold for access to legal aid? How is the department supporting low-income clients who do not qualify for legal aid supports?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The Yukon Legal Services Society provides legal aid services in the Yukon Territory under the authority of the *Legal Services Society Act*. They are constituted an independent society, pursuant to that piece of legislation. The board of directors is appointed by the Minister of Justice. The board of directors governs the society. That act allows the society to provide eligible Yukoners with legal services in certain types of criminal, civil, and family law proceedings. The civil and family law proceedings is quite limited although

expanding, as I understand it, as the opportunities arise for the Legal Services Society to grow to provide services for Yukoners. The society also provides poverty law services, such as advice and representation regarding Canada Pension Plan, employment insurance, and income assistance, in cases involving those issues.

The Yukon Legal Services Society has three Whitehorse-based clinics and the new justice support centre office that operates in partnership with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. There are a total of 21 staff, which includes 12 lawyers, nine support staff, and an executive director who reports to the board of directors. When staff lawyers are unable to provide client representation due to legal conflicts of interest, private lawyers are on occasion retained at a set rate to control costs. These are specific to the legal aid-type work.

In 2023-24, the core funding for legal aid was \$3.288 million. In 2024-25, it was increased to \$3,426,820. Then, in the 2025-26 budget, core funding for legal aid will be \$3,474,820, and there will be additional funding in the 2025-26 budget of \$100,000 for therapeutic court representation. That is, of course, should the 2025-26 core funding for legal aid main budget pass. Pursuant to the new five-year *Access to Justice Services Agreement* with the Government of Canada, the federal contributions to core funding have also increased a bit. I can indicate that predictable funding to ensure that operations are stable and accessibility of legal aid continues is really vital.

It is a vital service for low-income Yukoners and it increases access to justice. It has always been a priority for this government. Members of the Legislative Assembly may know that we have a legal aid advocate and expert here among us. The Minister of Highways and Public Works was the executive director of the Yukon Legal Services Society for, I will just say, many years. It is an organization that I was involved with while I was in private practice on many occasions. It is a critical support for access to justice for Yukoners here in our territory, and increases to their budget over the years have been a priority for us.

I have sought that authority with my colleagues and we have been pleased to recognize the needs for Yukoners through legal aid. It provides core operations and advice that is critical to Yukoners, particularly Yukoners who may be at risk of losing their liberty.

I hope that answers the questions from the member opposite about income levels specifically. Those are set by the board of directors for the Yukon Legal Services Society and eligibility criteria is set by them as well. They do have an appeal process if someone receives a decision that they feel should be challenged at that level.

Ms. White: Last fall, we asked about the 2023-24 annual report from the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office that indicated that they are receiving more calls about youth safety. At the time, the minister discussed supports for youth who are victims of crimes; however, there was no discussion about the upstream causes or prevention. For these next questions — if they can be not just Whitehorse but also outside of Whitehorse.

What upstream support is the Department of Justice providing for youth prior to them being the victims of crime or harm?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: Thanks for the question. I hope I understood it correctly. If I didn't, I'm happy to stand again.

There are some projects across the territory that are funded and aimed at youth under the crime prevention and victim services trust.

There are also some projects that are funded — or there's funding that goes to the Boys and Girls Club through guns and gangs funding, so there are allocations there. There are also community projects that are aimed at youth that are happening through the process of community safety planning, which is funded by the government, giving access to funds of up to \$200,000 to each Yukon First Nation — not all at once if they don't want it that way but in smaller projects — designed to deal with and enhance community safety across the territory.

That application process is run through Justice but is supported by the First Nations across the territory. It has been operating now for a few years. It was slow to have uptake, but more and more individual organizations are learning about it now and coming up with really innovative programs through community safety planning and their communities.

