



# Yukon Legislative Assembly

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## BLUES

Tuesday, December 9, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Speaker: The Honourable Yvonne Clarke

### 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 It may be used as a reference only with the understanding that it will be superseded by the final, edited version, entitled "Hansard", at a later time.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  
Tuesday, December 9, 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 re Question Period roster**

**Speaker:** I have been informed, through the Clerk, that we don't as yet have a consensus for the schedule of questions for Question Period. I understand that Question Period rosters are never perfect and must take into consideration the need to hold Government to account while balancing the needs of private members to question the ministers of the Government.

I am also aware that members make the rules of the Assembly and that it is my job to interpret them. In the case of Question Period, the members have not been specific in their intentions in the Standing Order with respect to rosters. This is probably due to the fact that roster-making is inherently difficult and usually in need of compromise to ensure that all members have a fair chance to ask questions.

In the past in this Assembly, the Government private members have been basically prevented from asking questions due to the nature of their positions on the roster. I agree that Government private members should not have the first, second, or even, in most cases, the third position on the roster. This does not mean that they should never be able to ask questions on behalf of their constituents to the Government of the day.

In reviewing the history of Question Period, I would note that up until 1996, the Assembly had a 40-minute Question Period. In 1996, the members changed the length of time for Question Period to 30 minutes. From the 1970s, the number of members in the Assembly has grown from 16 members at the beginning of the modern era to 21 members now. The responsibilities of the territory and size of the budget have grown along with the population during that time.

As Speaker, I believe that we are past due for the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges, or SCREP, to review Question Period and report to this Assembly on its findings. Until that time, I have made some adjustments to the draft roster circulated by the Clerk and will use the roster that I will now table for the members, which is based on what I heard yesterday at a meeting I had with the House Leaders.

I will also inform members that during Question Period, members should be reasonably succinct in their questions and in their replies, and members should get up quickly so that we don't waste time during Question Period. If I find that the members are moving too slowly, I will remind members again, and if it continues, then I will direct the Clerks to start timers in such a way as to speed up the proceedings.

I would ask that members of SCREP turn their attention to the issues surrounding Question Period as soon as possible and be able to report back to the House in the Spring Sitting.

**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 the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women and 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence**

**Hon. Laura Lang:** Today, I rise to pay tribute to the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

On December 6, 1989, an armed man entered a classroom at Montréal École Polytechnique with the intention of hurting female engineering students. The gunman systematically chose who to shoot. Men were asked to step out of the room; 14 women were killed and 13 were injured, and 27 families were irreversibly changed, as were their communities and our country.

As a 14-year-old high school student, this was a pivotal moment in my small community and high school as my younger self couldn't understand why anyone would choose to physically, emotionally and spiritually remove female students just beginning their adult lives.

Part of the national response to this tragic event has occurred annually through the establishment of the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Since 1991, Canadians have observed this day and remember the 14 women who died on December 6, 1989. Importantly, this day is also part of a 16-day campaign committed to raising awareness about gender-based violence and creating change.

We observe November 20 as Transgender Day of Remembrance. The reality for transgender women is a disproportionately high rate of violence, including physical assault, sexual violence, and murder.

For 34 years, we have taken 2.5 weeks to reflect on our efforts and our rate of violence. To put things into perspective: One in four Canadian women will experience some form of physical or sexualized violence in her lifetime, yet Yukon is three to four times higher than this.

We know that efforts to address GBV are influenced by the increased social divisiveness influencing how young men and women relate to each other. While there is a national increase in intimate partner violence cases reported by women and girls, 20 percent of the cases are for men and boys and it is increasing.

We know that all people deserve to live and love safely, and yet, as a territory and as a country, we spend billions on the health care, justice, and social system responses to GBV. We know that businesses lose millions due to productivity losses and individuals being unable to work as a result, and so I commend this year's campaign approach focused on the problem of mean and hateful messages online further inciting

divisiveness and violence. We need to be models and champions of gender equality so that young people can carry those values into adulthood.

New public health efforts like the equity-focused population health framework for gender-based violence prevention underway in Thunder Bay, Ontario is encouraging to what our future response could incorporate.

I was equally stimulated by the ceremony that I attended last Friday hosted by the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre. The passion and dedication by so many organizations was palatable. Your work is raw, essential, and often life-saving.

I conclude this tribute by speaking to you as a mom of three girls and two boys. Like all parents, I would like my children — all children — to grow up in a society where they feel supported, cherished, and respected. I would like my daughters to be safe and see people through a lens of trust, and I would like my sons to grow into valued men who see people through a lens of kindness.

It is with this that I conclude, noting our commitment to defending the safety, dignity, and respect of all Yukoners.

*Applause*

**Linda Moen:** I rise on behalf of the Yukon NDP Official Opposition in recognition of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Every year from November 25 to December 10, people from across the world come together in a call for solidarity and action to end violence against women and girls. This past Friday, we gathered at the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre to remember the 14 women whose lives were taken at École Polytechnique and honour the women, girls, and LGBTQ+ community members who continue to face violence every day.

We know that gender-based violence is a significant issue across the territory. In fact, the Yukon has the third highest rate of intimate-partner violence in the country. It is even higher for Indigenous women and girls, and every year that list of the murdered and missing grows. These numbers do not tell the whole truth. Violence is under-reported because of many factors like stigma, shame, and lack of trust in systems that too often have failed the survivors.

Gender-based violence does not occur in a vacuum. There are many factors to take into account that include housing insecurity, addictions, racism, mental illness, and trauma. This is especially true in many rural Yukon communities where women and girls who are fleeing violent situations do not have the options of accessing community health centres or women's shelters. Their options are limited, which puts women from one unsafe situation to another.

When I was reflecting on what to say today, I thought about the lessons that I've taught my own children, and they are very different. I have to give my daughter safety strategies; I have to warn my daughter to lock the car door; don't walk alone at night. I never had those same safety conversations with my sons. I never had to tell them to watch their drinks or make sure they didn't walk with their headphones on. This isn't to say that violence doesn't happen to men, but things are different for women and girls.

What I did do was teach my sons about issues like consent, how to be an ally to women and girls in their lives, and how to stand up against injustice. What 16 Days reminds us is that this is not an annual campaign; this is a responsibility that we all share every day of the year. My hope is that one day, instead of sharing grim statistics and current realities, this speech will be sharing inspiring stories of a world where women and girls are free from violence.

**Debra-Leigh Reti:** I rise today on behalf of the Yukon Liberal caucus to acknowledge the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women.

These important public awareness campaigns stem from two deeply troubling events. On November 25, 1960, the Mirabal sisters, three political activists from the Dominican Republic, were brutally murdered by order of the country's ruler, Rafael Trujillo; and on December 6, 1989, 14 young women were murdered at École Polytechnique Montréal in a violent and tragic misogynistic attack, spurring shock and mourning that shook our nation.

Fast-forward to 2024: An estimated 50,000 women and girls were killed by intimate partners or family members worldwide — 137 a day, or one every 10 minutes. Let's add some perspective to this statistic. From the time the Yukon Party rose to speak to this tribute to when I wrap up today, somewhere in the world a woman or a girl has been murdered.

Closer to home, we recognize the impacts of gender-based violence — the Highway of Tears to our south in British Columbia, where so many women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, mostly Indigenous, have gone missing and been murdered. We know that the territories, including the Yukon, have a much higher rate of gender-based violence. Today, I would like to take a moment to offer strength to the victims and the families of those impacted by gender-based violence. I want to recognize the efforts of so many Yukoners who are dedicated to making a change, those who worked so hard to develop the *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit+ People Strategy*, co-chairs Ann Maje Raider, Doris Bill, and former Minister Jeanie McLean, and all the committee members from over the years. The organizations that worked tirelessly on the ground as advocates and supports every day: End Violence Yukon; Yukon Women's Transition Home with Kaushee's Place and Betty's Haven; the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre; Watson Lake Help and Hope for Families; Dawson City Women's Shelter Society; Skookum Jim Friendship Centre; les Essentielles; the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society; the Yukon Aboriginal Women's Council; those who support through the sexualized assault response team; the Victim Services workers and social workers in the communities across the territory; and all the allies who support.

This work is complex, but together we can put —

**Speaker:** Order.

*Applause*

## TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

**Speaker:** Under Tabling Returns and Documents, the Chair has for tabling a report of the Clerk of the Assembly made pursuant to Section 39(6) of the *Legislative Assembly Act*, regarding the absence of members from sittings of the Legislative Assembly and meetings of committees of the Legislative Assembly; the 2024-25 Yukon Human Rights Commission annual report, and the 2024-25 annual report of the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate.

Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** I have for tabling the Public Accounts for 2024-25.

## REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

**Speaker:** Under Reports of Committees, the Chair has for tabling the following three reports from the 35<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Accounts, all dated May 30, 2025: 8<sup>th</sup> report, 9<sup>th</sup> report, and 10<sup>th</sup> report.

Are there any petitions to be presented?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

### Bill No. 200, *Second Appropriation Act 2025-26* — Introduction and First Reading

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** I move that Bill No. 200, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2025-26* be now introduced and read a first time.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 200, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2025-26*, be now introduced and read a first time.

*Motion for Introduction and First Reading of Bill No. 200 agreed to*

**Speaker:** Are there any further bills to be introduced? Are there any Notices of Motions?

## NOTICES OF MOTIONS

**Kate White:** I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce amendments to the *Elections Act* to institute a ranked vote system in line with the results of the November 3, 2025 plebiscite.

**Lane Tredger:** I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to establish a public inquiry into the failures of the Eagle Gold mine, Minto mine, and Wolverine mine under the *Public Inquiries Act*.

**Brent McDonald:** I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to introduce amendments to the *Workers' Safety and*

*Compensation Act* that would provide presumptive cancer coverage for wildland firefighters.

**Linda Moen:** I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to conduct a review of the *Education Act*.

**Justin Ziegler:** Je me lève pour donner avis de la motion suivante :

QUE cette Assemblée exhorte le gouvernement du Yukon à se conformer à la *Loi sur les langues* en offrant tous les services publics en français.

**Debra-Leigh Reti:** I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House

(1) recognizes the vital importance of the Porcupine caribou herd to the Gwich'in, Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in;

(2) congratulates Chief Pauline Frost, Chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, and Chief Elizabeth Wright, Chief of the Tetlit Gwich'in Band Council, for the successful adoption of the resolution to "Protect the Sacred Calving Grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd from Oil and Gas Development" during the Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly held in Ottawa in December; and

(3) urges the Government of Yukon to support efforts aimed at upholding inherent rights of the Gwich'in, Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in to self-determination and seeking permanent protection of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

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

## QUESTION PERIOD

### Question re: **Free transit program**

**Kate White:** During the recent election, the Yukon Party talked a lot about their plans to address affordability, so it was a shock to Yukoners who are deep in that same affordability crisis when one of their first acts as government was to cancel the free transit program.

The Yukon Party campaigned on promises to listen openly to ideas and solutions and to respect expertise. Multiple NGOs and Yukoners have spoken out about the hardship that cancelling this program will cause for those who are already struggling to make ends meet. Even the Whitehorse City Council talked about the value of the program and their regret that it has ended. Experts have spoken, the public has spoken — cutting the free transit program hurts Yukoners.

How does cutting the free transit program fit within the Yukon Party's commitment to address the affordability crisis?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** I will begin by welcoming the Leader of the Official Opposition to the new role. It's a role that I understand, appreciate and respect, and one that's very important to Yukoners so I wish her all the best in that role.

I'll turn now to the question that she has raised.

Yes, indeed, the program that provided free bus passes to Yukoners has ended. It is a program that was set up under the previous government with the deliberate date of the program ending at the end of November. It was the decision that the previous government made to set that date. They also funded the program to the level that would only ensure that there was funding available for a number of months.

In the budget that the Leader of the Official Opposition voted for last spring, there was only \$200,000 allocated to that program. Since that time, the Yukon Government has spent \$1.2 million on that program. It has gone way overbudget. It's a program that we believe needs to be reconsidered, and so we will work closely with the NGOs that have been partnering with the Yukon Government on the delivery of that program going forward to determine how best to work with them to ensure that we are delivering the services that their clients need going forward.

**Kate White:** That was under the \$1.5 million that we initially thought it would cost. The Yukon Anti-Poverty Coalition is circulating a petition to reinstate the free transit program. The Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon talked about how valuable this program was for their clients. Safe at Home said that this program was one of the most fundamental ways to support community members to get to work, to school, and to get home safe. They also warned that Yukon would pay for the loss of the transit program in other ways.

Whitehorse seniors have shared their fears, knowing that now they have to worry about whether or not they can afford to take the bus to medical appointments, to buy groceries or any of the other activities of daily living. Seniors have called the decision to end the program a dark cloud over their lives, and one even said that it filled her with dread and tears.

When will this government listen to experts and Yukoners, as it promised yesterday in the throne speech, and reinstate the free transit program?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** If the member opposite believes that this program should have been allocated \$1.5 million, then why did she vote for a budget that only allocated \$200,000 to this program?

The simple fact is that a sufficient amount of funding was not allocated to this program when the previous Liberal-NDP government set it up. They designed the program to end at the end of November, so it should come as no surprise to anyone that it did, in fact, end at the end of November.

Now, we realize there are a number of NGOs who were partnered in this program and that they provide a variety of different services to a variety of different Yukoners. We look forward to meeting with those NGOs to discuss how best to work with them to ensure that we continue to deliver services to their clientele.

However, I would note, for the Leader of the Official Opposition, that this program was not a free transit program. In fact, the fact that the CASA promised a free transit program was a matter of great debate — and the fact that there was a very public debate between the then Liberals and the Leader of the Official Opposition about calling it “free transit” because,

of course, they completely forgot to talk to an important stakeholder, the City of Whitehorse, which owns, operates, and pays for the transit system here in the Yukon. The compromise position that the previous government established was the purchase of free bus passes and the distribution of those free bus passes. That program, as designed by the previous government, has now ended.

**Kate White:** The Yukon Party platform mentioned “affordability challenges” 22 separate times, and they referred to it as a “crisis” nine times. With that kind of emphasis, you might think that this government meant to take the cost-of-living crisis seriously. Instead, Yukoners are seeing that, in their very first days as government, the Yukon Party has made cuts to programs that supported vulnerable Yukoners.

The Yukon Party could have extended the program that supported hundreds of people, including seniors, people with disabilities, and youth. They had an opportunity to show that they really had changed and that they were listening to those living in the affordability crisis. Yesterday, this government said — and I quote: “If mistakes are made, they will be addressed and acknowledged. True leadership means having the strength to change the course.”

Will this government take their own advice, reconsider their hasty cancellation of the free transit program, and reinstate it?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** I disagree with the member opposite's characterization of this program ending as hasty. It was something that was designed by the previous Liberal-NDP government to end at the end of November. In fact, when the Leader of the Official Opposition voted in favour of the Liberals' budget back in the spring, it only allocated \$200,000 to that program, despite the fact that she has admitted that it would cost much more than that.

The program has gone way overbudget. The Yukon Government has spent over \$1.2 million purchasing bus passes and distributing them around the Yukon since the budget passed in the spring. That program, as the Liberal-NDP government designed it, ended on November 30. We look forward to working with the NGOs that are partnered on that program to determine how best to move forward and support their clientele, but the program that was set up by the previous government was indeed flawed, overbudget, and not appropriately funded by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

#### **Question re: Eagle mine heap leach failure**

**Carmen Gustafson:** My colleagues, the Member for Takhini and Member for Whitehorse Centre, asked the previous government often about a public inquiry into the catastrophic failure of the heap leach facility at Eagle mine. The new Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources has inherited a long history of post-devolution mine failures, including the abandonment of Eagle, Minto, and Wolverine mines. I heard from many Yukoners about the June 2025 Independent Review Board report. Yukoners want to see changes to the way we do mining, and I agree.

The Yukon needs a reliable and thriving mining industry that they can trust. We need to go beyond the scope of the IRB's

work to understand how to manage mining better. Will the minister commit to calling a public inquiry into the successive failures of Yukon mines?

**Hon. Ted Laking:** We are not looking at that. An independent review board was struck to investigate the underlying causes of the failure at the Eagle mine site. The Independent Review Board included subject-matter experts with extensive experience in this type of mining. Earlier this year, they provided their findings and recommendations. We are confident that the recommendations will lead to positive improvements in the mining industry. We will move forward with implementing those recommendations because we know that this is the first step in rebuilding trust and confidence.

**Carmen Gustafson:** Recently, the Premier said he wanted to — quote — “unleash the mining industry”. It sounds to me like he wants to remove the very few guardrails that we have and that we know have not been adequate. We saw what happened when the last government unleashed the mining sector. A marginal mining project got the green light, cut corners, and subsequently unleashed a toxic disaster onto the environment. That mine’s executive team then unleashed itself onto new ventures. Despite the IRB’s investigation, the Yukon Government still does not have a clear understanding of the role that government and political decision-making played in allowing this most recent example of mine failure in the Yukon — or, if they do, the public does not.

When will the minister call a public inquiry into the failures of Yukon-approved and -regulated mines?

**Hon. Ted Laking:** As I stated in my previous answer, we will not be doing that. What we are doing is that we are moving ahead with the Independent Review Board’s recommendations. We believe that those are good recommendations. They were provided after extensive work by the Independent Review Board, so we will be moving forward with that because we think that it will restore trust and improve the way that mining is done here.

**Carmen Gustafson:** We cannot afford another catastrophic failure or abandoned mine. Yukon and Canadian taxpayers are already shelling out tens of millions of dollars per year for mine cleanups and receiverships. Every mine that leaves the cost of cleanup to the regulator means a diversion of public dollars that could be used elsewhere, like to hire front-line workers, provide public transit, or develop important infrastructure like increased electricity generation capacity.

Every mine that fails, every corporation that walks away, increases the Yukon’s financial and environmental debt. Fixing the regulatory system and making better government and political decisions is the only way that we will see world-class mining happen in this territory.

How can the minister be sure that we won’t see more mine failures if he refuses to find out the root causes and decision-making that led to previous ones?

**Hon. Ted Laking:** As I indicated in previous responses, in response to the failure at the Eagle mine site, an independent review board was struck to investigate the underlying causes of the failure. The Independent Review Board did include subject-matter experts with extensive experience in this type of mining.

Earlier this year, they did provide their findings and recommendations. We are confident that the recommendations will lead to positive improvements in the mining industry, so we’re going to move forward with implementing those recommendations because we know that this is the first step toward rebuilding trust in this industry.

#### Question re: Health Authority

**Debra-Leigh Reti:** I have a question for the Minister of Health and Social Services. During a community debate in Old Crow, the Yukon Party candidate said that she was a supporter of the new health authority and hopes to see it proceed.

Unfortunately, the Yukon Party platform said that they plan to reassess the work done to date on the health authority. The throne speech repeated that language yesterday.

Does this government plan to proceed with the health authority or is it simply being cancelled?

**Hon. Brad Cathers:** Here is what our platform said about this: “The Yukon party will work with unions representing health care workers, the Yukon Hospital Corporation, First Nation governments and health care professionals to reassess the work done to date on the Health Authority, and to determine where resources can be better directed; focusing on strengthening frontline care and improving health outcomes.”

We were sworn in as ministers in Cabinet on November 22, and a large part of our early days in office have been focused on getting ready for this Sitting. What the platform says is where we are today.

**Debra-Leigh Reti:** When the health authority legislation went through this House, the Yukon Party voted against it. In doing so, they voted against Yukon First Nations that were strong proponents of moving to a health authority. This summer, the initial board of Shāw Kwā’ą Health and Wellness Yukon was appointed.

At the time, the co-chair of the Chiefs Committee on Health said that it was an historic landmark in health transformation work for the Yukon and one step closer on our collective journey to making care more culturally safe, integrated, and supportive for all Yukoners.

So, will the government turn its back on this work?

**Hon. Brad Cathers:** In the first response, we committed to reassessing the work done to date on health authority and to determine where resources can better be directed, focusing on strengthening front-line care and improving health outcomes.

During my first week as Minister of Health and Social Services, I met with hospital leadership to get a better understanding of their needs and the major cost pressures that they are facing, as well as pressures on operational needs, and toured the Whitehorse hospital. I also visited H-1 to meet our staff there and then both of our EMS facilities in town. I look forward to visiting more HSS facilities soon and talking with the people who work there.

As I noted, it has been very busy and only just over two weeks since I have been a minister, so what the platform says is where we are here today.

**Debra-Leigh Reti:** I am hoping that the new government does not seem too content to throw out all the past work of the First Nation chiefs, public servants, and everyday Yukoners — all the money that has been spent and all the effort that has gone into this project to date.

Can the minister tell Yukoners how much money has been spent to date on this project?

