



Yukon Legislative Assembly

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BLUES

Tuesday, October 6, 2026 — 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 It may be used as a reference only with the understanding that it will be superseded by the final, edited version, entitled “Hansard”, at a later time.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, October 6, 2026 — 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 — Artwork in the Chamber

Speaker: I am pleased to introduce today the five new pieces of art on display in the Chamber for this Sitting. The artwork that surrounds us serves as a reminder of the people, cultures, and experiences that help shape the Yukon. These pieces all come from the Yukon permanent art collection, a public collection that preserves and showcases the territory's artistic and cultural expression.

Beginning with the piece closest to me on my right and moving counterclockwise, the works are *Delight* by Lara Melnick; *Eagle Warrior Helmet* by Eugene Alfred; *Knife Sheath* by Betty Lucas; *Arrival of the Dog Team* by Diane Olsen; and *Galaxy Sunrise* by Faye Cable. Together, these pieces reflect the creativity, talent, and diverse perspectives that contribute to life in the Yukon.

I encourage all members and indeed all Yukoners to visit the Yukon Legislative Assembly's website to learn more about the artists and their work.

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: Before we proceed to the Daily Routine, the Chair wishes to inform the House a change made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 153, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, has been removed from the Order Paper at the request of the member.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Introduction of visitors.

Visitors introduced

Speaker: Tributes.

Members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Statement — Gavin McKenna's NHL draft selection

Hon. Currie Dixon: Many might say that Yukon's greatest export is minerals, but Madam Speaker, after the Yukon's own Gavin McKenna was drafted first overall this summer by the Toronto Maple Leafs, the argument can be made that it's hockey players. And with another Yukoner, Dylan Cozens, playing for the Ottawa Senators, the battle of Ontario is now the battle of the Yukon. We're all familiar with Gavin's story and the hard work he and his family put in to get him to this point. But there is a bigger picture here. Both Gavin and Dylan have shown a generation of Yukoners that you can come

from a territory of less than 50,000 people north of 60 and reach the highest level of your chosen profession.

I was at Takhini Arena for the draft party and the excitement was palpable. Yukoners of all ages were beaming with pride as one of our own took the stage as the first overall pick in the NHL draft. On behalf of my colleagues, I want to congratulate Gavin McKenna and his family. We wish him well during his first season, except when the Leafs are playing the Habs.

Statement — Access to abortion services in Yukon

Carmen Gustafson: I rise today to highlight in this Chamber the longstanding need to ensure safe, dignified, and timely abortion access across the Yukon, as detailed in the *Geography of Choice* report recently released by the Yukon Status of Women Council. Abortion care is health care, and every Yukoner should be able to decide whether and when to have a child without shame or stigma.

While Yukon health care does provide options for abortion care, there are multiple barriers to access, particularly in rural Yukon, where people must often travel, pay extra costs, and take time away from work and family to access abortion care. Ways to reduce barriers include properly resourcing the Opal Clinic, providing clear information about abortion options, and making the abortion pill more available, especially outside of Whitehorse.

A person's postal code should not define whether they can access dignified and timely health care. It is beyond time to improve abortion care in the Yukon.

Statement — Chum salmon returns on the Porcupine River

Debra-Leigh Reti: I rise today to speak about something of importance to me and my people in Old Crow. I am very happy to report the increased numbers for chum salmon on the Porcupine River. As of September 24, 17,201 chum salmon have been counted at the Porcupine River sonar. That is an increase of 8,553 over last year's numbers. The importance of such a vital resource to our community and its people cannot be stressed enough. While these numbers are encouraging, we must remember that one strong season does not mean that the population has fully recovered. We can only hope that these years improve. Improved numbers might reflect a more positive outlook for the salmon population's long-term stability.

Statement — World Teachers' Day

Hon. Scott Kent: I rise today to recognize Yukon educators on World Teachers' Day. October 5 marked the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, which established international standards for teachers' rights, responsibilities, and working conditions.

UNESCO's 2026 theme, "Standing with Teachers: 60 Years of Protecting the Profession, Advancing its Status and Shaping Our Futures", highlights the importance of supporting teachers in a rapidly changing world and recognizes the key role they play in transforming education. The Canadian Teachers' Federation's 2026 theme, "Thank You for

Brightening our Future”, celebrates the lasting impact teachers have on students and the future they help shape. On this World Teachers’ Day, I thank Yukon educators and school staff for the positive difference they make in the lives of learners, families, and communities across the Yukon.

Statement — Yukon public service collective bargaining

Linda Moen: I rise today as a former union member and labour activist to speak about the importance of strong unions and a fair collective agreement for the Yukon public service. The Yukon Employees’ Union has been without a signed agreement since December 30, 2024. Going on two years without a renewed agreement is far too long. Yesterday’s tabled economic report highlighted the pressures Yukoners continue to face, including high inflation and rising costs for housing and food. Public servants deserve clarity about whether their wages will keep pace with the cost of living.

Yukoners rely on public services every day. They rely on the roads they drive on, the parks they enjoy with their families, the health services they access, and the schools that their children attend. Public servants are the heart of these services helping to keep Yukon running. It is this government’s responsibility to communicate with public servants when they intend to return to the bargaining table and that the Yukon Government continues to bargain in good —

Speaker: Order.