The government also recognizes that crime is really a complex issue and requires a multi-pronged approach to crime prevention and rehabilitation, and focus on youth is absolutely critical. I know that my colleagues and I were recently discussing the high importance of sport in the world and, of course, with the Yukon Native Hockey Tournament coming this weekend, sport is on top of mind for us all. A new president of the International Olympic Committee — it is amazing — a young woman — never before a woman — aims, we hope, at focusing sport around the world on youth and activities that can help youth stay connected to their communities and to each other through sport.

These programs, which I am about to note with respect to young people, focus on a wide array of activities in which they can be involved. There are programs that include the youth justice panel. First of all, I should say that youth justice is under the Department of Health and Social Services, but I can also note that, for instance, on community safety issues and the restorative justice program, we have joined efforts of the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Services to allow both adults and youth to participate in those programs. They are pre- and post-charge, if they were to be involved.

Part of the member opposite's question is about them being involved as victims, but we have funding that supports programs that are aimed at crime reduction and includes the Youth Achievement Centre. We fund Crime Stoppers, the community safety and well-being planning, as I have noted earlier, the SCAN unit, restorative justice circles, Justice Wellness Centre programming, crime prevention through environmental design, enhanced First Nations and Inuit Policing Program with the RCMP, community safety officer program funding, which we know in some communities is

really aimed at having youth programming as well, and other programs that truly foster relationships and supportive families.

I certainly know that the member opposite knows that this is part of the funding and the support that can be given to youth to have them really stay away from illicit activities or activities that will find them to be in a place where they otherwise might not be as healthy as they could be. Our focus is on providing those opportunities through that programming.

I hope that answers your question. If it doesn't, I am happy to give you more information.

Ms. White: I appreciate that answer from the minister. It did, and it answered the next three that I could ask that were going to be more specific about programs, so I appreciate that.

Next, I want to touch on crisis lines and after-hours support for victims. To be perfectly frank, lots of bad things happen after business hours; it doesn't necessarily happen, let's say, between 8:30 and 4:30. It seems that there is a need for after-hours support and system navigation, again, as many harms happen outside of business hours.

How many crisis lines or after-hours lines is Justice funding?

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The sexualized assault response team, also known as SART, provides an accompaniment service for victims of sexualized assault seeking medical care at the Whitehorse General Hospital or seeking assistance to speak to the police or providing counselling for them.

I should note that the sexualized assault support line operates 24/7 here in the territory. We have expanded the services into the communities and will continue to do so. They don't exactly mirror what's involved in Whitehorse, but we're very careful to make sure that the accompaniment service was one of the top priorities so that individuals in a community who needed assistance, support, or navigation skills into the system or into dealing with authorities or medical care would have that assistance as a top priority. We also have access for — this is through Justice which I think is what you're asking about.

Yukoners also have access to a phone line called VictimLINK BC through an agreement that we have with British Columbia.

We also connect people to other supports not directly funded by Yukon government through the SART website, and it provides links and resources for people and includes another 24/7 crisis line. There is also, of course, 911. That's funded by Justice.

I could also note that there is, depending on the kind of service the member opposite is thinking about, Moccasin mobile and the outreach van that is operated by Blood Ties Four Directions. Those are funded through the Department of Health and Social Services, not through Justice.

There is also an 811 access to a nurse 24/7 as well. It is funded entirely by Yukon government, but we run the program in collaboration with services that are run in British Columbia.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. I'm just looking to receive an update on the SART line. My understanding was that it was operated by Justice, but then it was transferred back to the women's transition home for operation. So, I'm just looking for a program update on how the SART program is

doing. How much is being spent on these positions? Is Justice funding them through the women's transition home? Is it being funded both through Justice and the Women and Gender Equity Directorate? I'll just leave it there to start.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: The note that I mentioned earlier with respect to the Women's Transition Home Society as follows: They requested that the Government of Yukon combine the sexualized assault response team services into one agreement to make reporting and tracking less onerous. The Yukon Women's Transition Home Society is a sexualized assault response team contributor that has been operating the sexualized assault support line since 2020. This service is supported through a transfer payment agreement with the Women and Gender Equity Directorate.