**Hon. Brad Cathers:** My understanding from officials is that over \$17 million has been spent to date on the health authority project. As I noted, our platform contained a commitment to reassess the work done to date on the health authority and determine where resources can better be directed, focusing on strengthening front-line care and improving health outcomes.

It will also come as no surprise to members opposite that, as we noted during debate on the health authority, we did have concerns about its impact on employees, their pensions, and recruitment and retention.

As I mentioned, during my short time as Minister of Health and Social Services, I met with hospital leadership to get a better understanding of their needs and cost pressures and toured the Whitehorse hospital. I visited H1 to meet our staff there and both of our EMS facilities in Whitehorse, and I look forward to visiting many more facilities soon as well as talking with more stakeholders. I have had the opportunity to meet with a few to date.

It has been very busy. It has only been a couple weeks in my time as minister so, as I noted, what the platform says is where we are today. We are going to reassess the work done to date just as we committed in our election platform.

#### **Question re: Electoral system plebiscite**

**Brent McDonald:** As part of the recent territorial elections on November 3, a plebiscite took place to poll Yukoners on whether they wanted to change the way we vote in our next territorial election. It asked the simple question: Should the territory replace its first-past-the-post electoral system with a ranked ballot system?

More than 56 percent of Yukon voters were supportive of replacing the old system with a new one. That's an even stronger mandate than was given this new government.

Will the Premier listen to the clear direction given to him by Yukoners and begin the process of implementing a ranked ballot system?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** I appreciate the question from the member opposite. Our platform commitment on this issue was clear to Yukoners. We didn't believe that the significant expenditure that would be required to change our electoral system was money well-invested, so we made it very clear that we have no intention of moving forward with changes to our electoral system. We opposed the creation of the various select committees that were established through CASA over the years that cost taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars. We disagreed with going forward with the plebiscite, which cost Elections Yukon hundreds of thousands of dollars. All of this money, we believe, should have been directed toward the priorities of Yukoners that they wanted us to focus on.

We have made our position about the plebiscite clear. We won't be moving ahead with changing it.

**Brent McDonald:** The results of the plebiscite clearly show that this change is not party specific. While voters in my home riding of Klondike voted overwhelmingly in favour of electoral reform, many Yukoners in ridings won by this new government did as well. Voters in the riding of Copperbelt South, Lake Laberge, Marsh Lake-Mount Lorne-Golden Horn, Porter Creek North, Porter Creek South, Whistle Bend North, Whistle Bend South, as well as Whitehorse West, all voted in favour of electoral reform. That is a clear majority of the ridings held by this government.

How do the Premier and his government justify ignoring the voices and direction given by the people they represent?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** Our platform was very clear. We presented to Yukoners our clear position on this particular matter. It was well-publicized, well-debated throughout the election period. There were numerous stories in local media about the fact that the Yukon Party had established this clear position. Having established that clear position and putting that clearly in our platform, Yukoners delivered the Yukon Party a resounding majority government and over 52 percent of the popular vote, so we feel we have a strong mandate to implement our platform, and that's what we're going to do.

**Brent McDonald:** The yes vote in the plebiscite received several hundred more votes than the Premier's entire party. In the Yukon, that is a significant margin. The Premier also campaigned for months on his slogan of "Change Starts Now". Just yesterday, the throne speech indicated — quote: "... voted for a government that listens, not dictates..." but it seems they are already refusing to listen.

According to voters, the biggest change that they want to see is in our electoral system. It is an affront to voters and to democracy to deny such a clear majority. The Premier and his colleagues have gladly accepted the power, pay, and benefits awarded to them by less than 52 percent of the electorate, so why won't this Premier acknowledge that the biggest change that Yukoners want to see is in their electoral system and implement a ranked ballot system?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** I will respectfully disagree with the member opposite. This is not an issue that I think is top of mind for most Yukoners. When I was door-knocking throughout my riding of Copperbelt North over the course of the last election campaign, I didn't hear this issue once. I heard about concerns with education, with health care, with the economy, and a range of other issues, but not once did a Yukoner come to me and say that this was the top priority for them.

In fact, the one group who has been advocating to electoral reform over the last number of years, Fair Vote Yukon, specifically disagreed with the approach taken by the former government in the creation of this plebiscite.

We have disagreed with the establishment of the committees that got us here, we disagreed with the creation of the plebiscite, we disagreed with the wording of the plebiscite, and now, of course, we established a very clear position in our platform that we would not be going forward with changes to our electoral system as a result of the last election.

Having received that significant mandate from Yukoners, we will implement the platform that Yukoners elected us to implement.

**Question re: Wareham dam project**

**Patti McLeod:** Late last week, the government announced a plan to address critical work at the Mayo dam Wareham spillway. The anticipated cost announced by the government was over \$150 million.

The government also noted that it would be putting forward a plan to ensure that these costs are not borne entirely by Yukon ratepayers. While I agree that it is critical that government ensures that the Wareham dam is functioning safely and effectively, can the Minister of Finance speak to the impacts of this project on the Yukon's fiscal framework?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** The Member for Watson Lake is quite correct. One of the first significant issues that we found when we took over as government was the critical condition of the Wareham dam. What we have been able to determine so far is that the government had been aware of the multiple engineering reports that identified concerns about the state of the infrastructure going back to 2023. Why the previous government did not communicate with Yukoners about this remains a mystery to us. Likewise, there was no plan to fund this project other than to put it on the backs of ratepayers through significant increases to power rates.

Nonetheless, we have inherited this massive project and the significant costs associated with it. The condition of the infrastructure is such that work being done is not discretionary and we simply have to do it, so we have stepped in right away and authorized the necessary borrowing to keep this work off the backs of ratepayers, but it's going to significantly affect our fiscal framework going forward. The member should be aware that the supplementary budget that I introduced today includes \$100 million of new borrowing since the main budget in the spring.

This means that our fiscal framework is significantly weaker than the previous government had communicated publicly.

**Patti McLeod:** The previous government's 2025-26 spring budget included an authorization for \$400 million of borrowing. In September, the former government announced the completion of the first tranche of this borrowing with a 10-year bond issuance.

Can the Minister of Finance please advise us if the government is planning to move forward with the second tranche of that borrowing? Will the government be issuing another bond, and does the minister anticipate that we will need to borrow the full \$200 million?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** The short answer to the member's question is yes. Due to the significant cost pressures that the Yukon Government is facing as a result of the fiscal position that we have inherited from the previous government, we will undoubtedly need to proceed with the next tranche of borrowing that was contemplated in the spring budget. This will likely come in the form of a bond issuance over the course of this winter. We are still considering the details and length of

that financial instrument, but we do anticipate that we will need to borrow the full \$200 million.

If the member looks at the borrowing summary on page 9 of the interim fiscal and economic update that was released today, she will see that the line titled "Total borrowing" of the Yukon Government is now approaching \$900 million. This means that we are even closer to the debt cap that is imposed by Canada of \$1.2 billion.

Unfortunately, that means that, in all likelihood, we will need to make a formal request of Canada to increase our borrowing limit beyond that amount in the very near future.

**Patti McLeod:** The minister has referenced the interim fiscal and economic update, so I would like to inquire about that further.

I note that on page 20 of the economic update, the department forecasts the GDP for 2025 to fall by 0.6 percent. It also notes that last year the economy declined by 2.5 percent. My understanding is that two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth is often a key indicator of a recession.

In the Yukon's case, we're seeing not two quarters, but two consecutive years of economic decline.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us if we are in a recession? If so, what does that mean for the Government of Yukon's public finances and for Yukon businesses as they navigate the economic reality that we face?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** The Member for Watson Lake has indeed read the interim fiscal and economic update correctly. The department is forecasting the economy to decline for the second consecutive year in 2025. I'll leave to economists to debate about whether or not this means we are in a recession or not.

What I will say is that we are clearly facing some very difficult economic times. Our private sector economy is struggling, and that's exactly what we have heard from so many small businesses throughout the Yukon over the course of the last several months.

Whether they are mining companies or the service and supply companies that support the mining industry, or small businesses like coffee shops and restaurants here in Whitehorse or around the communities, the general economic conditions facing the Yukon are very challenging. That is exactly why we need to turn our focus to supporting the private sector economy.

With our public finances so weak and our ability to respond to emerging challenges so constrained, whether it's the Wareham dam or any other piece of infrastructure that has been neglected by the previous government, the Government of Yukon finds itself in a very difficult position. But I'm confident that if we get our public finances in order and turn our focus to supporting the growth of the economy going forward, we can turn the page and brighter days will indeed be ahead.

**Question re: Rural solid-waste transfer stations**

**Kate White:** Under the previous Liberal government, a frequently raised issue by me and by the Yukon Party — the Member for Klune — was the decision to close four rural transfer stations in Braeburn, Keno, Silver City, and Johnsons Crossing.

Previously, there was a debate on two separate occasions on two different motions to keep them open. One was put forward by me, and one was put forward by the Yukon Party. It was such an important issue to the Yukon Party that they brought it up a total of 10 times in Question Period. Unfortunately, despite the importance of this issue to affected communities, they neglected to include it in their platform, so Yukoners aren't quite sure what happens next.

Will this government commit to re-establishing transfer stations in Silver City, Johnsons Crossing, Braeburn, and Keno that were closed by the previous Liberal government?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** The Leader of the Official Opposition is quite right. Under the previous Liberal-NDP government, rural services declined in this territory considerably. That is why so many Yukoners were disappointed that the NDP did not include the reopening of these transfer stations in their confidence and supply agreement with the previous Liberal government.

However, we have been in these positions now for two weeks. We are assessing the damage that was done by the Liberal-NDP government's decision to close those transfer stations and we will look forward to working with affected communities to determine how best to restore services to Yukon communities throughout the territory, whether it is in Health and Social Services, whether it is in Education, whether it is in Highways and Public Works — any of these files where we have seen rural Yukon disregarded by the previous government with the support of the NDP through their confidence and supply agreement.

**Kate White:** The Premier has alluded to brighter days ahead but with no mention of the plights of rural Yukoners from the communities of Silver City, Johnsons Crossing, Keno, or Braeburn in the Yukon Party platform. Those folks are waiting with bated breath to know when these stations will be reopened.

Will the Premier commit to a timeline to re-establishing rural transfer stations in Braeburn, Keno City, Silver City, and Johnsons Crossing?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** If those residents are waiting with bated breath, perhaps the Leader of the Official Opposition could tell us why the reopening of those facilities was not included in the confidence and supply agreement in 2023 when she signed an agreement to support the previous government in closing them.

**Kate White:** It is hard to believe that the Yukon Party asked so many questions about this issue and they don't have a clear plan to reopen them. The Yukon NDP — we included it as a commitment in our platform. At the time, the members for Kluane, Pelly-Nisutlin, and Copperbelt North framed this issue as an attack on rural Yukoners by the Liberal government. The Premier has alluded to brighter days ahead, but maybe not for all rural Yukoners. The Yukon Party said that the Liberals were out of touch with the needs of Yukoners and the Member for Copperbelt North, now the Premier, went so far as to call it — and I quote: “a question about leadership”.

If the Opposition party was so outraged by the decision to close these transfer stations that Yukoners depended on, why is that now, as government, the Premier isn't committing to Yukoners about reopening those same transfer stations?

**Hon. Currie Dixon:** Reversing the decline in rural services that came about over the course of the last four-and-a-half years under the Liberal-NDP government will be something that is difficult to do. When it comes to solid-waste services, we know that it is one area where we need to make the changes. We know that the previous government, supported by the NDP, made the decision to close a number of those transfer stations.

We need to look carefully at establishing a timeline for the possibility of reopening those sites. But it's something that we want to do by talking to municipalities, unlike the previous government. We want to sit down and have a conversation — whether it's with the Association of Yukon Communities, the individual communities themselves — and determine how best to restore some of the rural services that have been cut by the previous government over the course of the entirety of the government.

Obviously, solid-waste services are an important aspect of that, but we're taking a hard look at all of the services that have been cut by the previous government to rural Yukon. The simple fact is that rural Yukon matters very much to this government and you're going to see that reflected throughout our priorities in the coming years and, of course, in the tabling of our next substantive Yukon Party budget in the spring of next year.

**Speaker:** The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

### Unanimous consent re length of Sitting

**Hon. Scott Kent:** With the support of the other House Leaders, I request the unanimous consent of the House, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 75, that the maximum number of Sitting days for the 2025 Fall Sitting be eight, and that the provisions for the conclusion of a Sitting in Standing Order 76 apply on Thursday, December 18, 2025.

**Speaker:** The Government House Leader has requested unanimous consent of the House, pursuant to Standing Order 14.3 and notwithstanding Standing Order 75, that the maximum number of Sitting days for the 2025 Fall Sitting be eight, and that the provisions for the conclusion of a Sitting in Standing Order 76 apply on Thursday, December 18, 2025.

Is there unanimous consent?

**All Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**Speaker:** Unanimous consent has been granted.

Accordingly, I declare that the current Sitting shall be a maximum of eight sitting days, with the eighth sitting day being Thursday, December 18, 2025.

## Consideration of the Speech from the Throne

**Hon. Scott Kent:** I wish to inform the House, pursuant to the provisions of Standing Order 26(2), that consideration of a motion for an address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, if not concluded today, will take place on Wednesday, December 10, 2025.

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

## ORDERS OF THE DAY

### ADDRESS IN REPLY TO THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

#### Motion No. 16 — Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne

**Adam Gerle:** I move:

THAT the following address be presented to the Commissioner of Yukon:

MAY IT PLEASE THE COMMISSIONER: We, the Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, beg leave to offer our humble thanks for the gracious speech which you have addressed to the House.

**Speaker:** It has been moved by the Member for Porter Creek South:

THAT the following address be presented to the Commissioner of Yukon:

MAY IT PLEASE THE COMMISSIONER: We, the Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, beg leave to offer our humble thanks for the gracious speech which you have addressed to the House.

**Adam Gerle:** I am deeply honoured to be a member of the 36<sup>th</sup> Yukon Legislative Assembly and am grateful for the opportunity to rise and reply to the Speech from the Throne on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.

Firstly, congratulations, Madam Speaker, on your historic election as the first Filipina-Canadian woman Speaker in Canadian parliamentary history, and congratulations to Premier Dixon and my fellow Yukon Party caucus members on our successful election campaign, and to my colleagues across the aisle for your heartfelt wins and for taking on the important role as His Majesty's loyal Opposition.

I commend each of the 20 MLAs gathered with me here today. Each of you has demonstrated courage, commitment, and passion in standing up to build a better and brighter future for the Yukon. Your constituents will be well-served by your dedication and hard work.

It takes a team to run an election, and I would not be here in the Chamber today without the help and hard work, support and sacrifices, pep talks and advice, and the commitment and contributions of countless people. To the tireless volunteers, staff, friends, family members, unsung heroes, and true believers, I offer my heartfelt thanks for enduring the long hours, missed meals, and the emotional roller coaster of an election campaign.

Thank you, Porter Creek South. It's with a deep sense of gratitude and humility that I thank the people of Porter Creek South for your support and the privilege of championing your interests in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

Porter Creek South has been my home for over 20 years, so I know and love the community well. My journey to become your MLA, also known as the world's longest job interview, started earlier this year, and over the course of the summer, I had the incredibly rewarding experience of meeting with residents from across the riding. From Ponderosa to Prospector, from Range Road to Raven's Ridge, we were met with warm welcomes, insightful ideas, and a strong sense of community.

We heard many of the same themes reflected in the throne speech on the doorsteps: the struggles with affordability and the shortage of front-line health care professionals; the need for more educational support for our children; a return to a safe and healthy community; a desire for collaboration between decision-makers and the front-line workers, for a government that listens and supports a strong private sector, and for a Yukon where economic opportunities and affordable housing options for youth are available so that they can build their future here in the territory.

I am delighted that the throne speech addresses these important issues to Yukoners and provides a hopeful, optimistic vision for the future — a vision that provides responsive leadership and collaboration, a vision with a commitment to work with and grow our partnerships with Yukon's 14 First Nations.

Coming from the Yukon's private sector and representing in my riding many small business owners and constituents in the private industry, I am gratified to hear about the government's goal to make the Yukon the best place in Canada to build and grow a business. On the campaign trail, a number of hard-working Yukoners squeezed by high costs and suffocating red tape kept saying: Don't forget the little guy.

Well, I'm happy to report back to them that they will not be forgotten. A strong private sector provides jobs, feeds families, creates economic opportunities, builds well, drives innovation, supports innovation, and provides a tax base to pay for the important social programs that we enjoy here in the Yukon.

My story is one many that Yukoners share. I came up one summer after college, fell under the spell of the Yukon, and never left. For me, I have spent my whole career promoting the magic and the mystery of the Yukon, and am proud to continue serving the people of the territory in this new role. For me, politics is about people. It's about community, building relationships, and having an ongoing conversation about our shared future.

In closing, the Yukon is a special place. It's a land of opportunity, offering an incredible quality of life for our people and our families. We welcome visitors from around the globe, showcasing our incredible natural wilderness, rich history, and unique bucket-list experiences. Our natural resources and vast mineral wealth are among the finest in the world. Our First Nation land claims and self-government agreements lead the rest of the country. Our people are the greatest natural resource,

with their good old-fashioned Yukon ingenuity and generous community spirit. We face some challenges, but I know that, together, we can build a future where the Yukon remains the best place in Canada to live, work, play, invest, and raise a family.

**Kate White:** I spent a lot of time yesterday thinking about how I was going to address yesterday's throne speech, where I would start and what I would focus on. I have to tell you that yesterday, after the throne speech, I was struck by one emotion, which is interesting, because I have heard a lot of throne speeches in my time, but one yesterday, specifically, that hit me — and it's going to sound dramatic, but it's true. Yesterday, it was despair.

In listening to the throne speech yesterday, I realized that all this time I had spent trying to convince myself that, when I first entered this Chamber in 2011, you and a couple of the other members who were here — when I came into this Chamber for the first time, I came here optimistic. Everybody in the 2011 campaign had talked about working together, and listening to good ideas, no matter where they came from, and it was my very first Opposition Wednesday — kind of in a similar time of year, actually — where I recognized that this was actually not the case. That started my time as part of the Official Opposition to a Yukon Party majority government.

It's interesting, because I have reflected on this. I have new colleagues who I am really excited to be joined by. They come from incredible backgrounds and experiences, and it is drastically different. The players here today with me now are different from when I came here as the youngest member of my caucus 14 years ago.

I went back and I was looking at questions that had been asked when the Yukon Party was last in government. It's interesting, because I think about the line in the throne speech — there are so many lines in the throne speech — like this one: “Even though Yukoners are working harder than ever before, many feel that they are not getting ahead and, in some cases, are actually falling behind.” It's important to note that this is underneath the heading about housing. Then it talks about doing all the right things, including working hard and saving up. It talks about home ownership being beyond the reach of many Yukoners, but what really struck me about housing here was the very last line, which said that not all Yukoners aspire to home ownership, so the government will also work to create a healthier rental market, beginning with phasing out the rent cap that forced many landlords to remove their units from the market.

Maybe the current iteration of the Yukon Party forgets why this was something that the Yukon NDP fought for, for so long, but I could remind them that, if they wanted to, they could go into Hansard and they could look, on April 25, 2012, where we asked a question about a constituent whose rent had gone from \$1,100 a month to \$2,000 a month, so an increase of \$900 a month with three months' notice. They really didn't have any options because — well, what are you going to do?

We brought up another issue. Another person told us that their landlord gave them one month's notice for a rent increase

of \$500, or \$6,000 a year. This was a topic that we were discussing with the Yukon Party back in 2012.

I think about the newly elected members from Porter Creek Centre and Porter Creek North. I think about the Member for Porter Creek South who just talked about opportunity and the re-elected Member for Copperbelt South, because each of them now represents mobile home parks. I bring this up because mobile home parks fall within that rent cap. Maybe the newly elected members didn't know, but before the rent cap was in place, your constituents faced notifications of \$100 a month in increases. It made it unaffordable.

I think about the Member for Porter Creek South and I think about Northland. I tell you: I have spent a lot of time in Northland, and I have spent a lot of time in Northland because it was in my riding until this redrawing — 280 or so mobile homes, 280 families. I bring that up partly because not only did I knock on those doors — well, I even knocked on those doors during this election, to be honest. But I have circulated petitions in all of those mobile home parks — two of them. Maybe the Deputy Speaker remembers, because I have tabled them in this Assembly, actually, under a Yukon Party government, asking for protections for people in mobile homes — when you own the asset, but you rent the land. That was viewed for a really long time as being an affordable housing solution, but when your pad rent is \$695 a month and that exceeds your mortgage, just how affordable are we talking?