Statement — Lori Duncan’s retirement

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I rise today to recognize Lori Duncan [*Member spoke in First Nation language. Text unavailable.*] — a trail-blazer who shaped Yukon Government’s elders-in-residence role. Lori is a Ta’an Kwäch’än Council citizen, Crow clan, and was adopted to the Deishuhíttaan clan of Carcross/Tagish First Nation. She shares her knowledge and her Yukon First Nation history and culture with employees, often as their first introduction to First Nations and government. Her door was always open. She offered teachings, prayers, smudges, and practical guidance or simply listened. Her professionalism helped a pilot become a valued position, supporting intercultural learning and respectful relationships. After more than 30 years in the public service, Lori leaves a lasting legacy in the people she supported and the relationships she strengthened.

Thank you, Lori. We wish you a joyful and happy retirement with your family and your grandchildren.

Speaker: Are there any documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Justin Ziegler: I have for tabling a question for the Minister of Economy, Tourism and Culture.

Carmen Gustafson: I have for tabling a report titled *The Geography of Choice: Barriers to Accessing Abortion in the Yukon* by the Yukon Status of Women Council.

Speaker: Are there any committee reports to be presented? Petitions.

Are there any bills to be introduced?

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill No. 6, *Act to Amend the Workers’ Safety and Compensation Act (2026)* — Introduction and First Reading

Hon. Laura Lang: Madam Speaker, I move that Bill No. 6, entitled *Act to Amend the Workers’ Safety and Compensation Act (2026)*, now be introduced and read a first time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Minister responsible for the Workers’ Safety and Compensation Board that Bill No. 6, entitled *Act to Amend the Workers’ Safety and Compensation Act (2026)*, be now introduced and read a first time.

Motion for Introduction and First Reading of Bill No. 6 agreed to

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

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Hon. Scott Kent: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT the membership of the Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, as established by Motion No. 8, be amended by rescinding the appointment of Debra-Leigh Reiti.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT the membership of the Members’ Services Board, as established by Motion No. 9, be amended by:

- (1) rescinding the appointment of Doris Anderson; and
- (2) appointing the Hon. Linda Benoit.

Adam Gerle: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure safety for users by regulating the iGaming market.

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

QUESTION PERIOD

Question — Federal infrastructure funding

Kate White: Last winter showed Yukoners just how much pressure our electricity system faces. Yukoners understand that the territory needs new generation and repairs to aging infrastructure so the grid can reliably meet demand during periods of extreme cold. The Premier says that the solution to this problem must come from Ottawa. But after meetings with the Prime Minister, the Premier admitted — and I quote: “We don’t have a firm commitment from the government on an amount of money or anything like that yet.”

Nunavut secured more than \$17 million for renewable energy projects, and the NWT secured \$25 million in funding to double their hydro capacity. Meanwhile, the Yukon is still waiting for the federal investment needed to build a more reliable and affordable electricity system.

If the Premier says that Yukon’s energy future depends on Ottawa, what actions is he taking to secure federal funding?

Hon. Currie Dixon: This is an important aspect of our infrastructure here in the Yukon and indeed a top priority for our government, as we understand the extremely dire situation we find ourselves in after 10 years of neglect under the Liberal-NDP government with regard to our energy system.

We have taken steps here in the territory to reduce the demand or bend the curve for demand downwards as best we can. But ultimately, what we need to do is secure additional supply, and that's what the Leader of the Official Opposition has noted. We have engaged in multiple facets with the federal government. We've engaged at the staff level, we've engaged at the political level, and we've engaged at the highest possible level, including me raising this directly with the Prime Minister of Canada.

We're optimistic that the Government of Canada understands the importance of this to the Yukon, and we look forward to continuing to work with the federal government to seek the necessary funding to allow us to proceed with some of these projects. As I've noted and as the Leader of the Official Opposition noted, the scale of some of these projects is such that we will require significant federal investment to avoid undue hardship on Yukon ratepayers or taxpayers.

Kate White: Yukoners and visitors are driving highways with deep potholes, loose gravel, and rough sections that have damaged vehicles and made travelling dangerous. These problems are especially serious on the North Klondike, Dempster, and Alaska highways where drivers have reported broken windows, damaged vehicles, personal injuries, and dangerous road conditions. The Premier asked Ottawa to fund upgrades to the North Klondike and Alaska highways. But while the Northwest Territories secured \$405 million for the Mackenzie Valley Highway and another \$15 million to replace aging culverts on its portion of the Dempster, the Yukon has received no similar commitment.

What actions is the Premier taking to secure the federal funding needed to fix the Yukon's highways?

Hon. Currie Dixon: As the member will be aware, we have received some funding when it comes to a number of different funding pots in the territory that we're deploying across the Yukon for Yukon highways. The project that she's referring to specifically, though, comes under the Arctic infrastructure fund. It's a new fund that the federal government created last year to which the Yukon, other territories, First Nations, community groups, and a number of other organizations across the North have applied. We haven't heard back as to the status of our application before the Arctic infrastructure fund, but we're certainly engaging with the federal government to ensure that they understand the priority that we place on having safe highways here in the territory. We'll work closely with the federal government to seek the necessary funding to make the upgrades necessary to ensure that is realized.