The Women's Transition Home Society has also been providing accompaniment services to support victims of sexualized assault when they wish to have assistance in that way or when they accompany an individual to either a medical appointment or to the hospital, if there is a continued investigation, or to legal services or to the RCMP.

They do that on behalf of Victim Services. As a result, the Women and Gender Equity Directorate will transfer \$60,000 from their budget to Justice to support one agreement for the sexualized assault response team's services. I think I noted some of that earlier.

The SART team — sexualized assault response team — is a network of agencies with a number of linked and coordinated services. One component of SART is the accompaniment service to support victims of sexualized violence when attending, as I said, medical, legal, or RCMP services.

Since 2020, the weekend component of this service has been delivered by SART-designated staff at Victim Services; however, a review of the service identified operational constraints. As a result, an agreement was reached with the Yukon Women's Transition Home Society to formally take on the accompaniment service component of SART — and the Yukon Women's Transition Home Society is a SART agency. They have been operating the assistance telephone line since 2020. This service has been supported by a transfer payment agreement between the Women and Gender Equity Directorate and the organization.

The Yukon Women's Transition Home Society has requested that the government combine those related services into one agreement to make the reporting less onerous for them. We have done that, and in this particular supplementary budget, there is \$60,000 from their budget for the phone line to Justice. WGED sends it to Justice, and Justice will pass it on. The gender-based violence transportation component of SART, it might be of assistance to know, is about \$293,000.

Ms. White: I am going to take a unique approach. I'm going to ask the minister — I have a keen interest in getting into Highways and Public Works and out of the supplementary on Justice. I am going to ask, if the minister is willing, if I can list some questions so that they are in Hansard and to get a legislative return. If she is interested in that, then my intention is to clear us out of Justice ahead of the break so that we may move into Highways and Public Works.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: That would be fine. I am happy to have the member either provide the questions here or list them in a document. We would be pleased to answer them for you in relation to the supplementary or through opportunities to stand during the mains debate as well.

Ms. White: I thank the minister for that. So, these are the questions that I will put on the record. I am looking for a legislative return. This can be a point in time.

So, I am looking for, let's say on December 31, the number of folks at WCC and broken down by gender. How many are from rural communities? How many are members of First Nations? I am interested to know and to get an outline for what culturally safe programming and supports are available at Whitehorse Correctional Centre and if there is, for example, interest in auditing those programs or looking at improvements for those programs. I am looking for information and updates on community safety plans and how many community safety plans exist at Whitehorse and outside of Whitehorse. How are the community safety plans being monitored? I am interested to know if there have been any deaths reported at SHARP in the last year, and if there were, I am interested to know if there were any due to overdoses. How many deaths have there been at WCC in the last year? How many overdoses have there been? Overdoses, of course, don't necessarily mean leading to death. What are the plans in place for reintegration for people leaving WCC? What are the plans to support women leaving WCC now that the W-SHARP program is not renewed?

If the minister can supply me with a legislative return, I thank her and her officials for her time and willingness to move us on to other things and I appreciate the time in the House today.

Hon. Ms. McPhee: I am very happy to provide the answers to those questions in a legislative return.

Deputy Chair: Is there any further debate on Vote 8, Department of Justice?

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

Ms. White: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.3, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 8, Department of Justice, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 8, Department of Justice, 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 8, Department of Justice, 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 \$3,839,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures underexpenditure in the amount of \$1,289,000 agreed to

Total Expenditures in the amount of \$2,550,000 agreed to
Department of Justice agreed to

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is continuing general debate on Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

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 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*.

Department of Highways and Public Works - continued

Deputy Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Deputy, Chair, for the opportunity to be here to answer questions with respect to the supplementary budget for the Department of Highways and Public Works.

I provided introductory comments a few days ago, and I have a bit of time left. What I will just do is introduce the persons beside me who are assisting today. To my immediate right is Deputy Minister Tracy Allen and to her right is Assistant Deputy Minister Richard Gorczyca.

