Yukon Legislative Assembly

Number 58	1st Session	36th Legislature

REVISED BLUES

Tuesday, November 10, 2026 — 1:00 p.m.

Whitehorse, Yukon

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 It may be used as a reference only with the understanding that it will be superseded by the final, edited version, entitled “Hansard”, at a later time.

Draft Segment 002-013

Tuesday, November 10, 2026

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

Prayers

Withdrawal of motions

Speaker: Prior to proceeding with the Daily Routine, the Chair wishes to inform the House of a change made to the Order Paper. Motion No. 19, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek South, has been removed from the Order Paper, as the action requested has been completed in whole or in part.

DAILY ROUTINE

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Under Introduction of Visitors, I would like to introduce a former Speaker of the Assembly, David Laxton.
Introduction of visitors.
Visitors introduced

TRIBUTES

In recognition of Remembrance Day

Hon. Wade Istchenko: I rise today to pay tribute to Remembrance Day.

Department of National Defence form 2587, known as the Next-of-Kin Identification form, lists the names of those you consider part of your immediate family and those closest to you. They are the individuals you want to receive certain benefits and bereavement support should something serious happen to you. Every soldier completes one when they join the Canadian Armed Forces. You don't think much of it at the time: just another form to fill out.

Imagine you see soldiers in military dress walking solemnly up your driveway. The name you put on a form is who they're going to see to pass on the news of tragedy.

At approximately 4:00 p.m. on October 17, 2026, at CFB Wainwright, four Canadian soldiers lost their lives during a training exercise. Sergeant Morgan Wong from the Loyal Edmonton Regiment, Private Shaun Farrell, Private Aidan Goulding, and Private Hayden Lykkemark from the Third Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry made the ultimate sacrifice. In addition to those who lost their lives, 39 Canadian Armed Forces members sustained injuries and many continue to fight through a challenging recovery. Today, we think of them and their families and those affected by this tragedy.

On the 11th day of the 11th month every year, we honour those who gave their lives to serve our country. We remember the courage and dedication of the Canadian men and women who have fought valiantly over the years to defend our freedom and rights, making it possible for us to live in peace in a democratic country where we enjoy one of the best qualities of life in the world. For the past two centuries, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have earned enormous respect at home and abroad by answering the call to fight against tyranny and evil around the world in engagements such as the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, Afghanistan, and many other international military operations. Those who fought so valiantly in these battlefields are still honoured and remembered in places such as Vimy Ridge, Ypres, Normandy, Sicily, Hill 355 in Korea, and Kandahar, just to name a few. It is our duty to remember the Canadians who so selflessly defended our freedom. As we recall our proud history, let us also remember how early Canadians, First Nation, and Métis people fought together like never before in the War of 1812 to repel an American invasion, laying the foundation for an independent Canada.

Remembrance Day also provides an opportunity to pay tribute to daunting sacrifices made by Canadian families who were forced to endure their loved ones being away at war and on dangerous missions abroad. Let us recall the unfailing support they provided to those on the front lines, the thousands of letters and care packages, and the dedication of those who worked in support of the effort back at home.

On this solemn occasion, let us celebrate the brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces carrying on today in the proud tradition of their forebears and those at home supporting them. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces have the honour to wear a uniform that is recognized across the world as a symbol of courage and democracy. We continue to support Canada's resolve to keep fighting against those who would deny our liberties and freedoms and who have complete disregard for human lives.

2026 marks a once-in-a-lifetime milestone, a century of standing with veterans, strengthening communities, and honouring the memory of those who served. In the House today, we have members. The Royal Canadian Legion began with a clear mission:

to support veterans, to advocate for their rights, and to ensure the act of remembrance continues. We thank them for that. I want to specially thank them for 100 years of service — Branch 1 in Dawson and Branch 254 here in Whitehorse. Your tireless work is appreciated here in the Yukon.

Before I end, I want to quote from former Prime Minister Stephen Harper: "We can never repay the debt we owe to the intrepid men and women who paid for our freedom with their lives, but we can remember their enormous sacrifices and pay tribute to their bravery and patriotism."