I think about things yesterday in the throne speech where it talks about phasing out the rent cap. Last night, I met with friends and they both rent. We were sitting there and talking, and one said, “Well, you know, I guess \$500 a month more — I guess I'm willing to go that far.”

A two-bedroom apartment in Riverdale will then be \$2,600 a month — because without any kind of stop-gaps, without any kind of bumpers, that is what we have seen before, and I worry that is what we will see again. Last night we talked about it and they talked about: Well, what is too far? What is too much of an increase? How much could they afford?

In the throne speech it talks about landlords, but it doesn't talk about tenants. Thousands of people rent in the territory, in every riding that we represent. Thousands of people rent. We are talking about affordability, and we are talking about making ends meet, and we are talking about how to do that, and this is the solution: We are going to support landlords by removing the rent cap.

I have heard a lot of times from the Yukon Party over the years, whether they were in the Official Opposition or back in the day when they were the government, and I always got told that the private market — you have to just let it go, just let it go. April 2012, I asked a question about a \$1,000-a-month increase because that is what we were seeing when the private market could just go.

How would you feel when you go knocking on doors and you find out that someone has lived there for quite a while, excellent tenant, and takes care of the property — they are going to have to move. They might not be able to afford to live here because the private market will take care of him.

The day after the election I thought about my time here, initially, as the Official Opposition, and I thought about, honestly, the lateral violence of what the job was like. It was brutal. We were dealing with the Peel watershed land use plan. We were dealing with court cases, First Nations taking Yukon Government to court, lack of land use planning, and hydraulic fracturing. All of these things were happening — prices of houses increasing. It is interesting because, for the last nine years, the Yukon Party really gave the gears to the Liberals about land development, and I think that in the last year when the Yukon Party was government, they developed 40 lots in Whitehorse. That was definitely something to put a feather in your cap for. But now, it is going to be saved because it is going to be different.

The day after the election, I told myself that I couldn't bring my experiences from my first go-round to this one — that things were going to be different.

I hoped that they would be different. I hoped for Yukoners' sakes that they would be different.

First up, transit passes — I mean, in Question Period we can never get into the details of it, really, but I can talk about it because it was — I mean, working with the Liberals was terrible. Let's be frank. It was not easy, but we did it with purpose.

Those rent caps that are going to get phased out — we saw the real effects under the Yukon Party — \$1,000 per month increase.

Free transit — we're all dealing with affordability right now — free transit. I mean, I wanted it universally free — let's be honest. I wanted to replace the fare costs with the City of Whitehorse. To be perfectly frank, the then mayor and the then Minister of Community Services — there was no chance that we were going to get there — absolutely none. Instead of looking at it as an opportunity — unfortunately that wasn't the case.

But bus passes, in an imperfect system, being handed out — at least it was something.

I think about Carol, who said, "Dread and tears" — a dark cloud had descended on her. How was she going to get to her appointments? Dread and tears.

Congratulations. Affordability — 22 times. Affordability crisis — nine times. The first thing that happens — the transit program.

In reality, the government could tell me how bad it was and they can say "the Liberal-NDP government" all they want, but it doesn't change it. They have an opportunity. They have an opportunity to chart a new course to see Yukoners for where they're at. But it turns out that, if you rent and you work hard, it's not who this government is working for.

From the throne speech: "They voted for a government that listens, not dictates..." — when I think about the question from my good colleague from the Klondike — I want to tell you a story. He was on the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform. We had never met before; I couldn't have picked him out of a crowd. But the first time I heard him speak about that situation and about that learning and about what he learned in that assembly and how powerful having 38 Yukoners from across

the territory, in a room together, to learn and try to figure out how to make things better or not — and the reality is that when I was introduced to the Citizens' Assembly the first time, I said: I recognize that whatever recommendation you make, I will honour it, because I have said that.

On the day that I went to hear them make that recommendation, I had prepared myself for being told by the very group that had been tasked with making a decision that they were going to tell me that first-past-the-post is what they wanted to keep. I was ready for it. I had gotten myself emotionally prepared. I had been working on it for such a long time. I had been talking about the importance of democracy and involvement and participation, and I went into that final meeting to hear that recommendation, prepared for them to tell me that they wanted to keep first-past-the-post. That's not what they said. It's not what they said.

One thing that I regret about the process is that, at the final meeting when they were presenting, it wasn't filmed, because if the members from the government caucus could see what those Yukoners were saying and how they were saying it, they would understand why it's so important. Every time that the Premier holds up Fair Vote Yukon to say that even they are campaigning against it, I hope those folks cringe. I do — I hope they cringe, because the first time that I met with them after I was elected in 2011, I told them then: Look, I could never make a decision. I would have too much skin in the game. It's going to have to come from somewhere else.

And I was opposed — to be super clear. I mean, the Member for Lake Laberge and I were on this committee. He, against — kicking and screaming — and I — I was part of the confidence and supply agreement — but I was opposed to a citizens' assembly. I was opposed to it because I was like: Oh my gosh, how is this ever going to happen? How could it ever happen? But then you look to Ireland. The citizens' assembly voted for a woman's right to choose when it comes to reproductive rights — just recently, in a country so dictated by religion that a woman couldn't access a safe abortion, and it was a citizens' assembly that changed that. So, I changed my mind, and the Member for Lake Laberge, to his full credit, said: You know, in the first survey, you didn't ask about a citizens' assembly; we should do another survey.

And we did — we did another survey, much less complicated: Do you support a citizens' assembly, yes or no? Would you be on it, yes or no? More than 6,000 people responded. It was the survey that had the most responses ever in the history of the Yukon — more than cannabis, which used to be held up as like the single one with the most responses. Citizens' assembly — more people ever responding in favour, more people volunteered.

I met the Member for the Klondike through that process. When he asked the question today, he made a point: This government was elected with 51.83 percent of the electoral vote, which is 4.27 percent less than the number of people who voted in favour of electoral reform.

The Premier said that it's a strong mandate that he was given with 51.83 percent. I'm going to challenge that 56 percent is a stronger mandate for electoral reform, including

every one of the ridings that was listed off, the ridings that you represent. I think about my colleague from Mountainview and where I found her. It was at a union meeting, talking about the importance of representation and women's participation. I heard her speak, and I asked if I could have her phone number.

I think about the Member for Riverdale North, who I have known since she moved here, and how I have asked so many times, and she finally said yes. I think about the Member for Riverdale South, who is a new Canadian, and yesterday, when the Speaker gave her speech, it resonated.

I think about my colleague from Whitehorse Centre, who I have had the pleasure to work next to. I think about how we six are really facing a lot of what we six faced in 2011 — that we're dealing with a majority government that ways they want to work together. I guess we'll see. We'll see on the first Opposition Wednesday. We'll see what the power of words does. Again, you hold on to those core memories.

The Member for Copperbelt South might remember, because he was the one who edited that first motion. I put in a motion to develop a housing strategy and I listened to a whole bunch of people, and it was amended to say "implement its housing strategy".

**Some Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)

**Kate White:** "Continue to", he just said off mic. Didn't have a housing strategy — that was the spoiler. There was no housing strategy.

I guess we'll see how we're going to work together, come Opposition Wednesday next week; how motions can be edited; and how what we put forward will be different by the time we get to the vote.

When I think about the throne speech, something that really struck me was the absence of talking about the importance of some pretty big projects ahead of us with First Nations — and no mention of land use planning. Land use planning — critical to any kind of success going forward in any kind of mining. Do you want to make it easier? Let's make sure that it's not contested right off the bat. Let's do land use planning.

I have talked a lot about how the Yukon Government — it doesn't matter what colour it is, it's still the Yukon Government. The Yukon Government signed on 30 years ago and committed to successor resource legislation, which is new minerals legislation — land use planning. Out of eight land use plans, we have two completed in Yukon. We have one. We are waiting to see what happens with the Dawson regional land use plan. I can tell you that the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has shared some concerns. So, two out of eight — so I was surprised that they didn't talk about land use planning and building this new relationship with Yukon First Nations. I appreciate that there was a forum, but that should be the very least.

I was surprised that they didn't talk about new minerals legislation. It's interesting, because I remember being in Old Crow and having a conversation with the Klondike Place Miners' Association after that process had started. They wanted my assurance that I would support the work that had already been done to minerals legislation going forward. They wanted to know that it wasn't going to go backwards. I told them that

it wasn't me to whom they had to ask this question. I was like: Where does the Yukon Party stand? Where does the Yukon Party stand?

I was happy to see additional humans being budgeted for in Education. I can tell you that this is one of the things in the confidence and supply agreement that was done and I'm glad that those numbers haven't been taken back — 60 EAs, LATs, and wellness counsellors. So, the addition of 39 more is important. It's important.

I think about the throne speech from yesterday. It says: "If mistakes are made, they will be addressed and acknowledged. True leadership means having the strength to change the course." Transit — that was a good opportunity to change course.

I am happy to wear my mistakes. I have no problem with it. I own them more often than many.

That was so interesting today when we were talking about rural transfer stations. The Member for Kluane and I did work together on the Opposition side. Ten times there were questions about rural transfer station closures. The reality is that I really tried. I think about David in Silver City who told me that he was so disappointed that I couldn't get it there.

I told him that I would keep trying.

So, 10 questions, two motions when the Yukon Party supported us and we supported them, and here we are. What is going to happen to Johnsons Crossing? What is going to happen to Silver City and Kluane? Are we going to re-establish transfer stations? Are we going to support folks? Johnsons Crossing — lots of conversation around there about that transfer station. Lots of conversation about how many people live out that way. At the time, the Liberal government said that there weren't very many and the member at the time said that there was.

If this is the direction for the next four years in the throne speech, there are lots of questions. There are so many questions.

I thought that it was so interesting that in the portion that I would suggest was maybe about the environment — because it was entitled "Strong stewards" — it talks about hunters, anglers, and trappers having faced fewer opportunities and inconsistent decisions, but it doesn't say anything about species at risk. I say this because members who have been here since 2014 will know that I had asked about it 16 times before my colleague, the Member for Whitehorse Centre, was elected, and then I passed the torch. I think they asked it four more times. So, stewards — no mention of species at risk or land use planning, no talk about making the Yukon River corridor a protected space by giving it personhood. That was a really good conversation up in Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in territory because that is an initiative from First Nations — Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. How do you protect the river? How do you protect the corridor? Well, you could give it personhood like the Magpie River in Canada or like all of those examples that we have seen in New Zealand.

When I think about the responsibility that we have in this Chamber, no matter what side we're from, it is about working for people. I heard the Premier say that he never once heard about electoral reform. I can tell you that I heard about electoral reform, and I knocked on a lot of doors in a lot of ridings. I can

tell you I heard concerns about rent and what could happen. I heard concerns about education.

The Member for Copperbelt South has a lot of ahead of him. I mean, he has been asking questions about the department for nine years, so there is a lot of information on our side to come from. But I agree that, for education, there needs to be a redirection. There needs to be support there.

I think about the importance of health care and access to health care. I mention this because, right now, in the Deputy Speaker's own riding, one of those health centres is going to be closed for 12 days, I think — Ross River Health Centre closure, no access to staff.

I think about the health centre in Pelly Crossing and about the stress that the nurses there told me they face. I think about all the health care workers who said that they wanted to continue with education but that they need the support to do so. It's great that we have the bridging program, but if you can't afford to take time off of work and you can't afford to pay for school, then how do you do the bridging program to be an LPN to a registered nurse, and how there's an opportunity there. There's an opportunity for this government to invest in education for health care workers. There's an opportunity to pay for that education for registered nurses to become nurse practitioners. There's an opportunity to do those things — to make sure that community health centres, like that in Ross River, that are facing looming closures don't have to.

As we get into the budget debate, I have so many questions about some of the new directions within that document, because there will be some changes.

I think about, in 2015, talking about the Yukon Party's commitment to 50-percent diversion from landfills. The reason why I bring this up is that they were really far away from that — really far away. I think the last time I asked that question was on May 26, 2016.

I said that, when the Yukon Party government took office in 2011, they made a lofty commitment to Yukoners that, by 2015, half of Yukon's waste would be diverted from landfills.

Sadly, 2015 came and went and the Yukon Party government broke that promise. Instead, now all they can offer are vague statements about any and all waste management actions to distract Yukoners from the fact that it failed to meet its 2011 platform promise.

It's interesting because in this document and in yesterday's throne speech, it talks about — to pause and reassess the extended producer responsibility program. That was really interesting to me. I reached out yesterday to the Circular Materials organization to ask if they had heard about this, and what the consequences would be — and there are consequences because, come December 31, Yukon Government no longer holds the contract to move — to divert — recycling from rural Yukon into Whitehorse.

So, that 2015 commitment to waste diversion, with yesterday's statement about pausing the extended producer responsibility — that has consequences. Pausing the program means that people in the City of Whitehorse are going to have to pay for blue bins again. Remember, 22 times it talked about affordability, and nine times called it a "crisis", so here's one

more fee to go back on, because with extended producer responsibility, it was producers who were paying.

The Member for Porter Creek Centre and I were at a meeting hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, and I heard folks talk about their concerns, including someone from a building company. I followed up with him after he had a conversation with the Circular Materials. It turns out that he wasn't going to have to pay a single cost for EPR; everything was covered by the manufacturer — everything. So, pausing this program has consequences.

Je pense que la première fois que j'étais dans cette chambre, la première fois que j'ai répondu, j'ai parlé en français. J'ai parlé en français et dans le hantsard, ça dit « spoke in French ». Je me souviens de la première fois où j'ai posé des questions en français, et je l'ai fait parce qu'avant que je ne sois critique, jamais nous n'avons eu un débat sur les programmes ou les services en français.

So, we have come far. French Language Services Directorate is now independent, and me speaking French means that someone is going to get called in. I apologize to Hantsard; I did not supply that ahead of time. But I think it's important as we recognize the two official languages in Canada, or I recognize how important it is that when the Speaker speaks, I be included and how critical that is.

I think about how important it is when I think about my colleague from Riverdale South, who, just like the Speaker, is translating everything as we go because English is not their first language. We have come a long way since 2011 — the Yukon has and this Chamber has. I am concerned about going back.

After the November 3 election, I tried to tell myself not to bring the trauma from my first term around here back in — to leave it behind. I thought that maybe it will be different. You campaigned on change, affordability, listening, and acknowledging mistakes. It all sounded really good. Then yesterday I heard the throne speech and I realized it wasn't that good. There are going to be a lot of similarities that will hurt Yukoners, similarities that will hurt renters, that will hurt rural municipalities that will have to deal with waste or recycling with a pause to a program that was supposed to address that. There will be consequences. My colleagues and I will work hard to hold the government accountable and have you explain your actions and decisions.

In reality, I don't think that we will disagree all the time. I would like to think that we are going to agree. I would like to think that there are times when something will just make sense and we will agree, but I can already tell you that I disagree with much of the throne speech. So, that is the task. It is making sure that, in the next four years, my colleagues and I hold ministers accountable for their decisions and actions, and that we hold them true to their words, that if they make mistakes, they will acknowledge them and change course, and that they recognize that Yukoners are working hard and can't get ahead. But it's not just people who want to buy homes; it's also people who rent homes. Where do they fall in this? What is the transition program when it talks about phasing that out? There's a lot ahead of us here. It's a big responsibility.

I invite the newly elected people to find their feet and find your voice. I barely remember what it was like. I was in my thirties when I was elected and I had brown hair, but I think I remember that it was like drinking from a fire hose. You were always afraid that you were going to make mistakes, but we learn from those mistakes. It is a little less fire hose as it goes along. You might never want to read books at home that aren't fiction though, I will give you that. So, I imagine that for lots, and I hope that today's budget responses or throne speech responses will be an introduction. I want to know where you're from, I want to know who you are, and I want to know why you're here.

I am here because I care about people. I care about the Yukon, and I sometimes wonder how come I am still here, to be honest. It is not an easy job. It is an important job. So, I hope that when you have the opportunity to speak, you tell us why you are here and what your hopes are for the next four years.

Congratulations, Madam Speaker — your speech yesterday was beautiful, and I welcome my colleagues to tell us who they are.

**Hon. Cory Bellmore:** It is an honour and a privilege to be here today to respond to the Speech from the Throne. As a first-time member, I do hope that I will be able to convey why I am here in an optimistic manner.

First, I would like to take the opportunity to thank my constituents in my riding of Mayo-Tatchun. The support and encouragement that I received from the people who I met for the first time, as well as long-time friends and family, was humbling, and it is a great privilege to be here to represent them. Particularly, I would like to thank Tara Wheeler, Lorraine Graham, Heather Bellmore, and Belinda McGinty. Their help and company, while visiting folks in the riding, kept me going each day. There were also many others in the communities who were happy to lend a hand when asked, and I am so grateful for their assistance. Also, thank you to my husband, Corey, and my children Jesse, Lucas, and Kolton for their support and excitement through the campaign and driving the signs up and down the highway.

Mayo-Tatchun is the largest riding of the now 21 ridings in the Yukon, and it is so beautiful and unique in all the different places. Sometimes we take for granted what is in front of us each day, and during this election, with the many hours spent on the road and in the communities, I was reminded each day of just how beautiful it is, both in the landscape and the people.

There are many aspects to this vast riding that may on the surface seem incompatible, but in reality, it found success for many decades. There are vast stretches of mostly untouched wilderness, pockets and areas of land rich with minerals, and communities developed and grown for different purposes. The activities that have been successful over time were so, not because they were forced or because one had to win over another, but because the people doing them cared. They cared about the land, the people, and the future of this area. We need to encourage and support this, going forward. We need to listen to the elders, the traditional knowledge of the land; we need to

listen to long-time residents and use their knowledge as we make decisions for future generations.

There are many, many important milestone years for the Yukon. A few I will highlight: 1898, when we became an independent territory; 1973, the presentation of *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* to the Prime Minister of the day; 1979, when we were granted responsible government; 1992, the signing of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*; and from my riding, 1994 and 1997, the three Northern Tutchone First Nations signed their land claims and self-government agreements.

The Mayo-Tatchun riding has three communities that have three First Nation governments — Na-Cho Nyäk Dun, Selkirk First Nation, and Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation; two incorporated municipalities, Mayo and Carmacks, as well as several smaller unincorporated areas, including Keno, Stewart Crossing, and with the recent electoral boundary expansion this year, a growing population around Little Salmon Lake and Drury Creek. These places are full of people wanting to make healthy, thriving communities, and I look forward to listening to them, and with my colleagues here, finding solutions to help them to do this.

It was a true privilege to be asked by the Premier to join Cabinet, and I was very happy to accept the portfolios of the Yukon Lottery Commission and Community Services. My entire career has been working in and for communities in the Yukon, and I'm eager to continue this important work.

We have certainly hit the ground running. I was very honoured to attend my first Yukon Forum as an elected official. The work we do together will go beyond relationships to partnerships, supporting successful economic ventures, protecting our lands and wildlife, as well as building and sustaining health and wealth for our communities, residents, and citizens.

I am excited to work again with the Association of Yukon Communities on shared priorities and finding avenues to help municipalities thrive, from the never-ending woes of landfills, recycling, and animal control to training staff, growing tourism, and developing land and housing. All these everyday services and initiatives for new services, operations, and infrastructure need to have adequate funding and a clear path to decision making. Ensuring that the rules and guidance the *Municipal Act* provides are not a barrier to growth and that the comprehensive municipal grant is reflecting realities as much as possible is necessary work that we will do in partnership with the association and municipalities.

Each community also has its own unique challenges as well, from the capital city of Whitehorse and the immense growth pressures faced here to aging civil infrastructure in communities, a properly equipped fire service across the Yukon, and growing needs in our local advisory areas.

Communities are the backbone of our territory, and municipal government is where the boots hit the ground, often referred to as the most efficient and quickly responsive form of government that is closest to the residents. In some communities, these services are delivered by First Nation governments, and as their governance and capacity grow, so does their need. I look forward to assisting in finding

partnerships where they make sense in communities that have both municipal and First Nation governments. Success in our communities means success for the territory.

We also need to keep our communities safe. The Protective Services branch looks after Wildland Fire Management, the Fire Marshal's Office, and building and emergency services. While you can never predict an emergency, these teams work to proactively mitigate them and keep us safe when they do threaten. I spent many summers doing administration for fire crew teams in many Yukon communities and at a couple of fire camps. I truly appreciate the work that they do when they need to respond to fires and emergencies. Long days in hazardous environments is strenuous and stressful work. It was an excellent introduction to the workforce.

An important piece of our platform is to ensure that we can get the professionals we need working in our territory in regulatory and licensing services. We have the job to provide the opportunity to attract physicians and other important health professionals to our territory and our communities. We need to understand what their needs are and find a path to meet those needs and welcome them to the Yukon.

Sports and recreation are a necessity for the health and well-being of residents. Having functioning infrastructure and programs that promote healthy lifestyles is an important role of government — any government. This coming year, in particular, will be thrilling when we welcome the athletes and contingents to the Arctic Winter Games here at home.