I look forward to answering questions.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for his remarks and I certainly thank the officials for being here today to help the minister as we get through this supplementary budget.

To start off, I will ask a follow-up to a question that I asked the minister yesterday in Question Period regarding the Yukon Motel. I'm just wondering, since the minister has officials here today, if he could provide us with any updates on when the proposed meeting will be held in Teslin with officials and the owners of the Yukon Motel as well as Graham Construction.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I'm advised that the contacts are being currently made and, if the schedules align, that those meetings could happen as soon as next week.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that. It's very important, as construction season is rapidly approaching. We certainly don't want to wait until it's too late.

During Question Period today, the minister talked about two clearing contracts on the Campbell Highway that were direct-awarded to a Ross River Dena Council First Nation contractor. I had some questions around those contracts. The reason is that I had another First Nation contractor from Ross River reach out to me asking why he was not involved in the procurement process. He is wondering how the government chose to decide which contractors were invited or which contractors were direct-awarded and not his company.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will just provide, I believe, the basic information that I provided today for the record, and then I am getting some additional details with respect to the specific question.

If I don't have all of the details today, we'll certainly endeavour to get them to the member opposite. For the record, in January 2025, we awarded two contracts to a Ross River Dena Council business for highway right-of-way clearing and salvage between kilometre 366 and kilometre 368.1 on the Robert Campbell Highway. Ross River Dena Council businesses were invited to bid on these procurement opportunities to support local businesses and to promote opportunities in the community. I'm advised that Highways and Public Works worked with the Ross River Dena Council and the Yukon First Nations Business Registry to identify businesses and that it was invitational in nature and was per Highways and Public Works procurement thresholds. I'm advised that three companies were invited to bid — I'm just waiting to see whether there is any additional information — and that the contracts were both awarded under \$100,000 each. The threshold, as per the procurement policy, is \$133,000.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that. I'll pass that information on to that contractor and he can do with it as he sees fit.

I have a question or two regarding the Big Creek bridge. We know that it is fully complete, so I'm curious if the minister can give us a bit of an update on where we are at with total costs and how we made out with the court cases. Has the court decided whether the Yukon government gets their money back in regard to the bonding with the original company that was doing that Big Creek bridge?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will endeavour to get the updates with respect to the status of the litigation — if there are any late-breaking details — but I will just provide some of the information for both the member opposite and for persons listening at home.

The new Big Creek bridge opened to traffic on October 5, 2024. The replacement bridge is wider than the bridge that it replaced, with improved road alignment upon its approaches. The demolition of the old bridge was completed in early 2025. During the upcoming construction season, the contractor will complete the paving of the highway, thereby concluding this project.

Construction of a new bridge began in 2020; however, due to deficient work, the original contract was terminated from the project in the spring of 2023 for breach of contract. A new contractor was retained to complete the project. In August 2023, the contractor filed a statement of claim against the Government of Yukon claiming wrongful termination of the contract. The Government of Yukon has counterclaimed for costs to complete the project and repair the deficient work, with the bonding company being party to the claim. Legal proceedings are continuing and we will be looking to recover the costs of fixing the deficient work through the litigation process.

As this project is fully funded by the government, there are unfortunately no applicable federal recoveries. By the end of

fiscal 2024-25, the total expenditure is expected to be in the area of \$7.118 million.

Let me see if I can find any additional information with respect to this.

I believe that there were questions about this in the fall. In any event, for the 2024 procurement to complete the project, language was included in tenders to restrict parties that previously performed deficient work from the bidding.

So, litigation is ongoing. I have seen the photos of the Big Creek completed project and also now with the removal of the old bridge. I certainly look forward to travelling down to Watson Lake this summer to both visit the community of Watson Lake and see that completed project. Certainly now, albeit belatedly, it does appear to be a project that has improved the transportation infrastructure of the Yukon. The Big Creek bridge has been completed and is up to appropriate standards now.