Tomorrow, as you go about your day, whether you're at a Remembrance Day ceremony or somewhere else, just please take a moment to pause at 11:00 a.m. on the 11th day of the 11th month to remember them, lest we forget.

Kate White: I stand on behalf of the Yukon NDP Official Opposition in recognition of Remembrance Day. Today I pay tribute to veterans past, present, and future.

As I get older, I've come to realize that many Canadian families have a connection to Remembrance Day, some closer and some more distant, but the ripples exist and they connect each of us in different ways. Our own understandings of war and conflict may be far removed or they may be just below the surface, but they all highlight the importance of remembrance and the act of remembering.

My own grandfather served in the army, but as a kid, I only knew this because of a small photo in a frame by the stairs — a headshot of grandpa, young and handsome in uniform — and I only knew the very surface of the story because these stories were tied to others that were never shared. What I didn't know and what I still don't know are the stories that left their marks until the very end.

My family is not unique: the grandchildren who never got to meet their grandpa because he came home hurt in a way that nothing could reach, and he died when he was only 40 as a result of his PTSD. He left behind four children and a wife that he loved. The grandparents who fled Denmark and how that touched everything going forward. The generations within a family who served and have stories and memories of their own that shaped everything after.

The story of a father who completed his training as a bombardier and transferred into operations. He never completed any operational bombing missions, as the war ended a month later. He went on to be a teacher, and after retirement, he went to see a rebuilt Lancaster bomber fly for the first time in Hamilton, and he saw a friend he had worked with for decades and asked about his interest in the Lancaster. It turns out that friend had flown over 15 combat missions in a similar plane. Decades together and a shared story that they never knew.

I think of all the stories I've heard in quiet retellings at the legion — stories that aren't ancient history — or the stories shared with me by friends who are peers, those who aren't grandparents and whose stories are not distant — and how some of these stories and the memories they carry become scars, and some scars are harder to heal than others.

I think of the friend who every year reminds her friends that Remembrance Day is not a holiday. You don't wish a veteran "Happy Remembrance Day". You thank them for their service. November 11 is a day of observance, a day of gratitude for the sacrifices made on behalf of us all. I honour those in this room and everywhere whose own service is part of who they are. The ripples of conflict and war go far. The experiences of our veterans become the memories and sometimes the scars of their families.

The privileges that we have in Canada were not and are not free. Canadians from coast to coast to coast have paid the steep cost for the democracy and the freedom that we have. Remembrance Day isn't about the politicians who make the decision to enter wars. Remembrance Day recognizes the men and the women who have carried the cost of those decisions. It lets the families of those who serve or who have served know that we recognize the sacrifices that they made. Remembrance Day honours the veterans of the past. It shows respect for those serving in the present, and it fosters hope for the future.

If for some reason you choose not to observe this day, then I ask that you do so quietly so that your voice doesn't drown out the voices of veterans who need to be heard.

Lest we forget them.

Debra-Leigh Reti: As we approach Remembrance Day, I rise on behalf of the Yukon Liberal caucus to honour the courage, sacrifice, and service of all those who have served our country. We remember and honour the commitment and sacrifice of our veterans and all those who continue to serve. The history of military service is one of courage, resilience, and patriotism.

I want to recognize the service of the men from my home community of Old Crow, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, who volunteered to serve in some of the most significant conflicts in our history, including the First World War, the Second World War, and the Korean War. These men, along with thousands of other soldiers, left their families, their homes, and the familiar land they knew to travel thousands of miles to fight for their country.

We remember the thousands of Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice, those who were wounded, those who returned home carrying the physical and emotional impacts of their service. Their experiences remind us that the cost of war does not end just because the fighting stops.

Remembrance Day is about more than looking back at history; it is about understanding the sacrifices that have given us the freedoms and opportunities that we all enjoy today. We gather at the memorial parks, cenotaphs, community halls, workplaces, and homes. We wear our poppies and observe two minutes of silence on November 11 to pay tribute to the sacrifice and service of our veterans.

I encourage all Yukoners to take a moment to reflect and remember the people behind the uniforms, the families behind the service, and the sacrifices made by generations of Canadians. We honour their sacrifice and their courage.