Kate White: Yesterday, it was announced that the Northwest Territories secured more than \$121 million in federal health funding. In July, Nunavut received \$74.1 million of federal investment for their health infrastructure. Meanwhile, at home in Yukon, Whitehorse General Hospital reached 146-percent capacity this summer. The Yukon Hospital Corporation continues to warn this government of underfunded pressures and a critical shortage of space.

The other territories have worked with the federal government to secure significant funding for their health care systems, their roads, and their energy needs. When our territorial neighbours have successfully secured funding for all three, why has this government received no comparable investments to meet the needs of Yukoners?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The announcement made by the Northwest Territories yesterday was for two streams of funding. One was the health infrastructure fund under the PT stream of the HICC department. That funding was received by the Yukon Government and was signed by the Minister of Health and Social Services and the respective federal minister earlier this summer. So, we have received that money. The minister will be reporting on how that money will be deployed over the next three years very soon. As well, the second stream was the Working Together fund, and that's funding we already receive as well.

Those particular funding announcements that were made by the Northwest Territories yesterday have been made here in the Yukon. We've signed agreements with the federal government, and we're proceeding with the investments under those funds.

Question — Agriculture sector support

Carmen Gustafson: This morning, Sunnyside Farm, a family-run dairy operating just outside of Whitehorse, posted the following on their social media: "A fall update from our farm. We have run the numbers, and with the rising cost of farm supplies, diesel fuel, and the doubling of electricity rates, we are unable to keep our dairy open this winter."

It seems that Yukon producers that put nutritious local food on our tables are being squeezed from every angle. I want to highlight one thing from the post and that is the cost of electricity. We heard from the Yukon Party government that they're issuing rebates to households this winter. However, that won't help agricultural businesses keep their barns lit and water from freezing.

So, what is this government doing to protect Yukon farmers from rising electricity prices?

Hon. Ted Laking: The Government of Yukon recognizes that agricultural producers continue to face significant cost pressures and that decisions to scale back or pause production can be difficult for farm operators and their families.

Over the years, Sunnyside Farm has received support through a number of funding programs — from the Canadian Agricultural Partnership and sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership programs and the department of economic development.

The Agriculture branch at the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources will continue to engage with Sunnyside Farm to better understand its current circumstances, discuss available supports, and identify opportunities that may assist the operation moving forward. The Government of Yukon remains committed to supporting the growth and resilience of Yukon agriculture and local food production.

Carmen Gustafson: It really is this simple: no farms, no food. Fresh local food is not only good for us; it also benefits the Yukon in many other ways. It doesn't need to be transported as far, which means less fuel burned. Local food contributes to food security in Yukon. We've all seen how quickly grocery

stores become bare when the highway is closed. Local food is close by and accessible. Local food is an investment in our communities. Our dollars stay in the Yukon instead of the pockets of grocery giants. We see Yukon First Nations and other local farms not only sell but generously donate food to feed citizens and neighbours. Ensuring a consistent and dependable market for Yukon producers helps them to secure financing and make plans for the future. The Yukon Government could be using local food in schools, hospitals, correctional facilities, and other institutional settings.

Can the minister tell me what government-wide plan is in place to increase purchases from Yukon farms?

Hon. Ted Laking: Financial support from the Government of Yukon is helping agricultural producers develop and expand their businesses, adapt to challenges, and grow sector resilience. Under the five-year, \$9.25-million sustainable Canadian agricultural partnership program, we are providing funding to a wide range of agriculture and food-related projects that contribute to Yukon's economy and food security, and we are also supporting cross-government work led by the Department of Highways and Public Works and the Department of Health and Social Services to increase purchases of local foods for government-run facilities.

Carmen Gustafson: Farming is never-ending hard work, the kind of work that many people don't want to do. Many Yukon farmers also work full-time jobs to make enough money to keep their farms running. A Yukon farmer's day starts with early morning chores before a shift at their day job only to come home to do evening chores and finish up by balancing the books. On top of that, there is equipment to fix and, in the winter, the work to keep everything warm. This is after you've found land for your farm, built the infrastructure, bought animals, seed, and other inputs, sourced equipment, passed all the health and safety inspections, found a way to sell your products, and built relationships with your customers. Farming is also heartbreaking and mentally challenging work — losing animals, having crops fail, running out of money, bad weather, or any other number of things you can't control. It is not for the meek.

The minister detailed some of the ways that their government is supporting Yukon farmers, but how is the Yukon Government supporting Yukon farm families?

Hon. Ted Laking: I don't think you'll find much disagreement between the member opposite and me on how important the agricultural community is and how much we admire them and their resilience to deal with difficult conditions.

I've detailed already a number of programs that the Government of Yukon has to support them. When it comes to land opportunities, we are looking at ways to expand those opportunities to ensure that there is more access for land to allow for more producers to come online here in the territory. We're going to continue to work with the Yukon Agricultural Association in this endeavour, and as we progress on this, we'll provide more updates to this House.