Mr. Hassard: Just for some clarification, I believe that the minister said that the total spent to date was in the \$7.1-million range. I know that I am getting old and my memory is getting bad, but I am trying to recall — I thought that the original contract was in the \$7-million range and then the second contract was again in the \$7-million range. I am curious if the minister misspoke or if my memory is just worse than I thought it was.

The second question along that line, Deputy Chair, that I would like to ask is: How much are we hoping to recoup from the bonding company?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I can certainly endeavour, if not during the supplementary Committee of the Whole budget debate but certainly in the mains, to provide the member opposite with the complete costs. I can see that the total cost is certainly more than the \$7 million. There actually is a budget amount in fiscal 2025-26 of an additional \$2 million to be used to complete the pavement on the access and egress of the bridges. So, yes, there is a total number that I will be in a position to provide to the member opposite.

With respect to the quantum of the litigation, YG is pursuing all costs related to rectifying the deficiencies that were required to complete the project. I can also endeavour to get more particularity with respect to the actual claim and what the quantum of the claim is. But what is being particularized is pursuing all costs related to the rectification of deficiencies that were required to complete the project of the original contractor, who was ultimately found to be completing deficient work.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you to the minister. I appreciate him offering to get that information to us.

I have a question — we have spoken in the House this session a couple of times about the Shakwak funding and the uncertainty around that funding due to the situation south of the border. I'm curious if the minister can update us on what kind of timelines he is looking at to make the decision on whether or not that work will be tendered this year, understanding, of course, that the money may not come from the US government but also understanding that work could happen and be funded by the territorial government in hopes of later recouping that

money from the US government. So, I'm just wondering if the minister can give us a little bit of insight around that.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Thank you for the question from the member opposite. Planning and pre-construction work for this project is underway. Two major procurements are planned for the upcoming construction season. Tenders have been developed. Once the US — and, of course, with the uncertainty, I suppose, if the US approves — we will tender shortly thereafter.

The date of US approval will dictate when the work is able to take place. The majority of work planned during this construction season is aggregate production, which is more flexible in terms of tendering timelines. Aggregate production must begin well in advance to ensure that the necessary materials are available for road construction.

This construction season, transportation and maintenance activities on the north Alaska Highway include — within the current Highways and Public Works budget and irrespective of whether the US federal or state funding proceeds — conducting five to 10 kilometres of BST and two kilometres of overlay; identifying and mitigating large dips and holes in the BST surface with pre-mixed materials between Destruction Bay and the Alaska border to ensure a smoother driving experience and prevent further surface deterioration; and maintaining existing gravel patches between kilometres 1796 and 1856, which typically involves resurfacing or adding more gravel to areas that may have worn down or been eroded over time and applying calcium for dust control to maintain a stable and safe road surface.

Just as a recap of what the project potentially is: In 2024, through partnership with the State of Alaska and the US federal highways, the Government of Yukon announced \$37 million US in project funding over the next several years to rehabilitate sections of the north Alaska Highway. Unfortunately, the recent change in the US administration and its approach to trade with Canada has raised uncertainty about the finalization of funding agreements between Alaska and the US. The Government of Yukon remains committed to securing the funding that was previously announced as we work collaboratively with our American counterparts to complete funding agreements.

Our government is reviewing existing agreements that may apply to the north Alaska Highway and remains committed to fulfilling our obligation under those agreements. As the member opposite has indicated, the Department of Highways and Public Works has committed, as part of that, \$8 million in 2025-26 for capital investment within the north Alaska Highway corridor, but those funds would be recoverable through the funding agreement with the US after the work has been completed, should this agreement continue.

I will just say as well that the relationships that exists between the Premier of Yukon and the Governor of Alaska and my relationship with Transportation Commissioner Anderson in Alaska remain strong, and there have been some communications back and forth on this topic.