To all those who have served, those who continue to serve, and the military families that support them and endure the hardships alongside them, we thank you and are forever grateful.

Lest we forget.

Speaker: I ask all present to stand to observe a moment of silence.

Moment of silence observed

Speaker: They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
And in the morning
We shall remember them.

Please have a seat.
There are no members' statements today.
Are there any documents for tabling?
Are there any committee reports to be presented?
Are there any petitions?
Are there any bills to be introduced?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

Justin Ziegler: I rise to give notice of the following motion for the production of papers:

THAT this House do issue an order for the return of all directives developed by the Government of Yukon governing the creation, use, sourcing, or disclosure of visual content produced with generative AI tools in Government of Yukon communications.

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Question — Teaching materials about residential schools

Kate White: Through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the bravery of residential school survivors, their experiences and those of their families have been brought to light. Canada's residential school system forcibly removed children from their families, inflicted unforgivable trauma, and enacted cultural genocide. Yet residential school denialism is on the rise in this country. It shows up in statements from politicians and media and in online spaces.

The Department of Education has a responsibility to make sure residential school denialism does not reach a Yukon classroom, and yet a worksheet was given to high school students in Whitehorse asking them to identify the positive aspects of residential schools. There is no excuse for this. How was this allowed to happen in a Yukon classroom?

Hon. Scott Kent: Reconciliation is an ongoing responsibility, and the Government of Yukon works with Yukon First Nations to advance shared priorities in education. The material in question is one discussion question within a comprehensive four-part resource that teaches the history, purpose, and lasting harms of the residential school system. It is not intended to portray residential schools as positive institutions or to minimize the harms that they caused.

The grades 5 and 10 Indian Residential Schools curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Yukon First Nations curriculum working group, which includes Yukon First Nation elders and knowledge holders, and incorporates local Yukon resources and perspectives.

Kate White: I am concerned that the minister is okay with the question that was asked. The question asking Yukon students to identify the positive effects of residential schools was distributed in a classroom recently. This worksheet did not appear out of nowhere. Someone chose this material and someone put it in front of Yukon students.

Some of those students could be the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of survivors. Students were asked by their teacher to find the good in a cultural genocide carried out against Indigenous children, and I hope we can all understand the gravity of that request and the pain it has caused.

This worksheet's impact has reached far outside of that classroom. This has harmed the broader community and severely breached the trust of Yukoners. How long has the department known about this worksheet, and what actions have they taken to support those impacted by its use in Yukon schools?

Hon. Scott Kent: I think for the member opposite, the important thing that I mentioned in my initial response was that this curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Yukon First Nations curriculum working group, and it also included Yukon First Nation elders in that work. While this is a smaller part of a larger course, again, I think the important piece is that it was developed in collaboration with First Nations, including First Nation elders, including the question that the member is referencing here today.

Kate White: Residential school history must be taught honestly, truthfully, and with respect for survivors, and it must never be taught in a way that excuses or minimizes what happened. Genocide has no silver lining.

Survivors of residential schools should not have to explain why this is harmful. A residential school survivor and former NWT Premier said — and I quote: "It's like asking somebody who got a severe beating: 'But other than that, didn't that make you stronger? Didn't you feel good about it because you survived it?'"

Asking students to state the positive effects of a genocide is deeply appalling. We would never ask students to identify the positive effects of the Holocaust.

How will the minister tell Yukoners what actions the department is taking to prevent this breach of trust from ever happening again? Because for Yukoners, this has had lasting impacts.

Hon. Scott Kent: The material that the member is referencing here today was taken from part 1 of the grade 10 Indian Residential Schools curriculum resources, which was entitled *Changing Times*. As part of this lesson, educators and students review traditional Yukon First Nation values, ways of life, culture, and education to build an understanding of what was disrupted or lost through colonization. Students then explore the wide-ranging effects of residential schools on individuals, families, and communities. The surrounding lessons examine the policy of assimilation and the stated objective of the residential school system as well as its negative short- and long-term effects on Yukon First Nation children, families, and communities.

But once again, just to reiterate, this curriculum, including the question that the member opposite is referencing, was developed in collaboration with Yukon First Nations and, more importantly, Yukon First Nation elders.