Question — Cost of living

Debra-Leigh Reti: My question today is for the Premier. The cost of living is rising faster here in the Yukon than anywhere else in Canada. In August, prices in the Yukon

were 5.9 percent higher than a year ago. This is the highest increase in Canada over that time and double the average increase in Canada. The Yukon Party ran on making life more affordable and made a lot of specific promises to make that happen.

As we approach the one-year mark of this government's time in office, Yukoners are falling behind faster than anyone else in Canada. Does the Premier take any responsibility for the Yukon having the highest cost-of-living increase in Canada?

Hon. Currie Dixon: I think the Leader of the Third Party has, in my view, quite correctly noted that affordability is a very significant issue in the Yukon today. In fact, it's probably one of the biggest issues in the country right now. Whether it's the trade dispute between Canada and the United States causing economic disruptions, layoffs, and, in some cases, small business closures around the country or the soaring prices for things like gas, diesel, and food, it's clear that these are difficult times. Like all other provinces and territories in Canada, some of these issues, like diesel or food prices, are somewhat beyond our ability to control. That's why the Yukon Government is focusing on the things that we can control.

We're working diligently to address our long-neglected energy system, including working to mitigate the impact of rate increases and ensure that we have a sufficient amount of power to keep the lights on this winter. We're working to ensure our health care system can respond to the challenges that massive population growth has created, and we're working to ensure that we have the financial flexibility to respond to emerging issues that our territory faces.

Our public finances unfortunately have never been weaker than when we took office after the Liberal government was in charge, and we are still in the midst of some very difficult work to get our budget back on a path to balance. But getting our fiscal house in order to be able to respond to emerging issues is exactly what the budget that I tabled yesterday and the budget documents that I tabled yesterday are aimed at doing. We'll keep focused on doing that hard work to get our budget in order so that we can respond to the challenges that we face.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The Yukon Party promised to make life more affordable. Instead, the cost of living is increasing faster here than anywhere else in the country. The government has refused to cut taxes on gas and diesel, as other places in Canada have been able to do, has broken a promise to roll back electricity rates, and has taken no action to reduce the housing costs. These are all things that are in their control.

Why hasn't the government moved ahead with any of these measures to reduce the cost of living for Yukoners?

Hon. Currie Dixon: As the member may be aware, we find ourselves in a very difficult financial situation in the Yukon Territory. We have tabled a budget that sees us with an \$82-million deficit as of this spring. We've been successful in reducing that deficit over the last few months to the state that it's in, but we are still in the red. We're pushed up against our debt cap. We have very little financial flexibility in the territory as a result of the irresponsible spending patterns of the previous Liberal-NDP government that shepherded the territory's finances to the doldrums that we find ourselves in today.

We know that if we want to be able to respond to emerging pressures that we're seeing in the Yukon today, we need to have

the financial flexibility and strength to be able to do that. We're not there yet. We have a lot more work to do to get our budget in order to allow us to make the investments we'd like to make. In the meantime, we'll control what we can control. We'll focus on the things we can control, like dealing with our energy system, like dealing with our health care system, like dealing with our education system. Things like diesel prices, unfortunately, are far beyond the control of one territory in the far North.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The cost of living is increasing faster here in the Yukon than anywhere else in Canada. The Yukon Party has plenty of tools to help reduce the cost of living for Yukoners but either won't use them or pretend they don't exist. Their preferred option is to blame the previous government for everything, and as of late, they have switched the blame to the Government of Canada for their own inaction.

When is the Premier going to move past this blame game and take action to lower the cost of living for Yukoners?

Hon. Currie Dixon: We are taking action to get our budget in order. That's why we've tabled the fall capital budget that we tabled yesterday. That's why we've tabled the fiscal outlook which shows the progress that we've made in reducing the significant deficit that we are facing, and we're working closely with the Government of Canada to solve some of our larger capital needs as well as the need for an increase to our debt cap to allow us to borrow additional funds to make strategic investments in infrastructure in the territory.

Pointing out that the federal government hasn't acted on those things yet is not pointing the blame; it's simply noting a fact. We have a situation where the federal government regulates our debt and we have to apply to the federal government for them to make a decision as to whether or not that debt cap increases. That's not pointing the blame at Canada; that's simply stating a fact.

When it comes to some of our larger infrastructure projects — whether it is energy, whether it is roads, whether it is the hospital — we know that some of those projects are beyond the capacity of the territorial government to fund alone. They are beyond the capacity of the 48,000 residents here in the Yukon and require investment from outside the territory vis-a-vis the federal government. We'll continue the positive relationship we've established with the federal government, seeking the federal support that is needed to make the investments that are much needed here in the territory as a result of 10 years of neglect to our infrastructure.

Question — Cellular network connectivity

Linda Moen: Residents in McIntyre, Granger, Hillcrest, and Valleyview have dealt with unreliable cell service for years. People rely on their cellphones to call for help in an emergency. A call that does not connect can delay the arrival of police, firefighters, and paramedics when every second matters.