The specific question that the member opposite had was: What is a loose — or a deadline that might be considered where one might have to reconsider priorities in that area or reconsider

priorities for the Yukon in general for the construction or road building season for the spring, summer, fall of 2025? The answer that I have received from my department is in the area of May 1, 2025.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that.

The other question that I asked in that was whether the Yukon government would consider moving forward with that project even though they didn't have a final commitment from the US, with the hope of receiving that funding at a later date.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Just by way of update, the conversations continue in real time with the State of Alaska here on March 20, 2025. HPW officials met as recently as Tuesday to continue the conversations. Given that there is still time to make this decision, it would be premature to indicate where we're going with this project.

I think that it's safe to say, for Yukoners, that we are of the view that an agreement was in place. I think the uncertainty that has occurred with respect to Shakwak is emblematic of the uncertainty that exists with respect to all manner of circumstances, all manner of decisions, that have been made by the Trump administration not only as it pertains to road construction but as it applies to what appeared to be dismissal without cause of thousands and thousands of federal employees.

With respect to the imposition of — well, at least initially, unilateral significant tariffs on Canada and Mexico notwithstanding that there is a USMCA, the successor to the NAFTA, which was signed in the first Trump administration by this current president — President Trump — and which I think Canada was rightly of the view was a binding agreement. But obviously, we — Canada, Mexico, China, Europe, and other countries — have been caught up in the maelstrom of decision-making by the current executive of the United States, and this is one of those. This is another executive order that occurred, but as I had indicated, this has not been shut down yet, and Yukon HPW has a loose deadline of May 1. We are working toward that deadline. So far, we are encouraged with the conversations that have occurred with the State of Alaska for funding — at least hopefully for this year.

Like I said, I agree that one needs more than hope, but Yukon will explore all avenues for funding this work in a way that ensures that costs are recoverable under this project. But I did set out that there is a work schedule for the north Alaska Highway from Destruction Bay to Beaver Creek, which we have had over the course of many, many years but certainly over the four years that I have had the honour and privilege to have been in this position as Minister of Highways and Public Works. I have also indicated to the House on many occasions that the per-kilometre expense that is expended with respect to the care and maintenance of that highway is far above the per-kilometre dollar value in most of the rest of the Yukon.

It's not like this government has ignored that section. We just know that the US Army Corps of Engineers — in a different time of cooperation between the United States and Canada — punched in the Alaska Highway from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks in nine or 10 months. Of course, the adage is that they built it in nine or 10 months and we spent the next

75 or 80 years repairing it or putting it in a position where it perhaps ought to have been previously.

So, we recognize that the stretch of highway between Burwash and Beaver Creek is incredibly challenging and has discontinuous permafrost, which results in extremely challenging conditions. Our Alaskan counterparts, in our discussions over the last 12 to 18 months, absolutely recognize the value that this project has for Alaskan citizens, for American citizens who travel from the Lower 48 to Alaska and back, and for the American servicemen and servicewomen who are deployed to Alaska and then get deployed elsewhere with their U-Hauls. We certainly hear about the U-Hauls from time to time getting bounced around. We know that Governor Dunleavy and Commissioner Anderson and others in Alaska are very much aware that this is a good project and they support it.

We have been caught up in this executive order, which I think I said in Question Period a few days ago, that resulted in this review period. We are caught up in this and we are still cautiously optimistic that the funding will continue. In what form or in what quantum is to be determined, but we certainly know that all members of this Legislature want this agreement to go forward and we are making best efforts to make it happen.

Mr. Hassard: I would just remind the minister that yes, we all hear about the U-Hauls going up and down from the Lower 48, but we also have to remember that this piece of highway is very much used by Yukoners as well — folks in Beaver Creek and Destruction Bay and everywhere in between.

Also, in the minister's remarks, he talked about it being premature to make the call of whether the Yukon government would fund the project without certainty from the US administration. I tend to disagree with that as well, because I think that contractors here in the Yukon are certainly looking for some certainty on whether that \$8 million worth of work will be available this summer or not. Waiting too long certainly doesn't help their cause at all either, so I just urge the minister to consider that a little bit when they are making their decisions.