Question — Pioneer utility grant and Yukon homeowners grant

Kate White: In 2023, the Yukon Party asked the previous government to take measures to ease inflation on Yukoners, including increasing the amount of the pioneer utility grant. That grant helps seniors with the cost of heating their homes whether they use oil, wood, electricity, or propane and whether they rent or own their homes.

During their time as Official Opposition, the Yukon Party issued a press release calling to double the amount of the pioneer utility grant to help seniors navigate rising costs — and I quote: "… until the inflation crisis is over."

We think this is a great idea, as clearly the inflation crisis isn't over. Now that the Yukon Party is in government, will they commit to doubling the pioneer utility grant?

Hon. Brad Cathers: Of course, we recognize affordability is an issue, but as the members should be aware, because they were actively involved as part of supporting the previous government through their confidence and supply agreement, we were left with a challenging financial situation where we were at risk of exceeding the government's borrowing limit because the previous government and their NDP partners had been allowing O&M expenditures to significantly exceed revenue for years. We're taking the steps to get that back in order, but that has left us with very limited room this year to make increases in support programs.

We will consider the needs of seniors as we're assessing things going forward, but at this point in time, that did not leave us in a position — because they left us with very little money — to be able to make decisions that we would like to be able to do. We had to focus on what we were able to do while getting the finances back on track.

Kate White: That's weird, because there was $3 million to support businesses dealing with EPR but no additional money for seniors. The cost of living is at an all-time high for seniors, especially those living alone on a small pension or on a fixed income. The rising cost of utilities can be a significant source of both financial and emotional strain. Many rely on the pioneer utility grant to help them shoulder one of the largest monthly expenses and get through the harsh Yukon winter.

This program is a once-yearly income-tested grant that pays a maximum of just over $1,400 depending on marital status, income, and region. As everyone in the Yukon is surely aware, this amount isn't likely to stretch past one month. Yet the pioneer utility grant amount remains virtually unchanged since the Yukon Party formed government. In 2022, the Yukon Party deemed the Yukon Liberals — quote: "… out of touch with the struggles of Yukoners" when they did not double the pioneer utility grant.

Is this government aware of the realities facing Yukon seniors, and when can seniors expect to see the doubling of that grant?

Hon. Brad Cathers: Again, in addition to the fact that the previous government and their NDP partners were spending money substantially faster than it was coming in, leaving us with a very challenging fiscal situation, the member is completely ignoring the fact that we doubled the electricity affordability rate through the good work of my colleague the Minister responsible for the Yukon Energy Corporation. We have taken steps already.

The member is focusing on one particular area, and we do recognize the pioneer utility grant is one of the tools used to support seniors, but it is not the only tool. We are also taking steps to review other areas that are important to seniors, such as our chronic disease benefits program and the services that are available to Yukoners through pharmacare.

We look forward to making targeted enhancements as we are able to, but the member should recognize the pivotal role she and her colleagues played along with the previous government in spending money far faster than it was coming in, leaving us in a difficult situation. Someone had to get the finances back on track. That is what we have been left doing, but we are making targeted investments to support seniors and other Yukoners as we are able to.

Kate White: This is a pretty significant tool for Yukon seniors. In November of 2023, the now premier said — and I quote: "We said to double the pioneer utility grant for seniors; the Liberals said no." Along with doubling the pioneer utility grant, the Yukon Party has previously touted a number of measures that the former government could have taken to ease inflation, including increasing the homeowners grant to a maximum of $1,000.

Since they proposed increasing the grant in 2023, inflation has only continued to climb. Yet beyond inflationary adjustments, the pioneer utility grant and the Yukon homeowners grant have remained unchanged. While in Opposition, the Yukon Party stressed over and over that the Yukon Liberal government's inflation measures didn't go far enough. Here's their chance as government to prove that they aren't out of touch with Yukoners and the struggles that they're facing.

When will this government double both the pioneer utility grant and the Yukon homeowners grant?

Hon. Currie Dixon: What has also increased over the number of years is the size of the deficit, and that's because of the irresponsible spending patterns of the Liberal Party and the New Democrats over the course of the last four years.