I first raised these coverage gaps with the Premier in December 2025. I raised them again in the following spring. However, residents have been given no plan, no timeline, and no indication of when their service would improve. These communities should not have to keep waiting while their safety is at risk.

What action has the Premier taken to ensure that residents in these communities can reliably reach 911 during an emergency?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I do thank the member opposite for this question. It is a topic that we've heard about a lot over the course of the summer, and I'm sure all of us have had an experience where our cell service has been less than ideal.

I can say and share with this House that we have been actively working with both the federal government and Bell Canada and some regulatory authorities around what the options are here in the territory. We are a small territory with very vast areas to cover, and we are aware that we need to see some advancements and improvements in our cell service.

I'm pleased to say that we are working with Bell, we're working with Canada, and we're looking forward to sharing some optimistic news here in the future.

Linda Moen: This spring when I raised this question, the Minister of Highways and Public Works said their government had no plan to improve cellular coverage. The minister said First Nation development corporations could bring proposals to the government; however, there were no commitments to approach them or bring partners together. Now a Yukon Party motion calls for immediate investment but only in Whitehorse and only through Bell and the CRTC.

The Yukon Party has once again left rural and remote Yukoners and potential First Nation partners out of its plan. Why is the Yukon Party demanding immediate action for Whitehorse while ignoring rural and remote Yukoners who cannot reliably reach 911?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: Thank you to the member for the question. Again, we are prioritizing this as an issue to work with the federal government on to see improvements. Things have changed; we have heard from residents, and the intention is not just to improve service in Whitehorse. We fully recognize that service is a requirement in the territory across all communities and all communities rely on the service. We agree this is an issue that needs to be dealt with and we are indeed working on it and look forward to sharing updates here in the future.

Linda Moen: I would call, but my call would probably drop.

In the spring of 2026, the Minister of Economic Development, Tourism, and Culture said the Yukon Party was reluctant to invest in improved cell service because new cellular and satellite technologies may be coming. However, the minister could not say when those technologies would arrive or whether they would improve coverage in these neighbourhoods.

Residents cannot rely on a possible future technology when they need to call for help today. They deserve a solution based on their needs now, not speculation about what may become available later. Will the minister commit to taking immediate steps to improve cellular coverage in the Yukon, including McIntyre, Granger, Hillcrest, and Valleyview?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I think it's fair to say that the service over the summer experienced more challenges than it had in the past, and I think it's fair to say by myself and those whom I've spoke with over the summer that improvements do need to happen and that the degrading service was causing some serious concerns.

We acknowledge that; we've heard from Yukoners, and we are working on solutions for this with others such as the federal government as well as Bell Canada. So again, we're working on it. I acknowledge the question from the member opposite, and we're looking forward to sharing more information on this here soon.

Question — Wildland firefighters occupational health coverage

Tyler Porter: Wildland firefighters are trained to perform challenging and dangerous work protecting Yukon communities, infrastructure, and natural resources. Like structural firefighters, they are also facing serious long-term health risks because of the work that they do. Yet under the current legislation, wildland firefighters are not included in Yukon's firefighting cancer presumption.

Can the minister update this House on the government's plans to extend presumptive cancer coverage to Yukon wildland firefighters?

Hon. Laura Lang: I will be answering the question today as the Minister responsible for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, just so it's on the record. Thank you to the member for the question. Our government has communicated for years our support for wildland firefighters. They put themselves in harm's way to protect communities across the territory, often in difficult and demanding conditions.

During the election, we committed to extending presumptive cancer coverage to wildland firefighters, and today we are following through on that commitment. We have introduced amendments to the *Workers' Safety and Compensation Act* that would include wildland firefighters under the Yukon's firefighting cancer presumption. This change reflects our recognition that wildland firefighters should not have to carry the burden and the responsibility to prove exposure to harmful chemicals that can lead to cancers.

Tyler Porter: Wildland firefighters and their families will want to understand what these changes mean in practice. Can the minister explain how the proposed presumption would apply if a wildland firefighter is diagnosed with an eligible cancer?

Hon. Laura Lang: Under the current system, a wildland firefighter diagnosed with a work-related cancer must demonstrate that the illness is connected to their employment. This puts an administrative burden on the firefighter and their families during an already difficult time. The amendments we've tabled are intended to change that.

By extending the cancer presumption to wildland firefighters, eligible cancers will be presumed to be work-related unless there is evidence otherwise. In practical terms, this will make it easier for wildland firefighters and their families to access the supports they need so they can focus on what matters the most: the health and recovery of the loved one.

Tyler Porter: Changes like these are strongest when they reflect the experience of the people directly affected. Yukon wildland firefighters have been raising this issue for many years and advocating for greater recognition of the risks associated with their work. Can the minister tell the House how these amendments were developed and how wildland firefighters and their representatives were involved in that process?

Hon. Laura Lang: This work built on years of advocacy from Yukon wildland firefighters and their representatives. The Workers' Safety and Compensation Board engaged directly with the firefighters and their representatives to better understand their experiences and concerns. I can also confirm that I met with members of the firefighting community on several occasions, and these engagements taught me that key to the next steps are the preventive measures that the wildland firefighting community, in partnership with Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, will need to take. Through these discussions, we confirmed that the proposed amendments before the House today would extend presumptive cancer coverage to wildland firefighters and better recognize the occupational risk they face.