From high-profile sports and athletes reaching professional status, to backyard disc golf and pickleball, keeping our residents active is the goal. This department, the Department of Community Services, has a wide variety of responsibilities, and I won't list them all, but each is working hard to build and support healthy, safe and sustainable communities. Thank you to the public service for the hard work you do each day to realize these goals.

I would be remiss to not mention the great work done by the Yukon Lottery Commission and, by extension, Lotteries Yukon. This group plays an important role in giving back to the community. Recreation, arts, and sports are the main activities funded to support the work done by communities and non-profit organizations. Thank you for the work you do in our communities.

I would like to end today by thanking all of my colleagues in this House. We all made the choice to be here today to represent Yukoners and to do our best on their behalf. I'm excited to engage and create the change, where needed, to do this.

**Justin Ziegler:** I want to begin with something simple: why I am here and who I am. I grew up between France and Ireland. In my whole life, identity was something multiple, layered, shifting — never a single story — and this is exactly what the Yukon is about: a place that is rich in its history, its people, its culture; rich in its diversity, its languages, its traditions; rich in its wild landscapes, its creativity, its talent; rich in its ambition, its courage, its imagination; rich in its

stories, old and new; rich in its communities; rich in the dreams that we dare to build together.

When I arrived in the Yukon, something in me settled for the first time. After a week of driving from Vancouver — and as a European, a week of driving is not normal — we ended up spending days on the Stewart-Cassiar. It was the end of November, and the world had become black and white for days. Then, suddenly, there it was: the Yukon sign, a burst of colour in an ocean of white and grey.

Since that moment, my life has been filled with so many vibrant colours that only the Yukon has to offer. Here, for the first time, I found a place where I belonged, a community that accepted me, challenged me, and made me better. When my husband and I understood that we were not going anywhere else, that this was home, something shifted. I wanted to give back. I volunteered, I joined boards, I worked with and for the community, I produced shows, and finally, I did something I had waited for long before becoming Canadian: I stepped into political life.

« Je dirais orage. Je dirais fleuve. Je dirais tornade. Je dirais feuille. Je dirais arbre. Je serais mouillé de toutes les pluies, humecté de toutes les rosées. » disait Aimé Césaire.

One of the things that changed me most deeply since arriving in the Yukon has been learning from the First Nations of this territory. Their teachings, their history, and their leadership has opened my eyes in ways I wasn't expecting, and I continue to learn more every day. I grew up as a dancer surrounded by women. My teachers were women. My role models were women, and the political figures who inspired me most — Christiane Taubira, Simone Veil, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Greta Thunberg, Eva Joly — all are women. So, when I learned about matriarchal societies here, something resonated. It felt familiar; it felt right. I want to say clearly that I hope I honour this land and the people who are here long before me and any of us.

I have learned as much about myself as I have learned about Yukon First Nations, and I know I still have a lot to learn. I walk with this responsibility and this stewardship in mind every single day.

La mémoire du monde ne s'inscrit pas seulement dans les livres mais dans les paysages, dans les traces que les peuples y ont déposées. Nous sommes les récipiendaires de cette mémoire parfois complexe, parfois douloureuse et que nous devons porter avec une très grande sagesse et une immense humilité. Je suis le produit de toutes les solidarités que j'ai rencontrées. Je suis le fruit de ceux qui se battent pour ceux qui ne leur ressemblent pas.

I am deeply convinced that equity will never be real unless it is complete between all identities, between all genders. I am particularly proud to sit in an Assembly where men are not the majority. I hope that this example informs every decision we make.

The fight for equity is a daily one in our institutions, in our policies, and in our communities. Stepping into this role, I have been thinking a lot about what responsibility actually means — not the ceremonial side of it, not the title, not the seat in this Chamber, but the day-to-day work of being accountable to

people whose lives will be shaped by the decisions we make here.

For me, responsibility starts with listening — listening not for the answer I could give, but for the truth being humbly offered; listening not only to those who speak loudly, but especially to those who don't always have the space, the words, or the confidence to speak — and responsibility continues with humility, a willingness to say what I know, to admit what I don't know yet. I didn't come here to perform. I came here to work, to learn, and to build trust through transparency, and sometimes vulnerability, with all my imperfections.

Je veux ajouter que mon parcours n'est pas exceptionnel; il est le résultat de la générosité d'un pays d'accueil.

I stand here, as a gay man, with a privilege that many before me never had. People like me, not so long ago, were beaten simply for existing in the wrong place at the wrong time. That violence still happens in parts of the world. People like me were stigmatized, especially during the AIDS pandemic — a pandemic we speak of as if it is over, while it continues to kill those without access to treatments, education, or safety.

I think often of those who came before us and their courage, their fear, their losses, and their stubborn hope. They are here with me in this room in every word I speak. And yet today, I get to speak. I get to love openly, and I get to build a family. My husband supports me quietly, passionately, and genuinely. I admire him more than I can say. I hope we will soon have the privilege to grow our family further, and I want it to happen here in the Yukon, our home. The generations of people before me who fought to allow me to be who I am, I carry with me here in this Chamber. I hope to fight hard enough for the generations who will come after me.

There was a moment in this building — a quiet moment — that I will never forget. It's when a colleague realized they would not be the only queer person in this Assembly. Watching the relief move across their face told me something very profound. Sometimes just being who you are can make someone feel less alone. Sometimes, what is an undeniable pride can also be a burden.

« Aussi loin et différent que soit l'autre, l'autre est un autre moi-même. » disait Christiane Taubira.

My political compass is shaped by thinkers who taught me that dignity must never bend, that justice must never be compromised, that equality must never be postponed, and that courage must never be optional. Their words echo in me. They say that a society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable. They demand that we look injustice in the eyes and refuse to be afraid.

These ideas guide me. The shadows of the figures who said these words before me walk with me into this Chamber. And so, I stand here with determination, because I believe in the Yukon, and I believe that everyone in this territory deserves to shine. I am here to represent everyone in Riverdale South, every story, every family, every background.

Robert Badinter a répété sa vie durant qu'une civilisation se juge à la façon dont elle traite les plus faibles. Je tâcherai de m'atteler à faire en sorte que ma voix soit la voix de chacun et qu'aucun ne se sente laissé à l'écart de nos sociétés.

My duty is to make sure everyone, absolutely everyone, finds a place in the work I do.

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“My mouth will be the mouth of the adversity that doesn't have a mouth.” Those words of Aimé Césaire taught me this: politics is not about speaking for yourself, but speaking with and for other people.

Yes, I will always carry my identities honestly, but they are not limits, they are entry points. They teach me how to listen to those who feel unheard, how to recognize when someone is left outside the room. My commitment is to represent the whole of Riverdale South, the whole of the Yukon.

La politique doit être une exigence morale avant d'être un exercice technique. C'est ce que l'équipe précédente du NPD nous a prouvé.

I also want to acknowledge the previous NDP caucus, because they played a huge part in my decision to run. I watched them work with courage, discipline, and compassion. They stood for tenants, for workers, for safety, for reconciliation, for dignity. They showed me what principled politics looks like — not just in theory, but in action. That example made me believe I had a place here.

« Nous ne sommes rien sur terre, si nous ne sommes pas d'abord l'esclave d'une cause, celle des peuples et celle de la justice et de la liberté. » disait Franz Fanon et j'ajouterais qu'être libre, c'est effectivement être responsable des autres.

This theory has given me a home, a purpose, a community, a family. My hope is that my work here will give something back, something honest, something useful, something that makes life a little fairer, a little safer, a little more humane for the next generations who come after me.

I stepped forward, not because I think I'm the answer, but because I want to be part of the solution. I want to work. I want to listen. I want to serve genuinely, consistently, humbly. I believe in the slow patience of history. I believe that truth has a voice, even when it trembles. I believe that quiet steadiness can move mountains.

As Albert Camus once wrote: « Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux. » We must imagine Sisyphus happy, not because the struggle disappears, but because the meaning emerges. And when doubt comes, and it will, I will return to literature, to music, to dance, to the North, to people.

Je m'engage ici avec humilité, mais aussi avec la conviction profonde que le moment est venu de servir, d'écouter et de bâtir quelque chose de plus juste, ensemble. Quelque chose qui aurait été décrit par Léon-Gontran Damas comme quelque chose de beau. Beau comme une rose dont la tour Eiffel assiégée à l'aube voit s'épanouir enfin les pétales. Grand comme un besoin de changer d'air. Fort comme l'accent aigu d'un appel dans la nuit longue. And I know I won't do this alone. Nothing meaningful was ever done alone. And I know I

can count on a team that I admire so much, and sitting next to them is one of my biggest sources of pride.

**Doris Anderson:** *[Member spoke in First Nation language. Text unavailable.]*

I am Doris Anderson. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity. I would like to begin with congratulations on your new role as Speaker of the House.

I would also like to thank the constituents of Porter Creek North for your vote, your trust, your support. It is an incredible honour to represent you, and I am honoured that you shared your thoughts on what was important to you and your community.

The throne speech has set out the government's priorities, and I am happy to say that so many things I have heard from constituents across my riding of Porter Creek North have been echoed with those priorities. I heard concerns about the state of some of the schools — how so many small things have compounded and can become big issues — in conversations with parents and educators who were concerned about a number of issues in their schools, from a lack of learning spaces to the absence of a working PA system.

There is a plan to tackle those repairs and to address some of the concerns to ensure that they are safe and well-maintained for our students. I look forward to seeing those good things happen for our children's safety in our schools.

I'm sure that many more concerns will be raised with me over the course of my election term and that many conversations will take place to see how they can be addressed in the best and most effective way. I look forward to hearing from the residents of Porter Creek North, the good and the bad. If I can be of help to you, please don't hesitate to reach out.

I would like to also take this opportunity to thank a few very important people in my life. Many thanks to everyone who believed in me, who volunteered unconditionally to help me in so many ways. It means so much to me — *günilshish*, *günilshish* — to the team who helped me find my way to the seat today — Kelsey, Melanie, Danny, Amanda, Robin, and Tim — who went above and beyond, and, of course, our leader, Premier Currie Dixon, for the unwavering leadership, encouragement, and for building a platform that I could truly believe in and support. To my family, Tiffany, Kayla, Kota, Tanner, and Marshall — your willingness to step up and step in, and even more so, stay by my side unconditionally throughout the last few months.

To my gracious friend, Doris, also known as D-line Dorrie, who was so patient with the hot summer days, wind, and rain — we did have some fun going door to door. Most days it was during the dinner hour, so it was amazing to smell the whiff of some barbecued food — we were so hungry.

Again, however, *gùnèlchish*, *gunalchîsh*, thank you.

My heartfelt congratulations to all the elected MLAs. It is refreshing to see people here who reflect the population of the Yukon.

*Gùnèlchish*, *gunalchîsh*, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the time.

**Hon. Linda Benoit:** I am happy to be here to respond to the Speech from the Throne today. It is an honour to be rising in this House on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council as the very first Member of the Yukon Legislative Assembly for Whistle Bend South. Thank you so much to all of you in Whistle Bend South for placing your trust in me and electing me to represent you. Over the four months leading up to the election, you opened your homes and your hearts to me, shared your wins, your challenges and your hopes for the future.

Whistle Bend is a thriving community, although not without challenges and growing pains. I am proud to represent the residents of Whistle Bend Place, as well as have the newest school in Whitehorse — *Dámbü Tán Kets'ádañ Kù* — in my riding. It has been my pleasure to get to know their hard-working school council and some of their staff and teachers over the past months. Recently, the *Dámbü Tán Kets'ádañ Kù* School Council spent months and put in hours of work and research on an allergy awareness and anaphylaxis plan, in consultation with DTKK administration and teachers, Department of Education, experts, and parents. This work has allowed most classes in the school to resume eating nuts and other common allergen foods, while creating an allergy-aware environment and providing training for staff on how to react if there is a serious reaction among staff or students.

Again, this has been many hours of work put in by these dedicated parent volunteers and just one example of where they have focused their attention.

One of the highlights of my election campaign was definitely speaking to Ms. Lovatt's grade six class and also hearing from them about the work that she and many students have been putting in to form a student council.

I have also had the pleasure of working with the Whistle Bend Neighbourhood Association. They are a group of very dedicated volunteers who work hard on behalf of all of Whistle Bend to foster community and champion issues and concerns that everyone shares.

Recently, board members have brought forward concerns to both the Whitehorse City Council and the Government of Yukon about their priority to see a new fire hall with ambulance bays built in Whistle Bend, as well as the need to move forward on park development. These are both initiatives that I support and will continue to work on with my colleagues and other levels of government.

The WBNA is currently hosting a Christmas lights contest in Whistle Bend, and volunteers on the board have worked very hard to secure sponsorships and entries into the contest. Shameless plug — contest entries are accepted until December 16, and you can find more information on the WBNA Facebook page. This is just a small sample of the wonderful people who call Whistle Bend home or work to make it a better community. I'm grateful to be able to bring all of your voices forward.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention both Vida Pelayo and Dustin McKenzie-Hubbard, who also ran in Whistle Bend South. They are both dedicated individuals who serve our community in many ways.

I would like to thank my colleagues who are standing here with me today, as well as all of the Yukon Party candidates who ran alongside us for their dedication to their homes and the territory. We wouldn't be here today without the hard work of so many Yukoners, our party members, our party executive and campaign team, and our volunteers.

I owe a heartfelt thank you to my partner, Chad, and his family, my family and friends, my campaign manager Valerie, my official agent Maxine, and my many volunteers for the work that they have put in over the past months and the support that they have shown me.

I have spent many years volunteering for organizations who seek to level the playing field for women and gender-diverse individuals, including YWITT here in the Yukon and Equal Voice on a national level. I was absolutely blown away by the number of women and gender-diverse candidates who chose to run in our 2025 general election. To add to that the number of First Nation candidates and those of visible minorities — what a diverse group that truly reflects Yukoners. It was an election to be proud of in that manner.

The Yukon now joins British Columbia as one of only two jurisdictions in Canada currently who have a gender-balanced legislature. To that end, I look forward to working with all of you in this Chamber going forward and hope that we can work constructively for the Yukon and the people we represent.

I wish to thank Yukon Party leader and our Premier, Currie Dixon, for putting his faith in me to appoint me as the Minister of Highways and Public Works. Having grown up in Faro, I realized early the importance of the work that this department does, from looking after our highways and airports to managing all of the government spaces and IT infrastructure that our rural communities depend on.

My first real job out of school was as an observer/communicator at the Faro community aerodrome radio station — or the Faro Airport — and I remember my years spent working there fondly.

It fostered my love for aviation, my commitment to safety, and a true appreciation for every job opportunity available in a small community like Faro.

I have spent the last six years, prior to being elected, co-managing a local construction company. Through that work and while sitting on the board of the Yukon Contractors Association, I have become acutely aware of the challenges facing both construction and other industries who participate in the government procurement process. I will bring forward those experiences and many others, as well as the work ethic that many of you know me for, into my position as the minister for this crucial department.

I look forward to working with all of the Yukon Party MLAs — both ministers and private members — on implementing our platform commitments and keeping the best interests of our communities at the forefront.

**Carmen Gustafson:** Madam Speaker, congratulations on your new role.

I am humbled and honoured to share my words here for the first time on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First

Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council as the Member for Riverdale North.

I would like to start with a few thank yous to the people who helped me get here today: first and foremost, my partner Crispin, who supports and encourages me while keeping my grounded. He also makes chocolate, which is an excellent quality in a partner; to the Leader of the Official Opposition for all of the bike rides over the last maybe 13 years that finally led to me agreeing to run with her. I am always grateful for the love of my family back in the Kootenays in BC. During the campaign period and my first few weeks as an MLA, I thought a lot about and reflected on the mentors and the people I have looked up to who have shaped my life over the years — especially people who are no longer with us. I thank them for all of their sage advice.

I am thankful for the people who are part of my Yukon chosen family — those friends who just keep on showing up, no matter what — and to the new friends I made on the campaign trail, and all of the volunteers who covered many Riverdale kilometres with me.

I want to thank all of the candidates who put their names forward to participate in democracy and congratulate all the members of this Assembly.

Finally, to the people of Riverdale North who put their trust in me to represent their voices, I thank them for the honour and privilege to do so. I would also like to thank all of the people who have made the transition to this new role as smooth as possible: our team at the caucus office, as well as the staff of the Legislature Assembly, who have all made sure that we have the space, tools, and support to serve the people of Yukon.

Nodding to my friend, the Member for Riverdale South, I'm going to go to literature too.

In 1859, Charles Dickens penned *A Tale of Two Cities*, an early work of historical fiction — now a very popular genre — looking back at the French and American revolutions of the previous century. Of course, the class struggle and general distaste of the aristocracy appeals to someone of my political persuasion. It's the famous opening paragraph pointing out the paradoxes of the time that make the work famous.

I suspect that nobody here was expecting a reading of Dickens today, but here are those famous words: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way — in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

So why, in my initial address to the Assembly, am I bringing this up? Well, one of the enduring messages of these words, to me at least, is that, despite everything that is different about the world in 2025, much remains the same just as, in 1859, Dickens saw contemporary struggles mirroring those of the late 1700s. In some ways, this actually comforts me that,

perhaps, the problems of the world are not in fact ours to solve in this moment, but are a shared and constant struggle of being human living in collective societies.

In other ways, it's deeply troubling that, despite all the advances of humankind, so many remain in poverty despite being exploited for their labour. Our environment continues to be used as a playground for profit and a dumping ground for waste. Our common goods continue to be hoarded for the benefit of the few.

Despite the heavy lifting done by Indigenous communities and leaders around the globe, the law of sovereignty and rights of Indigenous people are still, unfortunately, viewed by many as a sidebar to colonial systems and histories.

As in the times of Dickens, those with privilege and power continue to amass more, while those without go hungry. But of course, I didn't put my name forward to become a Member of the Assembly because I dwell in a dark view of the world or the Yukon. I came here to be a voice for Yukoners who want a bright future for themselves, their neighbours, and the territory.

I came here looking forward to being true partners with Yukon First Nations, to achieve sustainable and equitable prosperity that respects the environment, to lift up our children and give them opportunities they deserve that we perhaps didn't have. I look to all of you here today, because I do believe that all members are here for the same fundamental reason, which is to make the territory the best place it can be, despite the differences in the paths we walk, the language we use, and the ways we want to achieve these outcomes.

Going back to *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens also wrote of justice and rule of law, and I want to take some time to touch on that, too.

Part of the oath I affirmed to become a member of the Law Society of Yukon read that, in all things, I will conduct myself truly and with integrity, and that I will uphold the rule of law, and the rights and freedoms of all persons, according to the laws of Canada and of this territory. There is no part of the job of being a legislator that is more important than upholding the rule of law. This has been my professional obligation for over a decade.

But what is the rule of law? To put it simply, the rule of law is what keeps our borders safe, our institutions functioning, and our democracy intact. It's the simple idea that we are all — we, all of us here in this Chamber, and everyone outside of it as well — equally subject to the law. This is the fundamental underpinning of democracy.

It means that a democratic state does not act without lawful authority to do the things it's doing, to spend the money it's spending, or to make the decisions it is making. Take a look around the world, and you will see, in real time, the dire consequences of the unravelling or breakdown of the rule of law: the occupation of Ukraine and the genocide in Gaza, extrajudicial detentions and killings for political aims, the verbal threats on Canadian sovereignty from our neighbour.

Governments and government officials acting without authority are real threats to the democracy and democratic countries around the world. Time and again, history teaches us that the breakdown of the rule of law that ends in armed conflict

and failed states began with minor incursions: an unlawful appointment here, a bit of unauthorized spending there, directions to the judiciary to further dubious political aims, oppression of groups and individuals — I could go on. This is why it's so important for governments to not only adhere to, but to fully embrace, protect, and cherish the rule of law.

It is the duty of each and every one of the members here to honour the democracy we are here to participate in. It means entrenching democracy and rule of law into even the most minor of what we do.

So, how do we do that? To ensure that we live democratic values day after day. To my mind it is imperative that our actions as members, and the decisions of government, can answer the following in the affirmative: Am I acting within the rule of law? Does my conduct strengthen our shared and cherished democratic values? Can I transparently defend my decision knowing that others might disagree? If the answer to any of these questions is no, it is not the right decision, it is not the conduct, it is not promoting the rule of law.