We inherited a very difficult situation when we took office last year in 2025. It was much different than the situation in 2022 or 2023, the years that the member opposite quotes from. The reality is that we don't have the same fiscal flexibility that the Yukon Government had in 2022. It's changed considerably since then. It's changed because of the irresponsible spending patterns of that member and that party.

We'll continue to make investments to help Yukoners. We'll do things like increasing the rebate for electricity and the support provided to Yukoners to ensure that they have access to affordable power. We'll continue to take measures like the ones outlined by my colleague the Minister of Health and Social Services, but what we won't do is take financial advice from that party.

Question — Arctic security

Debra-Leigh Reti: As we approach Remembrance Day, we honour those who have served, including the Canadian Rangers in our communities.

In March, the Premier told this House that Arctic security is the responsibility of the Government of Canada and that the Yukon stands ready to engage. Last week, he said nothing substantial has materialized beyond asking Ottawa for infrastructure funding.

What is this government itself doing to strengthen Arctic security in the Yukon?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The member opposite is quite correct that the Government of Canada plays an important role when it comes to Arctic sovereignty and northern defence, and that's why we've been so keen to work closely with the Department of National Defence, with the Prime Minister, the minister of DND, and others to understand better the significant investments that Canada intends to make across the Canadian North when it comes to those things.

But as the member has noted, there is an important role for the Yukon Government to play as well, and that's why you've seen the Yukon Government engage positively across the North — whether it's through the conservation officers, whether it's through the engagement with northern governments, or whether it's working across the North with other territorial governments. We continue to advance discussions about what role the territories can play in these discussions.

But ultimately, the simple reality is that when it comes to the significant amount of money and resources that are available, that's going to be the Government of Canada. The Prime Minister came to Yellowknife in March to announce $34 billion in expenditures over the course of the next little while across the North. We look forward to understanding more about what the Government of Canada intends to do with that money, how best we can engage with them, and how we can support their goals to ensure a strong sovereign Northern Canada.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The Yukon Arctic Security Advisory Council told the Government of Yukon that airports, transportation, and emergency response must be maintained to both civilian and military standards and that northern defence infrastructure should serve northern communities. Old Crow is the Yukon's only community north of the Arctic Circle and home to a Canadian Ranger Patrol.

Has the government asked Canada to invest in Old Crow, such as runway or emergency response improvements, as part of northern defence spending?

Hon. Currie Dixon: We have engaged with Canada to understand what it is and what they are willing to fund. The Department of National Defence has not inquired specifically about the Old Crow Airport to my knowledge, but I'll have to get back to the member opposite specifically about that.

That being said, we have provided information to the Government of Canada about a host of infrastructure needs across the North. Those include airstrips, those include roads, and those include power needs. We continue to engage with the federal government about those needs and where best the federal government can direct their significant resources.

But the member opposite is quite correct that the Old Crow Airport is an important piece of infrastructure for the northern part of our territory, and if the federal government is willing to provide additional supports for upgrades there, we would certainly be willing to work with them to do so. I have not heard from the Government of Canada, though, that they would deem the Old Crow Airport to be a piece of infrastructure that they're interested in investing in, but I'm certainly happy to report back if that changes.

Debra-Leigh Reti: The Royal Canadian Navy has been studying whether to establish a naval reserve unit in Whitehorse following a letter of intent signed with Canada in December 2024. The government said the report and recommendations were scheduled for release this spring.

Has the government received the navy's feasibility study, and what is it doing to help bring a naval reserve unit to the Yukon?

Hon. Currie Dixon: We've met with officials from the Department of National Defence to discuss their plans for the development of a naval reserve here in Yukon. We understand those plans are advancing and that they're considering currently where an appropriate space would be here in Whitehorse to host an office. The intent of the office and the physical space that they would have would be to provide a hub for the work of the navy but also as a recruitment tool to seek those Yukoners who may be interested in joining. We support those efforts and we're working closely with them.

While they're not in their own space, they're currently being hosted by the Executive Council Office in the Yukon Government's offices to support their work. Of course, as much as we love having them in our offices, we'd like them to have their own space eventually and we look forward to working with them to find an appropriate space for them here in the city of Whitehorse.