Following these amendments, the government will work with the Workers' Safety and Compensation Board, firefighters, unions, and other stakeholders to review listed cancers, service requirements, and practical measures that support firefighter health and safety. While extending presumption is an important step forward, we know there is a lot more to do, and we look forward to continuing those conversations.

Question — Downtown school replacement

Lane Tredger: Last spring, I brought forward a motion calling on the government to make sure there continues to be an elementary school downtown. This has been a critical issue for my constituents for years, so it was a relief that the government voted yes. The Minister of Education said he would support it regardless of what site was chosen for the future École Whitehorse Elementary. He said, "If the choice is to move up the hill, I think that at that time we will have to begin obviously planning for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School, but we will also have to start planning for a school in the downtown area, an elementary school."

Last week, it was announced that a new site for École Whitehorse Elementary had been selected and that it will be in Valleyview, outside of downtown. Now residents are eager to know about the minister's plan for a new downtown elementary school. Will the minister reaffirm his commitment to a new elementary school downtown?

Hon. Scott Kent: Yes, I will reaffirm our commitment to an elementary school being located in the downtown area. At the announcement last week that we made about the new location, the new proposed location for École Whitehorse Elementary School, I indicated at that time that the initial work underway is with respect to the existing Whitehorse Elementary School and whether or not it's cost-effective and beneficial to be able to repurpose that building into something else.

That would be the first step I think that we will undertake in determining the location for a new downtown elementary school. But again, that said, we remain committed to doing it. It's a separate process from what we're doing with École Whitehorse Elementary School up the hill with the new location, but it is something we remain committed to, and I look forward to meeting with the Downtown Residents' Association in the near future to get their feedback with respect to what they would like to see a new school look like in the downtown area.

Lane Tredger: I'm sure downtown residents will be very pleased to hear that. Thank you to the minister. As he mentioned, he wanted to look at whether the current building could be repaired rather than torn down. And during the previous consultation on a downtown elementary school, two sites had been proposed. One was the current location, and the other is a new site at Fifth and Rogers. There is this to decide, but there are also many other elements of a future school that will need to be designed and decided on.

The downtown community has asked to be involved in the process, and they are full of ideas and inspiration. The minister has mentioned that he'll be meeting with the Downtown Residents' Association. Can he go over his plans to work through them or through other methods to work with downtown residents to plan their new elementary school?

Hon. Scott Kent: Yes, as I mentioned to the member opposite, I will be reaching out to the Downtown Residents' Association. I did have the opportunity to meet with them during the consultation on the proposed locations for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School, and the member opposite is absolutely correct. They are full of a tremendous number of ideas and also have concerns with respect to a new school in the downtown area.

Regarding the two locations that the member opposite mentioned, there is the existing school site, but the site at Fifth and Rogers is no longer owned by the Yukon Government. That site was sold by the previous government to private sector interests, so we no longer have the opportunity to use that land as our own. It would have to be purchased or acquired some other way.

So that said, we'll continue to work with the Downtown Residents' Association. Building a school in the downtown area remains a commitment that we made and we voted on in two separate motions in this Legislature. So again, we look forward to those conversations and, while we're going through the process to build a new École Whitehorse Elementary School, separately working with downtown residents and those school communities on the best possible solution for a downtown school.

Lane Tredger: For years now, my constituents have been fighting for a downtown elementary school. They have written letters, signed petitions, made phone calls, gone to consultations, and attended debate in this Legislature.

They have shared stories about what a neighbourhood elementary school means to them. They have said it tells families they're welcome downtown. It brings laughter and joy and life into our community. It is a key part of creating a vibrant, liveable neighbourhood, which ultimately prevents crime and makes downtown safer for everyone.

Residents are anxious to know about the timelines for opening a new elementary school. They are hopeful that there will not be a gap without one because of the important roles it plays in our community. What are the timelines for building a downtown elementary school or refurbishing the existing building, and what year can downtown residents expect it to open?

Hon. Scott Kent: I appreciate the member opposite's remarks when asking the question. And we agree with those, and that's why we voted twice on private members' motions to ensure that we continue with planning for a downtown school.

I think it's premature at this time to give timelines. At the press conference last week, I mentioned that I would want to see as low a gap as possible, as short a gap as possible, if there is indeed one between a downtown school being there right now as it is with the École Whitehorse Elementary School and a new one being built, whether it's at the existing site or not.

One of the reasons that we did not choose the existing site for École Whitehorse Elementary School was we didn't want an active construction site next to an active school, so we have to factor that in as well. But again, I look forward to discussions with the Downtown Residents' Association and other community stakeholders when it comes to what the needs and wants are for a new school in the downtown area.

Question — Fiscal management

Adam Gerle: Yukoners elected this government to manage public finances responsibly while continuing to invest in the priorities that matter to families and communities. The interim fiscal update shows some progress.

Can the Premier highlight what these results mean for Yukoners and how they support our government's path to balance?