Democracy doesn't only happen at the ballot box; it is a continued exercise that all of the members here have stepped up to be active participants in. Our role here in the Official Opposition is to hold the government to account, not to be mean-spirited or overly cynical, but to be critical and seek information and answers about the conduct of government, to ask the questions necessary to let daylight into the deepest recesses of governing. It has been said that sunlight is among the best disinfectants. Transparency and accountability are the bedrock of democratic governance, and in our Westminster system, the Official Opposition plays an important role in engaging government in accountability, not just to us but to the people of the Yukon. Accountability and upholding the rule of law also means speaking up when a law or policy is not just. A law on its own is not justice; it must also achieve a just objective. Laws deserve scrutiny and their consequences deeply considered.

I look forward to embracing the role that I have been entrusted with, which is bringing sunlight to this Chamber on behalf of the people of the Yukon and in defence of the public interest. I look forward to getting to know the other members from all of the parties. Our individual paths have brought us to this place and inform our interests, priorities, and the way we approach issues.

In that vein, I would like to share a bit about my story, which starts in the southeast of British Columbia, in the east and west Kootenays. I grew up in Golden, a mountain town that has seen the good, the bad, and the ugly of resource and tourism development. My family are multi-generation settlers from the west Kootenays, a place that similarly has profited and paid for resource development, most significantly due to the dams on the Columbia and Kootenay rivers, built for US flood mitigation and BC's hydroelectricity generation. The environmental and human cost of those projects was huge and was not returned to the region for several decades. The First Nations of the area will never truly be compensated for the cost of the destruction of their lands and ways of life.

My family has mined, logged, driven trucks, and run businesses for generations in the Kootenays. One of my grandfathers was a minister at the church he built, and my grandma, the quintessential minister's wife, served the congregation. While I had tough questions for them about the gospel, I never once questioned the values of compassion and service to others that they embodied.

I watched my parents, as small business owners, take care of their workers and do any of the jobs that needed doing. My brother and I were the first in our families to get university degrees, both in environment and resource management fields, and I'm the only one who left — although the Yukon feels a lot like the Kootenays sometimes.

The Yukon became my home in 2012 after an initial summer here in 2009. I came for four months — this is a common story in the Yukon — to finish my articles and, as is the case for many Yukoners, fell in love with the place and here I am today.

While I'm not from here, I have always felt that I belong here. That's one of the magic things about the Yukon and Whitehorse in particular. So many of us come from afar and choose to be here — choose to participate, choose to build a place we want to be.

Sometimes that means that people come with new ideas; sometimes they adopt old ones. This can create tension, just as I witnessed growing up in the Kootenays. Despite coming from a multi-generation settler family that didn't necessarily agree with the newcomers, I've appreciated the ways that new people add to the social fabric and breathe new life into a place. The world is constantly changing, and embracing that change while reflecting on the past is the only way that we can continue to evolve. It doesn't mean throwing out who we are, but becoming all we can be.

I left home initially to pursue post-secondary education and lived in Alberta for several years, attending both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, with time back in Golden where I worked as an environmental advocate and in tourism jobs — lots of tourism jobs — while also being elected to my town council for a term.

While in law school in Calgary, I focused where I could on my roots in environment and natural resources and then articulated at the Environmental Law Centre before coming to the Yukon where I stayed. I went to law school to find ways to use the law, not only to protect the environment, but also the communities that need clean water and a sustainable economy, and the rights of Indigenous people impacted by development.

Since coming to the Yukon, I've made it my home. In true, excited, new-to-the-Yukon keener fashion, I lived in an off-grid cabin and got a dog my first full winter, took up marathon paddling, and raced in the Yukon River Quest the summer after I arrived. I started volunteering and being on boards. I ended up running the Carmacks checkpoint for the Yukon Quest for several years.

One of the more impactful volunteer experiences that I've had was coaching and being an athlete mentor for Special Olympics. There really is not a much better feeling than helping somebody realize a dream.

Some of the very best people I've met in the Yukon are the athletes I coached, travelled to games with, or mentored. I believe in the power of sport as an agent for change in people's lives, including my own. Despite being generally not that good at very many sports that I've participated in, paddling is one exception.

I also spent time as an emergency foster parent. I opened my home and my arms to children ranging from providing respite care to a preemie baby still in hospital to home care to teenagers who had spent much of their lives in the system. If I could reach out to all of them now, I would tell them that they are part of the reason I am here today, because that experience showed me that, despite everything we know about what we need for children to thrive and the cost of doing nothing to support children in their early years, there are far too many who are left out and are not receiving what they need.

Article 3.1 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* says, in part: "In all actions concerning children... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." Children and youth are affected by so many of the decisions made by adults. From their parents to people like us in positions of power, whether we take climate change mitigation seriously, whether we provide meals at schools, how we support their parents in navigating health and education systems, if we hire enough teachers and support staff in their schools, if we build more electricity generation capacity that they can count on for the businesses they will create in the future, how we make sport more accessible and affordable, whether we fly a flag that tells them that they belong no matter who they are, youth today are facing challenges in getting themselves started in the world that were not the case for most of us. Astronomical housing costs and high rates of unemployment for youth are two major ones. We need them to do well and be well. It is our responsibility to them. I encourage all of us to consider the best interests of children in all we do.

I want to close my remarks today on the Yukon's environment and wilderness, our greatest asset. Being able to be outside and experience intact wilderness has been shown to provide positive benefits to all people. Just knowing that there are wild spaces provides benefits to people. The wilderness is a great teacher and our most important provider. We are wealthy when we continue to have places we can go to experience nature in its true sense and when we are careful about how we use the resources found in these places and recognize that there are places that should just be off limits to development. In the constant pursuit for economic opportunities, do not forget the value of what we have here in our wild places. They cannot be recreated. I think that future generations will look back on us not only for how we treat our democracy, but for how we treat the environment that sustains us.

Once again, I thank everyone who helped me not only through the campaign, but through all of life's experiences that led to it. I thank the people of Riverdale North for putting their trust in me. I look forward to working with my caucus, staff, and the members opposite to serve the people of the Yukon as best I can and to participate to the greatest extent in our democracy.

**Patti McLeod:** It is my pleasure to rise today to respond to the throne speech that Commissioner Webber delivered in the House yesterday on the first day of the 2025 Fall Sitting of the 36<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

First, I would like to thank my constituents in Watson Lake, Ross River, and Faro. It was a challenging election campaign, given the vast distances between communities, but I was happy to have the chance to visit each community multiple times for a number of meetings, forums, events, and, of course, to knock on doors and talk to residents about their concerns.

I want to thank all those who allowed me some of their time to discuss the issues important to them. I had the opportunity to speak with many of the people I have had the honour to represent for the past 14 years, and to meet so many new constituents who graciously showed me around their community and introduced me to some wonderful people.

Of course, a big thanks to all the volunteers who helped to get signs out, drove voters to the polls, joined me door-knocking across the riding, and for the road trips involved to do each of those important tasks.

Every community is quite unique and different. In the three communities in my riding, the issues are varied, but a number of concerns remain prevalent across all three. One of the issues that is common to all is the addictions problem. We have seen this problem grow and grow over the years, affecting many different areas of society. The overall health of our communities has been impacted with substance abuse being a main contributor to crime, violence, and many other concerning areas. I'm happy to see the Yukon Party government turning attention to the importance of treatment and prevention to help individuals with addictions get the help they need.

Health care for Yukoners is something we've all heard concerns about. In Ross River and Faro, they have seen several closures of their health centres for varying periods, and this creates a hardship on the residents and adds stress on our EMS personnel.

I recognize the acknowledgement of this issue in the Speech from the Throne and that this government is committing to strengthen the territory's health care system and improve health outcomes for Yukoners. I look forward to finding a solution that is acceptable to the people who have faced numerous health care centre closures in recent years, as well as seeing a stronger health care system for all.

I'm eager to begin discussions with the community of Watson Lake about moving forward with continuing care in that community. It's something that we have wanted for many years, and I appreciate that the Yukon Party government is committed to making this a reality.

Another issue that comes up in every community in my riding is roads. Highway maintenance is a must, from snowplowing, sanding, brushing, and needed reconstruction, we are all affected. Highway safety can be promoted with proper highway maintenance. Many services are located in Whitehorse, and travel for rural Yukoners is not optional. I'm looking forward to ensuring that our highway camps are adequately resourced, so that all travellers can benefit and

travel safely. I will continue to advocate for road safety, including the all-important highway maintenance.

I was pleased to see the focus on housing in the throne speech and that this government has a realistic view of the current housing situation and the work that it will take to address the challenges associated with it, and I look forward to seeing more opportunities for land development in rural Yukon. Land development opens further opportunities for housing of all types. I look forward to seeing more opportunities for Yukon families to venture into home ownership, and hopefully helping landlords wanting to get back to offering rental housing. Not everyone is able to or wants to buy a house, and there is going to forever be a need for rental housing. This government's promise to work to create a healthier rental market is promising for many.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my constituents for putting their trust in me to put in the work for them as their MLA. I will continue to raise your concerns and amplify your voices to ensure that you are heard by this new Yukon Party government. It's no secret that I have a deep love for rural Yukon and a strong admiration for those who live and work in our rural communities. This government has made some strong commitments to rural Yukoners, and I look forward to the work that will be done to help to empower more people to thrive in our communities.

Again, thank you for your trust. I look forward to spending more time meeting more people throughout my riding of Watson Lake-Ross River-Faro over the next four years.

**Hon. Ted Laking:** Honourable members of the Legislative Assembly, fellow Yukoners, and all those tuning in from across Canada, I rise today with deep humility and profound gratitude to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered earlier this week by the Commissioner, and also, to all those in attendance today, I apologize in advance for any jokes or puns that I might be slipping in this afternoon.

It is a privilege to address the 36<sup>th</sup> session as the newly elected member of the Legislative Assembly for Porter Creek Centre, and I am truly honoured to contribute to the work ahead, as we chart a course for a stronger, more united Yukon.

The Commissioner's words paint a vivid portrait of our territory's enduring spirit, a spirit divined and forged by the 14 Yukon First Nations who first built communities on these lands, joined by prospectors and adventurers who braved the rugged wilderness to create new lives. As we were so eloquently reminded, the self-reliance, resilience, determination, and community spirit of our ancestors live on in every Yukoner today. In a place where, as the speech notes, where you are going matters more than where you're from, we continue to draw people from across Canada and the world, enriching our cultural fabric with diverse viewpoints and experiences.

I want to begin by extending my sincerest thanks to the people of Porter Creek Centre for entrusting me with the responsibility and honour to represent you in the Legislature. Your support in the 2025 election was overwhelming, delivering the largest victory margin for any first-time candidate in our territory's history. That faith is humbling, and

it drives me every day. From the families strolling the trails along the river to the seniors who have watched this neighbourhood evolve over decades, you opened your doors during the campaign and shared your stories. You shared your hopes for affordable housing, reliable energy, and safe communities. You shared your concerns about rising costs and health care access, and you shared your dreams for our territory where our children can thrive. I commit to you that I will carry those voices into every debate and every decision while in this House.

Porter Creek Centre is a riding of community pride and possibility, and I will work tirelessly to ensure that it remains so. Of course, as you know, no one reaches this Chamber alone. I must acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of my campaign team and volunteers who poured their hearts into this cause with tireless energy and an unyielding belief. From early morning canvassing in the crisp fall air to late night strategy sessions, your dedication made the difference.

In particular, there are some volunteers I want to highlight: Blake, Christina, Mark, Frank, and Jason, thank you for your support. Also, I want to thank several former colleagues of mine from city council, who encouraged me to put my name forward and believed in my abilities to represent the riding. So, Jocelyn, Dan, and Kirk, I thank you as well.

To my family, who are the true anchors of my life — my wife Colleen, whose strength and sharp insight grounded me through every challenge over this campaign; my sons — Henry and James — whose laughter, curiosity and promise remind me why we do this work in this House; and my parents, Bob and Cathy, who raised me in Dawson City with lessons in perseverance that I carry to this day.

As the first Cabinet minister who grew up in the Klondike, I draw from that northern grit — the same spirit that saw my home town through gold rushes and harsh winters. I am grateful for the foundation that you have all provided.

My own journey to this Assembly began in a spark of youthful indignation, back in 2000. I was a teenager when Prime Minister Jean Chrétien announced plans to rename Mount Logan after Pierre Elliott Trudeau. My dad whisked me away to protest during the Prime Minister's visit to Whitehorse in November of that year — to protest the proposal to change the name of the mountain. The announcement was made in early October of that year, and after what I guess you could say was mounting pressure, or mounting opposition, the Prime Minister ended up making a complete 180 and reversing course soon afterward.

Now, I won't claim sole credit for swaying the Prime Minister's decision, but getting involved that day taught me a vital lesson — that passionate citizens can make a difference and influence the course of events and history in our country. It was my first taste of politics, and if you know me, the theme of rabble rousing, passionately questioning the status quo, and not being shy with my opinion, have been common themes of my time in politics so far.

That fire led me to Ottawa, where I served as an advisor in Parliament to the Hon. Chuck Strahl, and later, the Hon. John Duncan. Following the 2011 federal election, I joined the team

of then-health minister, the Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, as a policy and issues adviser, accompanying her to Environment Canada when she moved portfolios. Leona, to this day, remains a dear friend and mentor, and I owe her immensely for her guidance and the opportunities that she has opened for me.

Through trips to Nunavut and visiting communities like Clyde River, Pond Inlet, Mary River, Igloodik, and Coral Harbour, and even weathering one or two week-long blizzards in Rankin Inlet, as our plane wouldn't take off, I gained a greater appreciation for the strength of rural and remote northern communities. These experiences, far from the comforts of southern Canada, underscored the resilience of Indigenous peoples and the need for governments to listen, partner and deliver.

They shaped my view that true leadership bridges divides, honours tradition, and builds futures where no one is left behind.

Closer to home, in 2021, I was elected to Whitehorse City Council, where I championed stronger budgeting and prudent financial decisions. Drawing on my policy background, I pushed for investments that balanced immediate needs with long-term sustainability, such as making essential investments in infrastructure without burdening taxpayers, fostering community partnerships, and ensuring accountability in every dollar spent. Those years honed my commitment to fiscal responsibility, a thread that runs through the throne speech and aligns perfectly with our new government's priorities.

As I prepared these remarks, I took the time to reflect on the remarkable lineage of representatives who have served Porter Creek Centre, or its predecessor ridings, as the boundaries and names have shifted over time throughout Porter Creek.

For those with a penchant for history in politics, allow me to honour a few previous MLAs who have represented all or parts of my current riding over the years under its various names: you, Madam Speaker, Paulo Gallina, David Laxton, Archie Lang, Geraldine Van Bibber, Doug Graham, Jim Kenyon, Don Roberts, John Ostashek, Dan Lang, Ranj Pillai, Mike Nixon, Don Inverarity, Pat Duncan, and Alan Nordling. Each brought their unique gifts and strengths to this role, driven by a common desire to uplift the constituents of Porter Creek.

Boundaries may change from Whitehorse Porter Creek East, or Porter Creek West, now Porter Creek Centre, but the community's heartbeat remains constant. The voices I heard door-knocking echoed those of past generations: a call for stability, opportunity, and care. What strikes me most about this roster is its extraordinary depth. Among these leaders, we find three former premiers, one former senator, one current senator, one former Speaker, the current Speaker, former and current city councillors, a former Commissioner, an Order of Canada recipient, three former ministers of health, a Minister of Environment, two former ministers of Economic Development, a former Minister of Community Services, a former Minister of Highways and Public Works, a former Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, and a partridge in a pear tree.

In a delightful twist of northern trivia, this riding's iterations have been represented by not one, but two members

of the Lang family, a legacy of service that resonates even more as I now have the honour to serve alongside another newly elected member from the distinguished Lang line, to get another pun in — but a distinguished line of political servants to this territory.

This is a small inheritance. It is a daunting yet inspiring mantle reminding me that Porter Creek has long been a cradle of capable leadership.

One final piece that I would like to highlight that is quite cool is that, of those names I just listed, I am now the MLA for five of them. Knowing all of them as I do, I know that the advice — or, in some cases, criticism — will always be there when I need it. But, seriously, I do look forward to being able to reach out to and speak to my predecessors to get their perspectives on things as I know that all of us, regardless of party, are interested in improving our community.

As I step into these shoes, I reviewed the past throne speech replies from my predecessors as well. I pledge to honour the tradition and perspectives that they brought forward. I will listen with the empathy of Paolo Gallina who, during his reply to the Speech from the Throne in 2017, shared stories of his own family's resilience. I will champion the economic stewardship like Archie Lang, who, in his reply to the Speech from the Throne in 2006, spoke of getting the Yukon's financial house in order. I will serve with the passion that has defined so many of the other representatives before me.

We may change the maps, but the constituents' needs endure, and I will strive to meet them with diligence.

Turning, now, to the Speech from the Throne itself, I commend the eloquent framing of our shared aspirations. It is a document that celebrates our past while boldly envisioning the future — a Yukon where growth fuels confidence, where partnerships with First Nations are deepened, and where we balance economic vitality with environmental stewardship. The emphasis on welcoming newcomers, fostering dynamism, and showcasing our place in the circumpolar world resonates deeply with me.

Yet, in the spirit of respectful dialogue that defines this Assembly, allow me to acknowledge the challenges we inherit as this new government takes the helm. These are not points of division but opportunities for unity and honest reflections on the ground that we must till to realize the throne speech's promise.

My first briefings as minister revealed a territory grappling with fiscal and infrastructural strains that demand our immediate and collective attention.

In energy, for instance, a sector where Yukon's northern advantages should be our greatest asset, we face a legacy of underinvestment and deferred maintenance that has left our grid vulnerable. One of my initial shocks was learning of the precarious state of the Yukon Energy Corporation. Over the past decade, poor planning, overly ambitious visions untethered from reality, and expenditures on projects that yielded little return have eroded reliability and driven up costs for families already stretched thin.

During the election, Yukoners rightly asked: Why, despite higher electricity rates, is service degrading? Why are brownouts more frequent? Why is there no clear path forward? The answer, regrettably, points to the previous government's energy plan propped up by an ever-expanding line of credit, operated without sufficient transparency to this Legislature or the public. This wasn't a strategy; this was survival mode. More concerning still was the revelation that risks to critical infrastructure, like the potential failure of the Wareham dam, which could endanger lives, property, and our environment were known but left unaddressed and without a funding plan that didn't burden ratepayers.

Unlike the previous government, we know that ignoring such issues does not make them disappear; it only compounds them. In contrast, our government acted swiftly. Within my first two weeks, we have taken the necessary steps to ensure that the Energy Corporation will get the resources for essential repairs at the Wareham dam, prioritizing safety and long-term viability of the asset. This is the proactive approach that the throne speech calls for, one that invests in resilience, modernizes our grid, and harnesses sustainable energy to lower costs and support growth. We will build on this, exploring expansions of renewables and efficiencies that honour our environmental commitments while powering our economy.

These energy woes mirror broader fiscal inheritances — mounting debts, stalled projects, and a treasury strained by past mismanagement. I do not raise these points to assign blame, but to affirm our resolve. With prudent management, we can restore balance, yet, as we arrived in government, we do inherit regulatory backlogs and environmental concerns that have led to a growing cynicism in government. So, there are big tasks ahead for us to restore public confidence while creating jobs.

Health and social services too demand urgent attention amid inherited pressures. The speech's focus on quality of life, better care, support for families resonates with me. But the reality facing the new government as we take over is aging facilities, wait times exacerbated by underfunding from the previous government, and a system strained by population growth. These challenges — fiscal strains, energy vulnerabilities, infrastructure in disrepair, and unfinished work — create challenges, but with challenges come opportunities. When reading the Speech from the Throne replies of my past predecessors, I was drawn to Lang's call for cross-party work and Gallina's emphasis on serving collaboratively through hardship. In that spirit, I invite the Opposition to join us in improving the lives of Yukoners.

All 21 members of this Legislature represent 100 percent of Yukoners. Together, we can deliver results. In my riding, constituents rely on my approachable, efficient advocacy. They expect me to consider all sides of an issue and I will. With my family by my side, I will represent the riding of Porter Creek Centre not for acclaim, but for purpose. The future is ours to shape. With respect for our past, resolve for our challenges, and optimism for our path forward, let us build a stronger Yukon together.

**Hon. Jen Gehmair:** I rise today with deep gratitude and a profound sense of responsibility to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I want to start by thanking the people who made it possible for me to stand here today. To my husband Noah and my children Peyton, Harper, and Isla, thank you for your patience, your help, and your support. This whole journey has been a family effort. From stickering envelopes to knocking on doors, to formatting lists or explaining to me the true meaning of party politics from the eyes of a six-year-old — spoiler alert, it does not have enough cake or presents involved — you all keep me going and inspire me. To my parents who have been unwavering in their support, not just during the campaign, but throughout my life, they stepped in to be the anchor in my family so that I could lean into this work. They also raised me to be accountable for my actions and decisions, which anchors my leadership and values today.