The minister also talked about his conversations with the Alaska governor and officials in Alaska. I am curious if, during any of those conversations, the proposed tolls by Premier Eby in British Columbia have come up and what their thoughts or what their thinking is in regard to those possible tolls on the Alaska Highway.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Yukon and BC remain in close contact on the issue of tolls. BC is currently preparing, as members likely know, enabling legislation. Highways and Public Works met with BC officials this month and remains in close contact, but also, we are assessing if these measures have any impact on the Shakwak agreement and are looking at receiving a legal opinion with respect to the Shakwak agreement and the legality of tolls arising from that agreement.

I'll also note that Premier Eby, as recently as today or yesterday, was certainly in the news saying that, although he is tabling — or perhaps already has tabled — enabling legislation in the BC Legislature, he conceded that his government would likely only consider the enacting of tolls as — I wouldn't say a last measure but certainly as a fairly significantly,

incrementally more aggressive measure if the tariff dispute escalated. The BC NDP government view it as being in their toolbox but certainly are not considering implementing tolls. I certainly have read that the BC leadership understands that it may be fraught with difficulty and is perhaps unnecessarily escalatory.

In any event, for us, I guess the answer to the member opposite's question — I have not discussed the issue of tolls with my counterpart in Alaska. I cannot speak for the Premier, but I certainly recognize that there may be a lot of challenges with respect to the imposition of tolls on northeastern British Columbia and in the Yukon.

There was a news story as recently as this morning out of Fort Nelson — it may have been the mayor or an official out of Fort Nelson who was certainly concerned about, if those tolls came to be or were implemented — that it would have a significant impact on Fort Nelson for machinists, tire shops, hotels, and restaurants in Fort Nelson and probably in the northeast corner of British Columbia in general.

I think that is where it's at right now but certainly recognizing that northern British Columbia and the Yukon could be in a challenging position vis-à-vis tolls.

Mr. Hassard: So then, what exactly is YG's position on the proposed tolls?

Hon. Mr. Clarke: Maybe I was being too roundabout — those darn politicians. Sorry — it's that we are still receiving legal advice with respect to even the hypothetical enforceability of tolls in the Yukon as it pertains to Shakwak based on previously existing agreements. That's where it's at. I'm not going to — I'm not in a position to provide the Yukon government's position on the fly today, but that is the considered analysis that is taking place. I think if you review whatever I have said over the course of the last three or four minutes, I think that this government likely does recognize the not insignificant challenges and the really unfortunate level of escalation that would have occurred prior to British Columbia and, by extension, the Yukon having considered tolls — right now, a legal analysis with respect to the pre-existing Shakwak agreements — and that's where we're at right now — and also perhaps recognizing that there could be really significant challenges for the Yukon in having those tolls continue on into Yukon.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that. I'm wondering if the minister would be able to provide the House with that legal advice once the government has received it.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: As a hopefully slightly above-average lawyer myself, slightly above, I would say that I will certainly take that request under advisement, but understand that it would be certainly of interest to the House and of interest to Yukoners as to what the interpretation was of a Shakwak agreement that goes back at least into the 1970s.

While I am on my feet, I do have an answer with respect to the Big Creek bridge. The \$7.1 million that I referenced applied to a construction contract that was issued to Formula Alberta bridge builders. Yes, the member opposite is correct. That is the contract to finalize deficient work and other related project costs in fiscal 2024-25. The total spent to date on contracted

and other project costs is \$12.9 million, and the total project cost is expected to be in the range of \$14.9 million. Yes, I concede that the member opposite's memory was not incorrect.

Mr. Hassard: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I thank the minister for that. I was getting pretty worried.

Another question in regard to the Shakwak. The minister told us earlier that there were two contracts written and ready to go, so I am wondering if the minister could provide us with what kilometres are proposed for reconstruction under those two tenders that he spoke of.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: While I endeavour to get the kilometre markers, which I think I will be in a position to provide the member opposite in the House this afternoon, I will just provide a little bit of detail with respect to this project in the hopes, of course, that it proceeds.