Hon. Currie Dixon: So, the member is quite correct that yesterday I tabled an interim fiscal update to update the work that we've been doing on our budget, and that update shows that we have been making modest progress toward our path back to balance. Those results are driven but in part by the budgetary reforms and measures that we introduced in the spring, including amendments to the *Financial Administration Act* and the creation of the contingency fund, which we're all familiar with.

The implementation of the two initiatives, both the red tape reduction strategy as well as the responsible spending initiative, are seeking to find ways to improve government efficiency. We've also introduced a debt management plan and communicate with the federal government on the structure of that plan to ensure that we re-establish a healthier relationship with debt here in the territory. And then, of course, the creation of the fall capital budget was intended as part of those packages of budgetary reform as well.

The projected deficit for 2026-27 has improved by \$28.1 million from \$81.8 million to \$53.7 million, while net debt is forecast to be \$28 million lower than expected. Those are very positive results, but they show that we do still have more work to do. We are seeing increased revenues from the federal government, stronger investment returns, and a placer mining sector that is projected to achieve one of the strongest seasons in decades, with production expected to reach a near 30-year high.

Adam Gerle: People across the Yukon can see construction activity underway, from new housing developments to major public infrastructure projects. The economic update seems to reflect this and points to growth in construction and residential development.

Can the Premier tell the House what these numbers say about the state of the Yukon's economy?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The economic outlook, of course, provides Yukoners with the best available information that the Department of Finance has to report on the economy. The economic update that I tabled yesterday confirms that there are

positive developments across Yukon communities but also some very serious economic challenges ahead.

One of the bright spots is that building construction investment and building permit values are up in 2026. Building investment grew by nearly 45 percent in the first seven months of 2026, reaching more than \$564 million. Residential construction investment increased by almost 64 percent to just shy of \$384 million. Through August, the value of non-residential permits increased over 15 percent to just over \$149 million, which represents about two-thirds of the total permit value of \$220 million.

As well, through the first eight months of 2026, the value of residential permits also rose 15.5 percent to almost \$73 million. These projects are creating good-paying jobs for Yukon workers, supporting local contractors, and strengthening our economy. So, while we remain optimistic about the overall economic outlook for the territory, we can't ignore the very serious headwinds that we're facing related to the impacts of ongoing trade pressures and geopolitical uncertainty. We'll continue to do the work that we can to bring our budget into order so that we can respond to these challenging headwinds that face us all.

Adam Gerle: Tourism remains a cornerstone of many local economies across the Yukon; from the Klondike to Kluane, Whitehorse to Watson Lake, businesses rely on a strong visitor season to create local jobs. What does the economic update tell us about the performance of Yukon's tourism sector?

Hon. Jen Gehmair: I appreciate this question and the opportunity to speak to it. Over the course of the summer, I was able to get out and experience some of the local economies and the tourism businesses operating in the territory, and to no surprise to myself and I'm sure to others in this Chamber, there is some fantastic work and commitment happening out there in the territory by tourism operators, and what I will say is that it's starting to pay off.

Preliminary numbers are showing that spending in Yukon, at Yukon payment terminals by tourists, including Yukon travelling throughout the territory, reached over \$368 million throughout the first eight months of this year, which is an increase of over 20 percent compared to last year of the same period. During June, July, and August, visitor spending was up more than 30 percent year over year.

At the same time, arrivals at the Eric Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport reached over 185,000 passengers, up 10 percent from last year and on pace to surpass the record set in 2025. Hotels are seeing strong occupancy and higher revenues. From placer miners to contractors to tourism operators and small businesses, Yukoners are creating the economic activity that strengthens government revenues and allows us to continue investing in these priorities, the priorities that matter most to Yukoners across the territory. This is how we make progress on the path to balance while continuing to build a stronger Yukon economy.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of Opposition private members' business

Debra-Leigh Reti: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3)(b), I would like to identify the item standing in the name of the

Third Party to be called on Wednesday, October 7, 2026. It is Motion No. 168, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

Lane Tredger: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3)(b), I would like to identify the items standing in the names of the members of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, October 7, 2026. They are Motion No. 161, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre, and Motion No. 160, standing in the name of the Member for Klondike.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BILLS

Bill No. 203, *Interim Capital Appropriation Act 2027-28* — Second Reading

Clerk: Second Reading, Bill No. 203, standing in the name of the Hon. Currie Dixon.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I move that Bill No. 203, *Interim Capital Appropriation Act 2027-28*, be now read a second time.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Hon. Premier that Bill No. 203, entitled *Interim Capital Appropriation Act 2027-28*, be now read a second time.

Hon. Currie Dixon: I rise today to present the 2027-28 fall capital budget and provide Yukoners with an update on our government's work to date.

When we came into office just under a year ago, we were clear with Yukoners about the challenges facing our territory. We inherited growing financial pressures, increasing demands on public services, aging infrastructure, and a number of difficult decisions that had been deferred for too long. At the same time, Yukoners expected their new government to act. They wanted a government that would confront challenges directly, make decisions with the needs of future generations in mind, and deliver practical results for all Yukon families, businesses, and communities.