I have watched and learned from my dad how to lead with grace and integrity throughout his public service career. I have watched my mom define her place in a professional world that, at the time, didn't embrace the dynamic role of mother that we have come to enjoy today. While we have heard today here that we still have a way to go, I am proud to carry the torch of a mother with young children while being a leader in this Chamber as well. Thank you to my parents for believing in me and convincing me that I would land on my feet even when the trajectory wasn't always in my favour. To my friends, volunteers, and supporters — I want to name them all but I fear I will probably forget one and then regret it forever — thank you for your time, your energy, and your belief in what we could achieve. You knocked on doors, shared your advice, lifted me up, dusted me off on the really tough days, and celebrated every milestone with me, even when I wasn't sure it was necessary.

Thank you to all the people who are in my corner, and thank you to my campaign team who braved some tricky conversations and, in some cases, very tricky terrain.

To my past colleagues, bosses, staff in the public service, the years spent working with you have shaped me in more ways than I can describe. I've seen you show up with your heart, with integrity, and with vigour. My leadership has been shaped by those who come before me in these roles, and by those who have learned alongside of me and, most importantly, those who stood up against me to challenge my decisions, processes, or outcomes. These experiences have helped me grow as a leader and encouraged me to think differently, be nimble, adaptable, and, most importantly, understand the true value of being humble, listening, and collaborating.

While in the public service, I have had some unforgettably hard days. This work, particularly in the last decade, has opened my eyes to the meaningful impact that public servants have on the day-to-day life of individuals. This is acutely true for those on the front lines of our health, social, justice, and education systems. It's these experiences that will forever inform how I show up today as a leader in my community and as a leader in this House.

To my new colleagues in this House, I am honoured to stand among so many strong and dedicated leaders, and I look

forward to the things that we can achieve together. To my constituents, thank you for placing your trust in me to represent you. My decision to run as your representative was rooted in the desire to give back to a territory that afforded me and my family so many opportunities and the desire to influence the future for the next generation of Yukoners that is rich with opportunity, safety, and pride.

Over the last several months, you have invited me to hear your concerns and your ideas, ideas that are born out of passion, experience, innovation, and a genuine desire to create a stronger sense of community. What makes me most proud is that the ideas shared with me are never about personal gain or at someone else's expense. Yukoners show a remarkable willingness to collaborate, to think practically, and to push for solutions to support the greater good. This commitment to collective success and outcomes that benefit all Yukoners is at the heart of the conversations that I have had. While it may seem that I'm a bit naïve, I'm okay with that going into this. I'm okay with being someone who is going forward with my heart, with sincerity, and with practical solutions.

I think we can all agree that progress rooted in collaboration and partnership is hard, and there will most certainly be times when disagreement occurs, but knowing that Yukoners genuinely have an interest in finding solutions to improve their lives and communities without leaving others behind is what keeps me motivated and, I think, is at the core of what defines us as Yukoners.

Thank you to the department that has supported getting my feet off the ground in working as the Minister of the Department of Tourism and Culture, Public Service Commissioner, Economic Development, and the Yukon Liquor Corporation. It's a privilege to serve and I look forward to what we can achieve together.

The throne speech laid out values that will inform our government's work: leadership that is steady and solution-focused, cooperation that respects partnership and lived experience, excellence in continuing improvement in how we serve Yukoners, innovation in how we approach our challenges, and measuring every decision we make against efficiency and effectiveness. These values will anchor every decision I make as MLA and in my role as a minister, going forward.

Through my career, I have experienced the value in articulating our collective values in leadership to enable us to establish priorities, create boundaries and set expectations.

The throne speech has also clearly set forth priorities — priorities that genuinely were informed by what we heard at the door of Yukoners, and I am proud to have had the opportunity to hear from residents in my riding and to ensure that this interest was reflected — priorities such as investing in highway safety. With increased traffic, the need to review the investment in upgrades, maintenance, and enforcement in our highways is critical.

Improved access to health care — more Yukoners are finding themselves without predictable options in care, and none of us here agree that this is a sustainable position for our

health care system, and we commit to finding ways to improve this in all areas.

Adjusting community funding to establish sustainability for community associations who are experiencing hardship in the sustainability of some of the community programs and associations — these programs are the backbone for residents in Marsh Lake, Mount Lorne, and Golden Horn, and maintaining an active and lively community is essential for both the well-being of the community and its members.

Making meaningful investment in energy sustainability, improved housing options, including viable options for seniors, improved land accessibility options, and more affordable ownership or renting options; strong environmental stewardship is rooted in every decision that we make; addressing gaps in emergency response plans and mitigating impacts for the rural communities. Our communities are well aware of the vulnerabilities they face with the risk of flood, wildfires, and recently, we were reminded of the volatility of the earth plates below us. Communities are looking to Yukon Government to support efforts to ensure that their communities, home, and livelihood are supported.

Investing in rural Yukon and ensuring sustainable services, such as sustainable drinking water, waste services, emergency services, and recreation are all important.

While this doesn't reflect every concern I have heard or have followed up on, it does highlight the themes of interest from residents of Marsh Lake-Mount Lorne-Golden Horn and remains consistent with the themes included in our platform.

I am proud to be part of a team who has expressed the commitment and desire to address some of the most pressing challenges that we have faced in our territory over the past several decades — challenges that have come about through factors well beyond control of Yukon Government, but challenges that have some autonomy and ability to help shape and improve for Yukoners, and undoubtedly concerns those impacted through this Chamber.

Housing remains one of the most urgent concerns. Families, seniors, and youth need real options for housing. We must work with other levels of government and with housing providers to remove the barriers and modernize our processes. We must do this while not losing sight of those who count on government — agencies and other organizations — to support their housing, well-being and safety. Housing is fundamental to the individual safety and health, and we have a responsibility to ensure that it is within reach for every Yukoner.

In health care, Yukoners want stability, access, and a system that they can rely on. We must strengthen our workforce, improve continuity of care, innovate through partnership, and work together with service providers to continue to modernize how our services are delivered. Excellence in health care cannot be a goal alone; it must be a standard.

In education, our children deserve safe, supportive learning environments and the resources to succeed. Supporting teachers and staff and investing in modern learning spaces and fostering innovation will enable students to have what they need to thrive, both academically and emotionally.

Supporting business development must remain a priority to strengthen and build a more resilient economy. Yukon is full of talented and dedicated entrepreneurs and hard-working business owners who are simply looking for the government to support the conditions for them to thrive. Businesses deserve clear rules, less red tape, and timely and clear decisions. When local businesses succeed, our communities are stronger, our economy is more resilient, and opportunities stay here in the Yukon for all Yukoners. Our job is to help create the environment where this success can happen.

Strong government-to-government relationships, particularly with Yukon First Nations, is at the core of our success as a territory. True collaboration, with respect, must guide our shared work, along with partnerships with the municipalities and community leaders across the territory.

These values and priorities that I have addressed here today embody my commitment to see meaningful progress — progress that is measurable through Yukoners' well-being, affordability, opportunity, and resilience. Whether we agree or disagree on all of the issues that come into this House, I know that we all show up here united through our enduring desire to make life better for all of those who we serve.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to all of the members in this House for listening to me, and also for working together going forward.

**Linda Moen:** Today, I stand on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'an Council, here, on the banks of the Chu Níikwän River — which is the Yukon River — home of the Kwanlin Dün people — Kwanlin, which is "river running through canyon", which is now known as Miles Canyon.

I represent the Yukon people as an MLA for Mountainview riding, which includes Valleyview, Hillcrest, McIntyre, and Granger. Thank you to all those who have supported me in the election. I look forward to representing my riding and to address the concerns and issues that are brought to my attention.

I want to thank my family, my friends, the volunteers and organizers, and all those who have supported me to how I am standing here today.

I will attend to my duties and responsibilities as I did as an elected councillor for the Kwanlin Dün First Nation people. Each day, I will uphold the values and morals instilled in me by my parents and my grandparents. I am guided by the ethics I upheld as a 21-year public servant for the federal government with Environment and Climate Change Canada. During that time, I was involved in the labour movement and social justice initiatives for equity-seeking groups.

I participated in events from coast to coast to coast. One of the achievements was as a negotiator and a signatory on the historic protocol "Together for Safety" with the RCMP and the Yukon Women's Coalition in 2014. This protocol is still active and so is the work that the coalition continues to do today. This work is so important as it addresses the unique needs of Yukoners and grassroot organizations. This work is often underfunded; however, the work is in great demand. The front-

line workers are essential to carrying out finite mandates of these organizations and the Yukoners they provide many services to — they provide services to some of our most vulnerable Yukoners.

I attended the vigil on December 5, 2025, for the ongoing work to address violence against women and girls. It saddens me that this is an ongoing issue that impacts First Nation women at a higher rate than other women. It's deeply concerning that issues continue to be so prevalent today, especially with the MMIWG2S, and the LGBTQ, two-spirited, IA+.

Even more alarming is that more and more names are added to this ever-growing list of names, but they are not just names. They are loved ones, moms, grammas, daughters, sisters, and aunties to families who deeply loved and cared for them. The impacts to these communities are felt for generations. The causal factors are many and will require resources to fund and continue to address these issues — poverty, lack of education, isolation in rural Yukon communities, addictions, residential schools and intergenerational impacts, loss of family units, not being able to access treatment or detox programs; there is no second-stage housing — to continue to address these unique needs of Yukoners. Most have to leave their communities and supports to receive these services elsewhere. They require affordable housing and should not have to choose between paying rent or the electric bill or groceries.

For the first time in the Yukon's recent history, there are more women MLAs elected. I will remain hopeful that this will influence this government and not remain status quo. I would like to acknowledge the Leader of the Official Opposition of the New Democratic Party and MLA for Takhini for her support and encouragement in running in the territorial election. I know that, if it was not for women supporting other women, I would not be standing here today addressing you, Madam Speaker. I am forever grateful for the other strong women who have inspired me to be in leadership, including my mother Bernice and my late grandmother Sophie, for these women reminded me that I need to know where I come from so I know where I am going. This includes my culture, my language, and my tradition.

We are hard-working Yukoners. My late grandmother worked three jobs at times and my late grandfather retired from the City of Whitehorse. They also lived here in Whitehorse without running water or indoor plumbing. Their lives, like many Yukoners, were impacted by pioneers. I would like to remind this Assembly that no matter what direction you go, you will be on one of the 14 First Nation's traditional territories, each with their own languages, traditions, culture, and protocol.

When I knocked on doors in my riding, affordability and health care were top priorities. We all want the same ideals. We hope to own a home, have good-paying jobs to provide for our families, a good education so our children could build on our legacy, safe neighbourhoods and the peace of mind that comes with that. There is not one door that I went to where they said they were happy with what they had. The cost of living is increasing — groceries and other expenses — but our wages

are not reflective of that. We see an increased number of Yukoners having to access supports and services like the food bank. We see the nutrition program not being offered in Yukon schools. Some will have the program and, unfortunately, others will be left out.

Accessing new technology is important to Yukoners with a need for new cell towers. Granger has just recently updated some lines that were required as far back as 2013. The updated technology needs to meet the demands of Yukoners, especially those in rural Yukon. Dropped calls are increasing and many wonder what would happen in an emergency situation with little or no access to use your cellphone. We should be able to depend on the technologies that we have come to depend on.

This government promises to overhaul the education system. The Auditor General of Canada has presented four failed reports on Indigenous students in the Yukon. Education is a key to ending poverty. I am hopeful that all of the school boards here in the Yukon and the First Nation School Board will work toward achieving equality for all Yukon students to obtain a diploma and have the opportunity to go to college, university, or trade school. We are hard-working Yukoners, wanting to pursue and fulfill our hopes and dreams. Some will become small business owners and contribute to the needs of Yukoners. As such, some of the tradespeople had put their names forward to run in the election under the Yukon NDP.

I also want to remind this Assembly that it was only in 1960 that the Yukon First Nations acquired the right to vote. That included my late grandparents. That means that my mom was 12 years old and still in residential school. It is still very difficult to talk about residential school because the generational impacts are still ongoing. I will hold this government accountable as a member of the Official Opposition. I will work toward earning the trust of all of those I represent in the Mountainview riding. I respected our differences when I was campaigning. I will remain humbled in the trust that has been given to me and the responsibility that comes with this.

There is much work to be done here in the Yukon. There is much work that we have to do. To my colleagues, as the Official Opposition, I will offer my unwavering support as we begin the tremendous work that we are tasked with. As a former public servant, I know what is expected before you.

I spent my formative years living in the traditional territory of Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation when my dad worked in the coal mine there, and then on the traditional territory of the Kaska Dena in Faro. My late father worked in the open pit mine at Cyprus Anvil mine. We enjoyed a good life but, like most mining projects, it was short-lived. Imagine being 12 years old and leaving everything that you knew because of strikes and the mine closing down. It reopened, but it is still closed to this day. We, as taxpayers and Yukoners, continue to pay for this ongoing contamination. I know, undoubtedly, that this is not an isolated incident. Unfortunately, this still continues today.

My late grandmother, Sophie, had told me — and I know this to be true — that we are lifelong learners. I will continue to learn and to grow into this position. I'm already

communicating with my constituents on issues that they are concerned with. My pledge is to do what I have done my whole life: listen to learn, listen not to judge, offer solutions and advocate for those whom I represent.

This work is hard; I know this. So, I thank my children for their support, for this very public work that I have undertaken. I acknowledge my mother and my sisters for their support right from the start.

In closing, I hope I inspire other women, Indigenous women, racially visible women, women who are not even on the spectrum who may identify as others, who may not fit with a cultural norm, so that here, in the Yukon, we continue to have a reflective public service that serves all the people of the Yukon.

Günilschish, mahsi' cho, merci beaucoup, thank you.

**Hon. Wade Istchenko:** First of all, I would like to thank my constituents. Everybody who voted for me and the people who didn't vote for me are all my constituents now and, as always, I will work hard for them. To my family, whom I love, my wife and my two children, they are very important to me and their support was unwavering. To my team, many of the sign putter-uppers and everybody else out there, and especially Jenna Gwen, you guys rock. I'm not very happy with CIBC freezing my campaign bank account until yesterday, but that's another ongoing issue.

It's going to be a real honour to serve everyone here. I would like to congratulate all of the new MLAs — it's good to sit and listen to their perspective on becoming an MLA — and, of course, the returning MLAs. I would like to thank them, and I would like to thank the Premier and my team, the team on this side, for the opportunity to be the Minister of Environment.

As some of you might know, my grandma was Hilda Watson. She was the first lady to lead a political party in Canada. When she was the MLA for the riding, it included Carmacks; it was a very large riding. I grew up in politics; it was always there. At the family gatherings, at the Christmas dinners, family was always quite hard on my grandma. You have to remember that, as an elected official, and I have to bring it across to all members on both sides.

This is sort of what happens when you become an MLA. Your friends and family get after you; they're quite hard on you. Why aren't you doing this? Why aren't you doing that? Well, you signed up for it, so get after it.

You're going to have to have a strong will and a good heart, and don't take it to heart. We're all going to work together for the betterment of the Yukon.

I want to talk a little bit about the Kluane riding. It's a big riding. For thousands of years, the Southern Tutchone people have lived in the shadows of the big mountains out there. They adapted to an ever-changing landscape, hunted and fished, trapped and gathered food in the area. Access to the coast was controlled by the Chilkat Pass by the Tlingit-speaking Chilkats of Alaska.

There was active trading between the two groups, intermarriage, and often clashes. So, Europeans first explored over the Chilkat and into the interior on the "grease trail", later

known as the Dalton Trail. In the 1800s, Jack Dalton, an American who most of you know was an explorer, was in the area from 1894 to 1896 and established a series of trading posts in the interior and then a pack trail over the Chilkat Pass to where everybody met up with the Chilkoot Trail to go to the goldfields.

One of his trading posts, Dalton Post, where my adopted Hume family settled, was on the Tatshenshini River, south of present-day Haines Junction. The Dalton Trail was abandoned with the coming of the White Pass railroad from Skagway to Whitehorse, and the riverboats on the Yukon River in 1903.

Gold was discovered east of Kluane Lake. More than 2,000 gold seekers poured into the area with high hopes. They gathered at Sheep, Bullion, Burwash and Ruby creeks and many mining settlements. Silver City sprang into life, but little gold was found and most moved on. The short-lived gold rush precipitated the building of the Kluane wagon trail that went from Whitehorse to Silver City where the Jacquot brothers had a barge that went across Kluane Lake to Burwash. They would ferry across the big lake of Kluane. It was the longest wagon road that the Alaska Highway would eventually be built on.

All of the stuff that I spoke to basically now, I will speak to as part of my riding. Now modern day, the Takhini River bridge is where it all starts. My riding starts at the Takhini subdivision at the old horse-wrangling spot where Elijah Smith spent many a day. Then there's the Mendenhall subdivision where the local kids ride more than three hours a day on the school bus. Champagne is an old First Nation community and was a trading post along the Dalton Trail. Haines Junction, where I was born and raised, of course, is at the base of the most picturesque St. Elias Mountains range and home to Kluane National Park, the world's largest non-polar icefield. Canada's largest mountain, Mount Logan, is 18,555 feet tall and it's still growing a little bit each year. Maybe we'll catch up to those mountains over in Asia someday. This is also the traditional territory of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

Before we head north, we travel south on the Haines Road — in 1943 where the residents are spread out all the way to the British Columbia border and down into Haines, Alaska. Travelling up north, the Alaska Highway, which was built in 1942 and was a war effort during World War II, you arrive at the Yukon's largest lake, Kluane, and the communities of Destruction Bay and Burwash Landing. This is the traditional territory of the Kluane First Nation. It is also the location of the world's largest gold pan. Sorry, Member for Klondike, but I think we win on that one.

Further northwest, you arrive at Beaver Creek, Canada's most westerly community, in the traditional territory of the White River First Nation. It is also home to Canada customs and the end of the Alaska Highway's Yukon portion. The Alaska Highway is an all-season road and one of the Yukon's most important links as an economic corridor for commerce, a strategic link for Arctic security and for our increasing tourism industry. That's a pretty big riding. I do put in lot of miles — my truck is a year and a half old and I have 100,000 kilometres on it already.

My history and my community — I am a conservative-minded person. I have also been known as a little bit of a redneck, but in my early life I started working at an early age. My family built a store, and I used to pump gas at a gas station. I can remember working in the store. My parents tried to get permission for me to leave the school on Fridays. Every Friday was freight day — a busy day for our family business. We fought with the school — my family did. They were going to fail me if my siblings and I missed school, but I kept good marks in school and I got Fridays off. We found a bit of a balance there, I guess — working in the store from a tender young age.

Once I learned to drive, long before I had my licence, I would quite often drive many First Nation elders and non-First Nations throughout that area, to drop them off. We had a big store van and all the freight had to be shipped everywhere. I can remember going to get my driver's licence, and when I walked in there, the local RCMP officer looked at me and said: "What are you doing here?" I said that I am going to get my driver's licence. He said: "You don't have your driver's licence?" I said: "No sir, I don't." He said: "I see you driving that big van. Have you ever been in an accident?" I said: "No, sir." He said: "Well, I'll give you your driver's licence." So, he gave it to me, and that was my test, the questions. That is a small town.

I spent many years working in the community doing a lot of different stuff and volunteering. I am adopted into a First Nation family, and I helped the family out when I was young. When we had the store, I drove a lot of First Nation members back and forth to their homes, which were spread out through the area. We worked and co-existed together.

I am very active in the Canadian Rangers — 38 years in the Canadian Armed Forces — and always will be, and I am very active with the Legion. I spent my first four years in the regular force, when I was young, and I travelled to Europe and all over. I have seen a lot, and I encourage our youth, as we debate things in the House today, I always want to remember about our youth. They need to get out there and see the world, but we want to make it good, so that they can always come back.

I want to talk a little bit about boards and committees and the national park that is in our neck of the woods. I was on the Alsek Renewable Resources Council and I learned a lot. When we talk about the land and our environment, and when we talk about our fish and wildlife — for example, I have gone to renewable resources council meetings. I remember one I went to where all the councillors were there, and we looked at a beautiful presentation on the Porcupine caribou herd. We heard about that in a motion today. The second statement in there said that we will not be talking about wolves. Those were the politics of the day. Just because somebody doesn't like it and it makes it to the newspaper, we can't do complete management with our animals, but we need to look at that. I am a firm believer in that.

We have been on a permit-hunt system in my neck of the woods since 1983 for moose, and we really need to look at how we do our management. We need to set politics aside and let the locals, the elders, the First Nations, our boards and councils

come forward with proposals, work with our Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board and our renewable resources councils that are a product of the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and set out in chapter 16, work with our Yukon Fish and Game Association, the Outfitters Association, the Trappers Association, and start using science and data so that we can make sound management decisions on our fish and wildlife.