Highways and Public Works will be tendering and leading the construction projects throughout the corridor. All projects are planned to be delivered over the next seven years, with one to two construction tenders issued per year starting in 2025. The "Buy America" policy does not apply to our project, because the projects take place in Canada and are being delivered by the Yukon government.

Procurements related to the funding will follow the Yukon government's procurement policy, which includes the Yukon First Nation procurement policy. Road rehabilitation activities will primarily consist of the restoration of the existing BST pavement surfaces by removing the significant cracks, bumps, shoulder depressions, and other deformations that result from permafrost thaw under the roadway. This is part of a long-term strategy to keep the road between Destruction Bay and Beaver Creek in good repair while emphasizing value for money.

Of course, I can't agree more with the member opposite that Yukoners are using the road from Destruction Bay to Beaver Creek. We just know that, as far as Americans are concerned, that portion of the road is used more by Americans than Canadians on a traffic volume basis. The planned approach allows for an improvement to surface conditions over the life of the road at an overall lower cost. The project will divide the highway between Destruction Bay and Beaver Creek into six zones. It is planned to restore approximately 14 kilometres of road within one zone per year. The order of work will be prioritized based on current conditions.

If it proceeds, the funding announced is anticipated to repair approximately 90 kilometres of the 222-kilometre section of highway between Destruction Bay and Beaver Creek, addressing the sections most impacted by permafrost. I will just see if I can find the answers to the question. One tender is for aggregate production and the other is for road reconstruction. The kilometres are planned to be kilometre 1762 to 1790 for year 1, and that's approximately between the Donjek River and Koidern River No. 1 near Burwash.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that information.

We've spoken at length in this Legislature regarding commercial vehicle inspections, or PMVIs, and the fact that you used to be able to take a course and do PMVIs and now you can't; you have to be a certified red seal mechanic to do that.

I'm curious why Highways and Public Works vehicles — our plow trucks, for example — are exempt from needing PMVIs when everyone else's truck is required to do so.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I have some information on this question, but if additional detail is required, I can certainly endeavour to get some additional answers as well.

Transportation Maintenance conducts PMVIs on YG maintenance equipment. While the Yukon government is exempt from PMVIs, the department strives to maintain rigorous safety standards across its fleet. My understanding, provided to me, is that the exemption is because they are not commercial vehicles — that is, it is not equipment for hire. Yes, so Yukon government vehicles do not meet the definition of “commercial” as they are not for hire under the current *Highways Act*.

I am not sure if that generates a lot of additional questions, but that is the information I have for this afternoon.

Mr. Hassard: I thank the minister for that, but I guess that it does lead to more questions, because I don't understand and I am sure that there are a lot of people who don't understand what difference it makes if you are for hire or not. It is still a heavy transport vehicle travelling on the same highways as everyone else is, so I am curious if there is some other rationale as to why they wouldn't require it.

Hon. Mr. Clarke: I will undertake to have a legislative return with respect to this specific question and get more detail for the member opposite.

Mr. Hassard: I appreciate the minister getting that information to us, because there are certainly people out there who would like to know the answer to that.

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

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin 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: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 216, entitled *Third Appropriation Act 2024-25*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

Motion agreed to

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. on Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

The following legislative return was tabled March 20, 2025:

35-1-167

Response to matter outstanding from discussion related to the appearance of witnesses from Yukon University before Committee of the Whole on November 12, 2024 (McLean)

The following documents were filed March 20, 2025:

35-1-304

Breaking the Dawn — Reimagining reconciliation through re-education — Yukon University Reconciliation framework (McLean)

35-1-305

Growing shortage of physicians, letter re (dated February 15, 2025) from the Yukon Surgical Clinic to Currie Dixon, Leader of the Official Opposition (Dixon)