We heard that message clearly. The commitments we made were ambitious, but they reflected the reality Yukoners were facing and the direction they wanted their government to take. From the beginning, we knew that meeting these expectations would require much more than maintaining the status quo. It would require that we make tough decisions, establish clear priorities, and begin laying the groundwork for long-term growth and prosperity. That is the context in which this new fall capital budget has been developed. The challenges we faced did not emerge overnight, and they will not be resolved overnight. In fact, most of them have been building for many years, but progress begins by taking action and making decisions in the best interest of all Yukoners.

The business before the House today reflects a government focused not only on addressing today's pressures but preparing the Yukon for the opportunities and demands of tomorrow. Canadians across the country are facing economic uncertainty driven by global instability and ongoing trade pressures, and we are not immune here in the Yukon. From groceries to fuel and building materials, trade pressures are making life more

expensive for families, businesses, and workers. But this uncertainty also creates opportunity.

Across Canada, there is a growing consensus around the importance of sovereignty, strengthening economic resilience, developing strategic resources, and building the infrastructure necessary to support long-term growth and prosperity. Yukon is uniquely positioned to play an important role in this work. We are a gateway to the North, with strategic transportation corridors, strong partnerships with Yukon First Nations, and a highly skilled workforce. Yukon is home to abundant natural resources, with placer activity approaching levels not seen in decades and growing interest in critical minerals needed for energy security, advanced manufacturing, and national economic resilience. Our territory possesses significant natural resources, including deposits of gold, copper, and zinc as well as one of the world's largest high-grade tungsten deposits at Mactung and many others. At a time when countries are seeking secure supplies of critical minerals and strategic resources, these advantages position Yukon to contribute to Canada's economic resilience while creating good jobs here at home. This puts us in a strong position, but opportunity alone is not enough.

To realize our potential, we must create the conditions that encourage investment, support innovation, and provide confidence to those looking to invest and create jobs here in the Yukon. That's why our government has committed to improving the efficiency and transparency of Yukon's regulatory processes.

I'm pleased to share that over the past year, real progress has been made on that front. As of August 31, more than 100 quartz mining and placer gold decision documents had been issued, more than double the number issued during the same period last year. These improvements are helping provide greater certainty for proponents, communities, and investors at a time when competition for resource investment is increasing across the country. Decision timelines for resource projects have improved by more than 50 percent, and Yukoners can now track projects online through a new public permitting tool. The purpose of these improvements is straightforward. We want a system that provides clarity to the public, Yukon First Nation communities, proponents, and investors while maintaining environmental and social standards Yukoners expect. A more predictable and efficient system supports investment, helps enable the private sector to create jobs, and helps ensure Yukon remains competitive at a time when opportunities and competition grow across the country.

No issue better illustrates the importance of planning for the future than energy. Reliable and affordable electricity is essential to our quality of life, to economic development, and to future growth and prosperity. It is also an area where years of inadequate investment, population growth, and increasing demand have placed significant pressure on our existing infrastructure. For that reason, our government committed to taking a more proactive approach to energy planning. I'm pleased to share that this work is also well underway. We are increasing energy supply by advancing phase 1 of the Whitehorse Power Centres project, which will bring 15 additional megawatts of generating capacity online beginning in 2028. We continue to work with the federal government to secure support for all phases of that project, which has the

potential to double Yukon's electricity generation capacity over time. These investments are essential, because energy security is directly connected to our ability to build housing, attract investment, and support long-term economic growth.

We are continuing critical work at the Mayo hydro facility to ensure that the dam continues to safely generate reliable winter energy. We've also taken immediate steps to manage peak winter demand and improve reliability while longer term projects move forward. We also recognize that affordability remains a serious concern. That is why we have taken steps to provide relief to ratepayers while continuing to advance longer term infrastructure solutions.

Later this fall, our government will release its draft winter reliable energy plan, which will outline additional measures to improve reliability, manage risk, and support Yukon families and businesses, because the reality is that our territory is growing. Our population is approaching 50,000, and electricity demand continues to increase. If we want to build more homes, attract new investment, and support a growing economy, we must have the energy security in place to support that growth.

The investments we're making today will help ensure Yukon has the energy infrastructure needed to support that future growth, and they represent another important step in fulfilling the commitments we made to Yukoners. We also made a commitment to Yukoners to get our fiscal house in order. We knew that we needed to bring spending growth under control, strengthen financial controls, and ensure taxpayer dollars are focused on the priorities that matter most to all Yukoners.

Since the Spring Sitting, we have taken important steps to do exactly that. We introduced changes to the *Financial Administration Act* for a new voted contingency which enables us to respond quickly to emergencies and other unexpected events while adhering to the same robust reporting requirements. We've made progress to reduce annual growth in operation and maintenance spending from the unsustainably high rates of the past to one that we can actually afford. We also implemented a new debt management policy to govern our borrowing and debt-related risk oversight and reporting. As our borrowing needs evolve, this new policy will help ensure debt is managed responsibly and supports our long-term fiscal sustainability.

[The complete transcript of the day's proceedings will appear online by 8:00 p.m. the following day.]