As the Minister of Environment, I am committed to do this. Just because they screwed everything up in Europe doesn't mean that we're going to screw it up here.

When you talk to your locals — it doesn't matter where you talk to them, especially out in rural Yukon — they pass on the information that we need. We have to make sure that it works for everybody and that special interest groups just don't dictate how we're going to go about doing something, so that everybody gets consulted. You go to the communities and the people who enjoy the environment, whether they're skiers, snowmobilers, four-wheelers, hikers — just about everything — there are lots of ways to enjoy the environment, and we still need that.

I sat on the Kluane National Park Management Board and they brought forward the demographics of the people and what's going on. No longer is that five-night stay in our national park to go and enjoy the wilderness. That's not happening anymore. Everything has changed when it comes to our tourism industry. Everybody wants to be there, they want to post a selfie, check in on Facebook or Twitter or X or whatever it's called. I don't know; I have a bunch of them on my phone that I don't know how to operate, but that's what everybody wants to do. So, the world is changing, and we have to adapt to that.

I remember that on the board, the first meeting as the president of the snowmobile club, when they developed the Tatshenshini-Alsek Park, and it was so important for us snowmobilers to make sure that we still had access to that. We worked hard, and we did get access for that. Going back to our national park, when it came to meet with the community, they met with my grandfather, who was the chairman of the local improvement district in 1971 and made a bunch of promises and created a bunch of rules and regulations, and it has affected our community for the good, sometimes for the bad, with opportunities. So, we just need to be careful when we develop new protected areas — parks or things that we do here — that we don't take things away or opportunities away.

I have been around the communities most of my life — well, just about all of my life — in a rural community. I know a lot of people up and down our highway, of course, and lots of people throughout the Yukon, and I've worked with many of them — working with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Kluane First Nation, the White River First Nation — I just met with Kluane First Nation this morning for shared interests — of course, the Village of Haines Junction, and there are a lot of community associations out there.

The key that I find to everything is consultation — letting them be heard — and then everybody works together. I'm sure we can do that with a lot of these issues and work together.

The last years in Opposition have been humbling and rewarding. I've heard all the issues and brought them forward in this Legislature.

I've heard loud and clear, during the campaign, that under this Liberal coalition government, that rural Yukon has been ignored and not heard. There were many opportunities in the last four years for the NDP to bring down the Liberal government, but they chose to keep them in, because they received increased funding and they got some of their policies implemented, which Yukoners aren't very happy with. They could have stood up for rural Yukon, but they chose not to. I believe Canadians and Yukoners are just tired of this experiment of coalition parties.

When it comes to rural services, we could talk about the question in Question Period today about landfills. That file is a way too long, drawn-out file, or we could talk about rural lot development. We could talk about the school that's not finished in Burwash Landing. There are many issues that are incomplete after 10 years of this previous government. I think it's so important that we put timelines on projects, and we work together to get things done, so that we can move on to the next thing. We need health centres, we need more infrastructure, but sitting here waiting for infrastructure to be done or having it caught up in the courts isn't the way to do business, and I believe the team on this side has the ability and the skills to get this done.

I do want to talk about some of the past. Some of the past was programs that were created and at the expense of this government being responsible for a failed grid. We have no power; we're short of power.

At the same time that we're short power, and we have to deal with these legacy issues left by the previous coalition government, we have to be smarter on what we do. Right now, up on the top of the Two Mile Hill — this is just an example of how we get so fixated on something like green energy that we forget we don't have enough power to go around. There was a power outage in Whistle Bend last night.

Canada Post, which everybody probably knows is pretty much broke — they have a big building on the top of the hill up there. They're pulling out their newly installed fossil-fuelled generators and putting electric heat in in that big building. We are short power. We have to care about the climate but we also have to make sure the lights are on for Yukoners. This is why I am happy on this side here that we are going to put that perspective to it and take into consideration everyone from all walks of life.

Again, I am looking forward to working with my counterparts. Seriously, this is my fourth term, and I am humbled by the fact — and I don't know how a guy who likes snowmobiles, trapping, hunting, and fishing got here, but I am going to work as hard as I can. I may not get my words right sometimes or whatever, but my heart is in it.

I am really happy with the team we have here, and I am just starting to meet some of them. I am looking forward to meeting with other ones and maybe talking about caribou, because I want to be updated on that, too, with the files that I have, which were just freshly minted a couple of weeks ago.

I just want to say a couple of things. Let's not forget, when it comes to our youth — I work with the Junior Ranger program and I coach minor hockey, and I have taught kids to curl and did a lot of stuff — our future is with them, and they should be of the utmost importance, while not forgetting the needs of our seniors and our elders. When it comes to our health care system, senior care and senior housing are super important.

I got a text from one of the chiefs that says that my Auntie Doris — which is one of my adopted aunties — couldn't get out of her seniors housing here in Whitehorse, because there was a foot of snow, and she had an appointment, so I contacted the minister in charge and said that we should do a better job of snow removal. You know what, on this side, those little things like that, we are going to work hard and make sure that that stuff gets done.

I want to thank everybody again for the opportunity to stand in the Legislature. Always just remember a couple of things — we always have to volunteer, because communities are built on volunteerism. We always need to stay humble and kind.

**Hon. Scott Kent:** Like many of my other colleagues, I would like to start by congratulating you on your election as Speaker yesterday. You are certainly an inspiration to many new Canadians and a trail blazer in Yukon and in Canadian politics. Congratulations to her on that incredible accomplishment of becoming the Speaker in the Yukon Legislative Assembly.

I would also like to congratulate colleagues on both sides of the aisle for their success in the November election.

I know, like all of us know, how much work it takes to get elected, how many doors you knock on, how many signs you put up, all of the hours and the stress of a campaign, and for all of those who are in this Chamber, it's an incredible achievement. You should be very proud of yourselves. There are very few Yukoners who get to do this job. It's an honour and, as many have said before me and many will say in the future, it's the honour of a lifetime for many of us.

I want to start by thanking the constituents and residents of Copperbelt South. This is my third term as the MLA for Copperbelt South. This time, it was a little bit different. There were many new constituents who were added with the boundary changes. The riding now stretches from Cowley Creek in south Whitehorse to Lobird Trailer Park, and all places in between.

I also want to thank former constituents, those who are now in the Marsh Lake-Mount Lorne-Golden Horn riding. I represented the residents of Golden Horn from 2016 until this year, and I certainly enjoyed the conversations with them and enjoyed the opportunity to advocate on their behalf as their MLA.

Those same conversations that I enjoyed with them, I also enjoyed during this campaign period that, for many of us, started well before the writ was dropped. Back before the summer, we were all out knocking on doors. Candidates started to get nominated in their various ridings, and having those conversations throughout the summer and into the fall was

amazing. You learn so much about people, and you learn so much about this beautiful territory that we all live in.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank Robin Reid-Fraser, the Copperbelt South candidate for the New Democratic Party, and Derek Yap, who ran for the Yukon Liberals, and their efforts and what they brought to the campaign. They were strong campaigners, and I appreciated their work and the efforts that they put in during that writ period.

Of course, like everyone in this Chamber, we couldn't get to where we are without the support of our friends, our family, and our volunteers. From the door-knockers and the scrutineers, to those who put up signs or made phone calls for us, or dropped off literature, to those who make financial contributions to our campaigns, everybody plays such an important role. Like others, there are so many who were involved in my campaign, too many to list, but I do want to single out a couple.

In my campaign — too many to list — but I do want to single out a couple. First, Angela Cooper, who acted as my official agent — an important part of anyone's campaign. All the support from the central campaign team that we received as candidates was very much appreciated. Of course, two incredible individuals — my wife Amanda Leslie, who also was my campaign manager. I don't know if I would recommend that for every candidate, but for us, it works. She has run my campaigns going back to 2011 and they have all been successful. We have a system, I guess, and it certainly works for us. I love her and I appreciate everything that she does for me and our son, Eli. Eli, as I mentioned, was 13 years old for this campaign. He was only 2 years old when I ran in 2010. Then I ran in 2016. He has grown into an amazing young man and has turned into an awesome volunteer for us as well. He helped us put up signs for me and for the Member for Marsh Lake-Golden Horn-Mount Lorne and also delivered literature to help get out the vote. I know that he has caught the political bug at an early age, as the Member for Porter Creek Centre did. He will be around and helping in campaigns long after my time as an MLA is done, I'm sure.

This was my sixth election as a candidate. I won five and lost one. My first term in this Chamber was in the year 2000. I was elected to represent the riding of Riverside, which was a portion of Riverdale North and a portion of Whitehorse Centre, just along the river. What a tremendous honour that was. I served under Premier Pat Duncan at the time as a member of the Liberal Party. Then in 2002, I ran again and lost to Archie Lang in Porter Creek Centre. Again, that loss and that campaign taught me as much as or more than winning. Archie's infectious humour and the way he conducted himself during the campaign was a lesson that I learned there that I took when I came back as a Yukon Party candidate and MLA in Riverdale North in 2011. Then, as I mentioned before, in 2016, I ran in Copperbelt South when my family moved. I have been the MLA out there since that time.

As I mentioned, this sixth election was the first election that I've run in without my mom. She passed away a few years ago. I think about her often; I think about her all the time, but I thought about her a little bit more on election day.

At our campaign headquarters, we missed her cookies and her soup. Amanda and I missed when she would look after Eli and our dog on election day as we were trying to get the votes out, or the way that she used to fret over the results and couldn't watch TV, and then would phone and see how we made out. We would call her back — a very fierce and loyal supporter of me and the family. Again, many Yukoners would know her from her time at the fruit stand in downtown Whitehorse and many Yukoners miss her since she passed away a few years ago.

When I was listening to the Commissioner deliver the throne speech yesterday, there was a particular passage that stood out to me because it resonated with me and my family. It was the part talking about the territory and was early on in the throne speech. It was the passage that said that the territory needs to be a place where people are encouraged to dream as big and bright as the northern lights, a place where those who take risks are rewarded, a place where young people can stay and build a future, and a place where everyone, regardless of their background, can get ahead through hard work.

That reminds me a lot of my family. As I mentioned, my mom and my dad — we moved to the Yukon in 1973 from Saskatchewan. I have four brothers and two sisters, and all of us are still here in Whitehorse and we all make our home here, as well as two additional generations of my family.

Those remarks that I talked about from the throne speech, I think, certainly apply to the people who are in my family. Many of them have taken risks as entrepreneurs and have been rewarded. Many of those young people can stay and build a future, as evidenced by the generation after generation still here, and we want to make sure, as the Commissioner in the throne speech said yesterday, that the Yukon is a place where people do not have to settle for good enough, but are empowered to build the life that they want and deserve, and I think that is certainly reflected in what my family has been able to achieve in the Yukon as small business owners, as contractors, as public servants, and their family following them.

I want to speak a little bit about some of the things that have been important to me in my constituency and that we look forward to realizing during this term in government.

As my colleague from Marsh Lake-Golden Horn-Mount Lorne mentioned, safe, reliable transportation along the Alaska Highway corridor is something that has come up at many doors during my time as an MLA and in the most recent campaign.

Procurement is something that is extremely important. I have a number of contractors who live in my riding and rely on a fair and reasonable procurement system, so we will look forward to involving those contractors in the upcoming reviews of procurement policies here in the territory.

Something that may not seem like a big deal to many folks in here, but it certainly has been for my constituents, is the state of the soccer field at Golden Horn Elementary School. I am happy that my colleague and I were able to make an announcement during the campaign that work will start on that soccer field this summer. Those kids out there deserve a safe place to play. With the improvements, we will look forward to bringing that to them.

When it comes to my place in Cabinet, I would like to thank the Premier for appointing me to the portfolios of Education and Minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation. It is a tremendous honour to be responsible for both of those departments. As the Leader of the Official Opposition noted, I was the Education critic for nine years, so there are quite a few Hansard questions that I have asked. I am sure that I will be asked a few of them from the Opposition benches with respect to what I was holding the government of the day to account to. I look forward to those conversations, whether it is in Question Period or Committee of the Whole as we debate budgets in the coming years.

One thing that I'm particularly proud of is the education platform that we put before Yukoners this fall. I think that it resonated at many of the doorsteps that I knocked on, and I'm sure that it resonated for colleagues, as they went door to door in their particular ridings as well. I'm just going to read a few clips from that platform. You know, when we started talking about reforming the education system, we talked about the past several years and the several reports that have been put out highlighting serious concerns within the Yukon's education system. That system wasn't helping Yukon students to meet their full potential and wasn't supporting the educators who are fundamental to teaching them.

What we want to do and some of the things that I will highlight as part of our plan for the next four years, the first is to review the Department of Education. As we mentioned at the time, the education landscape in the Yukon has changed significantly over the past several years. With the schools in rural Yukon, the First Nation School Board, Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon, and families who choose to home-school their children, they all agree that there are inequities in the way that the Department of Education provides supports to them. Our party, during the campaign, committed to launching an overhaul of how the Department of Education delivers supports to the education system, which will reflect changes to the landscape of education in the Yukon, prioritize the delivery of classroom supports, and focus on the fundamentals of education, such as math, science, and literacy, as the building blocks of learning.

We also want to focus on and make it a priority with respect to student mental health and well-being, recognizing the increasing mental health challenges that students face by empowering educators, families, and students with access to mental health supports. Again, something that was in the news this morning — part of our platform and was in the Speech from the Throne — which is to disallow personal smartphone use by students in school. Some of the policy work has been done. There is still some to come, but we look to meet that goal for the 2026-27 school year. As I mentioned, there is a lot of legwork to do and consultation to take place with respect to that, but I did listen to the President of the Yukon Association of Education Professionals this morning on the radio, and I'm pleased that organization supports the work and wants to be a part of the solution, as we move forward with that commitment.

Partnering with the Child Development Centre to increase resources and reduce wait times for services — the CDC plays

such an important role for so many families in the territory. I know that the programs and services that they offer, not only here in Whitehorse, but throughout the Yukon, are very well-regarded, well-received and successful. I look forward to meeting with them sometime, hopefully early in the new year, to talk about this particular commitment.

Some of the other ones that we wanted to talk about — I will skip over now to capital planning when it comes to the schools. The previous government introduced a school replacement ranking for the Whitehorse schools, but left out the rural schools, so we want to do a ranking of rural schools and integrate that list with the Whitehorse list, so that we have a full picture of what is needed and ensure that the rural communities are not left behind when it comes to capital improvements with respect to the schools in their communities.

One of the other things that we have seen with the growing population in the Yukon is the need to address the growing need for additional high school spaces in Whitehorse, so we will start working on that relatively quickly and meet with those school communities and talk to them about what their needs are and how we can do that — whether it is through modular classrooms or other means will be determined on a case-by-case basis with each of those schools.

Something that I think is extremely important is to create a plan to ensure that schools do not fall into unsafe levels of disrepair, so we need to focus on capital maintenance when it comes to our schools. When it comes to all the buildings in the government envelope, we need to make sure that they are safe and well-maintained, so that, in the case of schools, those individuals can learn in that type of environment.

One thing that I think has excited a lot of Yukoners — and I knew it during the campaign, but I also found out as recently as this weekend at the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees' fall meeting — I spoke at that and stuck around for the school roundtable — I think there was an awful lot of interest in our focus on trades training and alternative learning models. Some of the things that we want to do is to develop hands-on programs to connect students with local industries, build on the success of the union training and innovation program, which is led by the Government of Canada and explore how to further support apprenticeship training, innovation, and partnerships in the red seal trades.

This last one that I will highlight — there are others in here, of course — came from a doorstep in Copperbelt South that I happened upon one evening and started talking about opportunities for secondary students in the skilled trades. What we want to do is expand the student training and employment program, or the STEP program, to include secondary students who want to get involved in the skilled trades.

Those are the types of things we were able to take from the doorstep right to the platform, and now into what we hope to accomplish over the next four years. There is also support for early learning and childcare. Recruiting and retention of educators is extremely important. We need to partner with the YAEP, the school boards, and the school councils to develop a teacher recruitment strategy that is timely and efficient. We want to support the good work at the Yukon University as well,

with things such as supporting the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining and working with the university administration to ensure that it is meeting the demands of the local economy.

I want to skip over now to housing. There are so many initiatives. Obviously, this is an important issue for Yukoners. I thank my colleagues and all of those who were involved in putting together a very comprehensive platform when it comes to housing. I should also thank the members of the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors. There are four individuals there right now who bring a vast array of experience to the table, and I look forward to learning from them and their experiences, as we continue to address issues across the housing continuum. Some of the land development issues that we're looking to bring in are: reforming the land lotteries system; developing a rural land development strategy; and cutting red tape in the land sale process by addressing some of the arbitrary timelines and processing for closing land sales. When it comes to underutilized land, we will look to acquire vacant or abandoned lots, particularly in Whitehorse, to prepare them for mixed use development, preparing sites for development, and working with the private sector to demolish derelict structures, release prepared lots to the private sector with conditions for timely development, while recovering costs, and creating financial incentives for landowners to demolish those derelict buildings and remediate land to increase housing opportunities.

We want to look to release commercial, industrial, agricultural and recreational lots. During our last time in government, the Member for Kluane and I were able to get lots on the market on Kluane Lake — recreational lots. As well, there were other ones done on Bennett Lake and Windy Arm. It's an important opportunity for so many Yukoners.

There's so much more when it comes to housing opportunities and what we want to do, from modernizing the National Building Code adoption process, removing all land transfer fees, and cutting the average housing construction application timeline by 50 percent, right through to increasing the supply of rental housing by introducing incentives to build affordable rental units, recognizing that — again, this was in the Speech from the Throne and it was brought up in Question Period today as well — rent control and the fact that it has failed has reduced rental supply while increasing rent costs. So, we want to develop a plan that balances the needs of both tenants and landlords while increasing supply and making rent more affordable through updates to the *Residential Tenancies Act*.

So, just a tale that the Member for Whitehorse Centre and I heard from a local real estate lawyer was that over a six-week period, I think, he was involved in 30 transactions of landlords getting out of the rental business. We're losing supply of rental units, so, of course, that is going to drive the cost up, that's why we believe that the rental cap has been a failure, and that's why we'll look to change it.

We need to plan for growth in Whitehorse. With the continued development of Whistle Bend and the next residential development beyond Whistle Bend, we need to start working with the City of Whitehorse on that, considering

opportunities for private land development and, of course, working with Yukon First Nation governments with respect to the development of their settlement lands for residential and commercial use.

Social and affordable housing is something that is the responsibility of me in my portfolio with respect to the Yukon Housing Corporation. We need to develop an approach for data collection and sharing with partners so that we can generate territory-wide access to clear and accurate information while we work to address gaps across each community. We want to implement the recommendations and continue to implement the recommendations of the Auditor General's 2022 report on housing, which spoke to improving access to the Housing Corporation's stock and reviewing the corporation's policies related to rent assessments.

Increasing the stock of affordable housing offered by the Yukon Housing Corporation, working with local developers on that, and exploring new social housing developments by working with NGOs, the private sector, and of course, Yukon First Nation governments.

There are so many things across those two portfolios, but everyone on this side of the House has to start working on and digging in to their departments, as mentioned by others. We are only a little over two weeks since we were sworn in as Cabinet, but I know that everyone has been working extremely hard and getting up to speed with their portfolios. A big thank you to senior officials in all the departments, but for me, in Education and the Yukon Housing Corporation, for all of the work that they have done putting together the transition binders and the briefing binders and all of the notes to support us in the jobs that we do here in the Legislative Assembly.

With that, I will conclude my remarks. Again, congratulations to you for your election as Speaker, and congratulations to everyone in the Legislature for their elections in their ridings, and I know that everyone will do their best to represent their constituents and Yukoners, as we move through the next four years.

**Debra-Leigh Reti:** Drin Gwinzii and mahsi' cho, Speaker. It is an absolute honour to rise for my first time in the Yukon Legislative Assembly as the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin. I also apologize as I think I am losing my voice, as I am coming down with something as we are sitting here.

I am so grateful, though, for the opportunity to serve my community in a good and meaningful way. I embark on this new role and the new responsibilities, recognizing the trust that has been put in me to listen to constituents and be their voice in the Assembly. I am committed to representing you with honesty, strength, and integrity.

I would like to congratulate all of my colleagues here today. I wish you well and may God bless you in representing the community to which you were elected. A big thank you to all of the candidates who ran, pausing your lives to uphold our democratic institution — taking leave from work and putting your names out there. It is a vulnerable undertaking and you deserve recognition.

To start off my list of thank yous, I firstly want to give all thanks and praise to God for being my guide throughout my entire life and always holding me up in difficult times. There are so many family members — friends and supporters — who are owed a huge mahsi' cho for helping me along this new path to where I stand today — my mother, Mabel Reti — she was raised as Mabel Martin from Dawson — has been my prayer warrior and my biggest support in life; my brothers, Douglas and Lawrence Reti, for checking on me and giving me many words of wisdom; my sister-in-law Dionne, who helped with much of the campaign literature and material and helping me with speeches; my grown children — Diego, Dawn, Gladys-Lee, Germaine, and Eamonn — who were cheering me on throughout the whole campaign month, even though they didn't fully know what I was doing — and my youngest daughter, Catrielle, up in Old Crow, who not only cheered me on but she fed me when she saw me fading from being out in the cold for hours, and she babysat my youngest grandbabies, who are in my care, while I knocked on doors daily.

I want to thank those friends and supporters who took time to organize the events, those who cast their ballots, and some who stayed behind the scenes just helping me stay organized. You are all appreciated. You dedicated your time and your energy and you put your trust in me.

I follow a long line of very strong and influential matriarchs, starting with my great grandmother, Sarah Abel. She's also known as Sarah Abel Chitze. She grew up on the land. She lived the traditional lifestyle of trapping and hunting while raising 17 children at White Fish Lake up the Porcupine River from Old Crow. She was the first female council member of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. Her wisdom and her teachings were passed on to many in the community, including me, through her storytelling, and I am blessed to have learned so much from her.

Grandma Sarah reminded me, at a very young age, that I belonged to the community. When our family returned home after many years away, she helped me with my identity, reminding me that we are Vuntut Gwitchin, no matter where we go, and that is part of who I am.

I am one of five siblings. I'm a mother to seven and a grandmother to eight amazing and beautiful grandchildren. The network of family life is incredibly important to me. I was born in Moncton, New Brunswick to Harvey and Mabel Reti. We moved around in my younger years, as my dad was a sergeant in the military — the PPCLI, to be specific. My mother was a nurse. At 10 years old, we returned to the Yukon for my mother to reinstate her status, according to Bill C-31, and also to be home and closer to our language and cultural way of life.

I have very fond memories of my time in Old Crow as a child, from laying down at the end of the runway with my late brother, Tyler Reti, as we watched the Air North flights land right over our heads, Elder John Joseph Kyikavichik, teaching me to drive boat on the Porcupine River, and my great uncle Pete Lord teaching me to check net and, back then, hauling in the biggest king salmon I had ever seen — and sadly, we don't see that today — to sitting at my great grandmother's side as she talked to me in broken English and fluent Gwich'in.

After my time away from the territory, the Yukon called me home once again in 2012 when I continued a career in education with First Nation initiatives at Yukon College. I moved to Old Crow in 2018 to work with the Alice Frost community campus and to live among my Gwich'in people and really learn how to live our way of life in the Arctic and listen to the concerns and issues that Old Crow was dealing with. I wanted to help.

Prior to my election as MLA, I was deputy chief and then councillor for my First Nation and continued to work at Yukon University. I currently belong to the Old Crow Rangers — 1 CRPG — where we are building up our patrol and restarting the junior ranger program. This is very exciting for our community.

I spend lots of time on the land, snowmobiling and boating with my family and at my camp, called Camp Reti, in respect for my late father, Harvey Reti, which is halfway up Mountain Road in Old Crow. I am deeply rooted in my community of Old Crow, and I love my people and those who come to work for us.

Throughout the election, I had the opportunity to connect with people in a different way from what I'm used to.

I learned so much. People shared personal stories about the issues that matter to them, their concerns, their ideas on how the government can serve them. Campaigning up in Old Crow was very different. You're actually going into homes, and you're having tea, and sometimes they're feeding you, and you get pretty full by the end of the night.

Being the only fly-in community in the Yukon, it sets Old Crow apart from others here in the territory. Living there is not for the faint of heart. We are resilient, adaptive, and strong, though, but with it comes a unique set of challenges. These are the challenges that I want to be able to work on with our government: access to health care that is consistent and culturally informed; recruitment of trauma-informed teachers; culturally sensitive nurses, maintenance workers at the airport or for our roads and services; availability of healthy, affordable food and goods; the cost of building and maintaining housing and buildings. This list goes on and on. Our people also have a history of being incredible advocates for issues that matter the most.

The protection of the Porcupine caribou herd is a great example of this. Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation leadership and elected MLAs over the years have long since advocated for the protection of the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd, the lifeblood of our culture, identity, and survival. We, the Gwich'in, call it "Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit"; it is "the sacred place where life begins". Spanning decades, trips to Washington, protests, letters, resolutions, international and national conservation agreements that included the establishment of the International Porcupine Caribou Board and the Porcupine Caribou Management Board, commitments from all levels of government on both sides of the border to protect the caribou and their habitat — yet we are here again. With the United States preparing to restore oil and gas leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge that had been cancelled by

the Biden administration, we need to unite in our collective efforts to protect the herd.

A little interjection — when I get emotional, it is because I live in Old Crow. When those caribou don't come through, I have grandchildren who say, "Grandma, are you bringing us meat?" My grandchildren who go back and forth with me to Old Crow are growing and learning about what sustains us. A few of them are sick right now, and I brought down broth. Somebody gave me caribou, because I didn't get any, and I am feeding them broth, and I'm telling them it's their medicine.

I would just like to take this moment as well to recognize Pauline Frost, who is a former MLA for Vuntut Gwitchin, Minister of Environment, among other portfolios you are aware of, and the present Chief of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, for her work on this over the years. During the Assembly of First Nations annual December meeting in Ottawa last week, as I mentioned in my motion, Chief Frost, along with a delegation of Gwich'in leadership, were successful in bringing forward a resolution to urge Prime Minister Carney to permanently protect the coastal plain of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil and gas development. I would like to thank all those who spoke to this resolution and the importance of protecting the Porcupine caribou herd, including Vuntut Gwitchin elder Lorraine Netro, who is also a past MLA.

To my people: I will stand with you and do everything I can to protect the Porcupine caribou herd and their habitat through my position. You know, as Gwich'in people, on one end, we are fighting to save our caribou, and at the other end, we're fighting to save our loved ones who we are losing to the opioid crisis. Our graveyards are full. Our children are growing up without their parents. This is not just a personal family issue. It's not just a First Nation issue. It's a Yukon and Canada-wide issue. We, as Yukoners, must work together to stop this drug trade from destroying our way of life, our culture, and our children's future.

I now have a few responses that I added to my speech to portions of the Speech from the Throne that greatly concerned me as a person, a Yukon First Nation person, and a leader who is responsible for making life-changing decisions for fellow citizens.

In the Speech from the Throne, there is a reference to addictions. I was surprised that it wasn't under the section Caring for Yukoners. It was under the section Safety for Yukoners, and that confused me. The placement and the framing of this issue in the speech, to me — I felt like it set the tone of how the current government views and intends to treat folks who are struggling, but I hope not though.

I want to highlight two items in this section. In the first statement, the government will take decisive action to tackle the current crime wave, beginning with conducting a comprehensive review of the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter, its operating model and the potential alternative locations and options for sheltering services.

The second one: The government will increase addiction treatment options to keep vulnerable people from falling into a life of crime in the first place. I don't know why the choice was

made to place these items under Safety for Yukoners rather than Caring for Yukoners.

In the first statement, the government is tying criminal activities to those in need of shelter services. I am asking: Are all those fleeing violence and needing access to food or housing services criminals? Are all the youth themselves who are out of work and in extraordinary times of need criminals? Those are just the first kind of questions that came to me.

I acknowledge that there is a need to improve the way we operate the shelter. I agree. A review was conducted with work underway to implement changes, but linking all users to the current crime wave, I really felt was inappropriate. So too is that link between folks struggling with addiction and being automatically vulnerable or falling into crime. Addictions are all around us. Some people are struggling silently. Some are fully housed. They have families and they actually show up for work every day. This does not make them vulnerable or criminals.

While I do support the increase in addictions treatment options — thank you for that — I do take issue with the categorization — I guess that's how I am looking at it — of those who find themselves in unfortunate situations as being criminally involved — whether it be those needing shelter or those facing addictions.

I wear a tattoo — my first one. My kids were in awe that I actually did this, but I wear a tattoo for my late brother, Tyler Reti, who struggled with his addictions, and he died from them. Yet, he did not turn to criminal behaviours. As I step back and I look at the throne speech at a high level and I read through the tone and the sentiment of the government's foundational values, I reflect on what is said and I also reflected on what I felt was not said — underlying messages. That is the way it stood+ out to me — the line in the introduction — and I quote: "Yukoners are among the most blessed people in the world. We are the inheritors of a proud legacy shaped by those who came before us, beginning with 14 Yukon First Nations who built the territory's first communities."

My first thoughts were that I need to recognize that and I need all of us to recognize that we should actually not be proud of some of the parts of our collective history. The reality of the Indian residential schools: my mother attended Choutla; the building of the Alaska Highway and the disruption and lasting damage that this caused to Yukon First Nations to this day. Yukon First Nation people actually lived a nomadic lifestyle. Our communities were seasonal, and we followed our food sources. The territory's first communities were not what they are today. Today's communities actually are a product of colonization, but I am hopeful that somehow these statements that were put together were an oversight and just plain that — that it was an oversight.

To continue, we need to recognize, as well, because of this history, the harm done. We have a need to represent everyone who calls Yukon home, from all walks of life — those hard-working and those unable to work. Collectively, as elected officials, as Yukoners, we need to be intentional in our work to advance reconciliation. It is not solely the work for First Nations. It is not just something that we talk about doing. It is

about educating ourselves, reflecting on our actions, and undertaking the work. As decision-makers and legislators, the government has a responsibility to reconciliation and to lead by example.

I look forward, in my position now as Third Party Leader, to hold the government accountable and also to work together on all this work that is before us right now. When I sit and think about my next four years in the Legislative Assembly, I look forward to the opportunities to work with those who can help to make these changes, not only for my community of Old Crow but also for the Yukon as a whole. My door is always open and my cell can be made available to chat and dig deeper and further into these issues that we share. I have said many times that, yes, we represent different political parties, but we are all Yukoners and we are connected one way or another to each other and to the issues at hand. We can all work together to help our First Nation communities thrive in areas of language, resources, housing, education, the economy, and our rich First Nation culture here.

Last but not least, I just want to say that I am so blessed and grateful for the Liberal Party campaign team and the candidates who all cheered me along, way before they even knew who I was. I am really grateful to Jason Cuning, Kim Stavert, Laura Seeley, and Sharon Johnson for supporting me daily as I learned the ropes of this new position. I want to give thanks to my Yukon University colleagues — so many of them showed up to the swearing in — and many friends, and to my chief and council for their support to go ahead and represent the riding of Vuntut Gwytchin. May God bless us all as we move forward in a good way.

**Hon. Brad Cathers:** I am pleased to rise here today to respond to the throne speech. I would like to, first of all, thank my constituents for electing me for the sixth time as their MLA for Lake Laberge. After 23 years of serving as MLA for Lake Laberge, I am very grateful for the continued support of my constituents. I would like to thank my family, especially my sister, and my friends, some of whom spent many days helping me during the election and the lead up to it, and to all of the volunteers who spent in some cases a few hours and in some cases many hours or days helping me with the election. I would like to also thank my official agent and my friends who helped me out knocking on doors for many hours, sometimes on rather dark nights during this fall campaign, as well as those who took the time to volunteer and to make blue signs seem to magically appear, springing up all across the riding of Lake Laberge. I very much appreciate the time spent by everyone involved, and thank you for your continued support and your continued trust in this role.

I would like to congratulate, as well, all MLAs in this Assembly for their election or re-election to the Legislative Assembly. I am happy to see so many of my Yukon Party caucus colleagues re-elected, and I am pleased that we have so many new Yukon Party MLAs joining us.

Congratulations to the Premier, the central campaign team — all of our campaign teams across the territory — volunteers and everyone who helped us with the Yukon Party forming the

largest majority government in Yukon history, with the largest number of MLAs ever, and 52 percent of the popular vote. Your efforts are all appreciated. I want to thank everyone who supported us in this election, everyone who helped out with my campaign, the Yukon Party campaign team, and, indeed, all of our volunteers across the territory.

As we begin this mandate, we face many serious problems inherited from the previous government. Some of the largest challenges that we face are in our health care system, which has been in a state of growing crisis for years. I thank the Premier for entrusting me with the responsibility of serving as Minister of Health and Social Services. This is my second time in the role, having first been sworn in as Minister of Health and Social Services while still in my 20s back in 2005. In fact, later this week will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of me being sworn into Cabinet for the first time, which was as Minister of Health and Social Services.

The challenges today of improving our health care system, meeting the needs of today and preparing for the needs of years to come, will not be a small one. While I have been asked to lead our efforts in this very important area, stabilizing and improving our health care system will require the support of my colleagues and the combined efforts of hundreds of Yukoners. We will need the help and advice of health care professionals across the Yukon, the dedicated staff of Health and Social Services, the Yukon Hospital Corporation board, employees and medical staff, as well as family doctors and specialists, allied health professionals, and many others.

We will also work with First Nation governments, municipalities, communities and the federal government to take the action needed to improve our health care system and help it better meet the needs of Yukoners.

We will be asking the federal government for financial assistance in building some of the health infrastructure that we need to meet the needs of Yukoners, including the long-delayed expansion of Whitehorse General Hospital and continuing care facilities.

I will expand more on some of the health issues, but I do want to touch on a few of the other issues that came up during the election campaign that were raised with me on the doorstep by constituents. That includes one thing that has been a significant concern for a number of my constituents as well as others in areas served by volunteer fire departments, and that is the lack of resources that have been provided by the previous government to meet their needs. The budgets had not grown significantly since we were in office nine years ago. As an example, while the capital portion provided to the Fire Marshal's Office at the time that we put it in place was sufficient at the time to purchase two new fire trucks per year, the budgetary allocation has remained relatively static, in some years not been spent fully, and the cost of fire trucks has gone up dramatically. As well, the cost of operating volunteer fire halls throughout Yukon communities and in the Whitehorse periphery, including the two in my riding — Hootalinqua and Ibex Valley — has not been adequately supported by the operational envelope, leaving a situation that we were forced, within the last year and a bit, to raise — the issue on behalf of

those firefighters that too many of them were actually responding to calls in expired or damaged gear, putting themselves at risk in the process. I am pleased that, in the election campaign, we announced our commitment to increase support for our firefighters and to work with them, with the association of Yukon firefighters and fire chiefs, to provide appropriate gear, equipment, and training.

We also committed to strengthening EMS and wilderness response to ensure a timely and effective response, and that will include looking at the question of wilderness response in areas such as trails — whether that response is best provided by EMS or through, at times, the resources of volunteer fire halls. I look forward to that work going forward.

Another important issue for people across the Yukon, including in my riding, was the property rights of people, including firearms owners. We committed to protecting the rights of innocent firearms owners by opposing the federal Liberal government's unjustified gun confiscation plan, which they cleverly but deceptively call the "gun buyback program". Whatever name they place on that politically and ideologically motivated program, it is nothing but the unjustified confiscation of private property from innocent people who have done nothing wrong and, in some cases, depend on those firearms to hunt and feed their families.

The power has long existed for people who commit a crime or pose a risk to society to have firearms taken away. We committed, in our election platform and in the throne speech, to develop and implement a Yukon firearms act aimed at protecting innocent Yukoners from the federal government's gun confiscation plan. As I noted, this includes people who depend on hunting to feed their families, including people whose subsistence hunting rights are constitutionally protected but are at risk of being eroded by the federal Liberal plan. I would be remiss if I also didn't take the opportunity to remind this House again that indeed the National Police Federation, the union representing RCMP members, has criticized this gun buyback program as taking resources away from where they are needed most.

Other issues of concern include rising crime. As noted in both our platform and throne speech, crime is up and is increasingly a worry for people across the Yukon. One thing that I found notable in this election campaign, especially in contrast to the last election campaign, is the increase in the number of security cameras that my constituents had and the increase in the number of gates. That is just one piece of the overall problem. Areas such as downtown Whitehorse, of course, are seeing even greater rises in property crime and violent crime.

I remember that when I was growing up, my parents never worried about me walking down the street alone when I was a little kid. Downtown Whitehorse used to be safe, and people felt comfortable leaving homes and vehicles unlocked. Generally speaking, I think it's fair to say that while, of course, there was some crime, people considered Whitehorse a safe place to live. Unfortunately, that has been eroded. It will be important for us to take a number of actions in this area, including lobbying the federal government for bail reform to

ensure that violent and repeat offenders are not simply released the next day, leaving police incredibly frustrated and leaving our communities at risk.

A few other areas of importance include the agriculture sector. Many of the Yukon's farmers do live in my riding.

We made commitments to them in this election to increase the purchasing of local food, including providing dedicated envelopes within the Yukon Government to help do that. Our commitments included recognizing the many benefits that come from the Yukon-grown sector of our economy and value-added products made locally. We committed to growing this sector of the economy, including ensuring that the government buys more locally produced food and provides predictable increased funding, specifically for local food production. This includes our commitment to moving to a model that will provide certainty to Yukon food producers under multi-year contracts, through which government will commit to purchasing a minimum amount of product from individual farms and producers at an agreed price. This is aimed at also helping those producers attract financing from banks and private lenders to help grow their own businesses and their farms.

Another important area was log home construction. Some of Yukon's log home builders live in my riding and have been frustrated by the challenges in accessing the timber that they need to build environmentally responsible and locally built homes, as well as employing a number of Yukoners in doing so. That is a problem that is created by government and can be solved by government.

In a similar vein, Yukon firewood cutters have faced significant challenges in being able to access the firewood they need to sell to Yukoners to help them keep their homes warm. Again, this is a problem that is due to lack of sufficient government action and can be solved.

Another area that my colleague, the Minister of Education, touched on — the issues around the education system — that is something that, particularly in contrast to what I used to hear years ago, there was a time when, as the MLA for Lake Laberge, I did not hear very many education issues from constituents. They would come up upon occasion, but it has become a regular matter for me to hear serious concerns from constituents about lack of support for their children — for example, individualized education plans that require support from staff that are not being met within the system. Hidden Valley Elementary School has, of course, had a long series of problems and frustrations in dealing with the previous government and has not felt supported.

In the area of energy prices and electricity, the issues around cost increases, the lack of stability of the grid, and people being concerned about the fluctuations month to month in some of their electricity bills are all common topics of concern.

As well, the proposal by Yukon Energy to develop generator sites within my riding was of concern to people with opposition to all five sites being considered — in particular, the strongest opposition and what most people were concerned about were the three sites that are near MacPherson, Hidden

Valley, Echo Valley, and Ibex Valley, because of the close proximity that those sites are to so many people. Recognizing, of course, that we do need to meet energy needs, I will, of course, raise those concerns on behalf of constituents, as we go forward.

As well, the electricity costs that should be noted — I mentioned the spikes and rates — the cost of failed energy policies is a significant factor in that, including tens of millions of dollars spent on rental diesel generators after the previous government made the political decision to cancel a 20-megawatt diesel, or LNG, generation site. That was after spending millions of dollars on planning, design, engineering, and public meetings. We also have, as my colleague, the Member for Watson Lake-Ross River-Faro raised earlier during Question Period, the \$150-million surprise that we had regarding the condition of the Wareham dam at Mayo and the need to take appropriate action to ensure not only the continued use of that facility, but the safety of the community around it.

I believe our time is growing short this afternoon, so I would note that I look forward to resuming my remarks tomorrow, but as the throne speech emphasized, our platform commitments to address the health care crisis and improve the system are very important to us. I am again honoured to have the responsibility of leading the work in that area. Those commitments include stabilizing primary care, attracting and supporting health care professionals, cutting health care wait times and improving access, boosting hospital capacity with a generational expansion of Whitehorse General Hospital, providing more continuing care and long-term care space, and helping Yukon students pursuing health careers.

As the throne speech correctly noted, few issues matter more to Yukoners than health care and a vibrant —

**Speaker:** Order, please.

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

*Debate on motion re Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne accordingly adjourned*

*The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.*

**The following sessional papers were tabled December 9, 2025:**

SP 36-1-2

*Report from the Clerk of the Yukon Legislative Assembly on the Absence of Members from Sittings of the Legislative Assembly and its Committees* (December 9, 2025) (Speaker Clarke)

SP 36-1-3

*Yukon Human Rights Commission Annual Report 2024-2025* (Speaker Clarke)

SP 36-1-4

*Children's Rights — What a Ride! — 2024/25 Annual Report — 15 Year Review* (Speaker Clarke)

SP 36-1-5

*Yukon Public Accounts 2024-25* (Speaker Clarke)

SP 36-1-6

*Eighth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts* (Speaker Clarke)

SP 36-1-7

*Ninth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts* (Speaker Clarke)

SP 36-1-8

*Tenth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts* (Speaker Clarke)