Question — *Territorial Youth Strategy* implementation

Brent McDonald: Earlier this year, the Premier told us that the government had contributed to 26 of the *Territorial Youth Strategy*'s 38 priorities, which left 12 priorities with no clear update. Those remaining priorities came directly from young Yukoners and should not be quietly set aside for any reason. Youth deserve to know which priorities remain outstanding, whether the government has accepted them, and when work will begin.

What is the government's plan for the remaining 12 *Territorial Youth Strategy* priorities, and when will this work begin?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The member opposite is correct that the youth strategy is an important document for the Yukon Government, and we are working hard to respond to the recommendations made therein. He is correct as well that I did say that is the number of recommendations that have been accepted or acted on by Yukon Government so far. Since that time, we have shifted the Youth Directorate from the Executive Council Office to the Department of Community Services, and that work continues now under the leadership of the Department of Community Services.

I don't have the list of which recommendations and their current status with me today, but I'd be happy to offer a technical briefing for the member opposite so that he can get up to speed and have the questions answered specifically by those who are most familiar with the information.

Brent McDonald: The *Territorial Youth Strategy* reflects years of work by our youth, First Nations, and community organizations.

In April, the Premier said the government had contributed to 26 of the strategy's 38 priorities. However, he admitted that he had not reviewed all 38 and could not say with certainty where each priority stood. The Premier promised to review them and explain the government's role. Yukon youth deserve to know what the government counts as progress.

Would the minister table a progress update on his party's work to implement all 38 priorities before the end of this Fall Sitting?

Hon. Currie Dixon: The short answer is yes. I'm certainly willing to share that information with the member opposite, and in addition to that, I'd offer him a technical briefing on where we're at with each of those recommendations so that he knows the finer details from the folks who actually are doing the work.

Brent McDonald: Employment and career opportunities are one of the six main calls to action in the *Territorial Youth Strategy*. The Yukon Bureau of Statistics reported a youth unemployment rate of 20 percent in April of 2026. This is five times the rate for Yukoners age 25 and older.

The government needs to understand why youth unemployment is growing and whether its current employment programs are reaching those who need them. What is the government's plan to reduce youth unemployment, and what target has it set?

Hon. Currie Dixon: I'm not aware that we have a specific target for youth unemployment, but I obviously stand to be corrected there.

But as I've said, we work with a number of youth-serving organizations across the territory that include Bringing Youth Towards Equality, the Youth of Today Society, and a range of others. Our goal, of course, is to ensure that young Yukoners have a bright future here in the Yukon and that youth are well-served by the programs available through Yukon Government. Obviously, there's a variety of programs that are included in that, and some of those are employment programs.

In addition to my commitment to the member to offer at least a technical briefing for the implementation of the youth strategy, I will look into the current status of the youth employment programs as well and provide the member with that information as well.

Question — Power Potential Portal and biomass energy development

Tyler Porter: Last week, the Government of Yukon announced the launch of its new Power Potential Portal, an initiative inviting First Nations, businesses, and other organizations to bring forward proposals for future electricity generation and storage projects. As we look toward strengthening the Yukon's long-term energy security, I believe there is an opportunity to think beyond traditional approaches and explore innovative ways to make better use of the resources we have right here at home. New technologies and local solutions could help meet Yukon's growing energy needs while strengthening the resilience and reliability of our electrical grid.

Can the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources explain what kinds of opportunities he hopes to see emerge through the Power Potential Portal?

Hon. Ted Laking: I agree with the member opposite. The Power Potential Portal is a very exciting opportunity for the territory as we map out our energy future. It's inviting First Nation governments, businesses, NGOs, and what have you to submit projects that they think could help solve our energy shortage here in the territory. Whether it's hydro, storage, wind, or something like biomass, we want to hear from folks here in the territory. We're looking forward to the success of this initiative, and we really encourage people to submit their projects so we can begin reviewing them and figuring out how they fit into the longer term future of energy in the territory.

Tyler Porter: One area that I believe deserves greater attention is the potential for biomass energy development here in the Yukon. With an established forestry sector, ongoing wildfire mitigation efforts, and increasing interest in making better use of locally sourced wood products, there may be opportunities to connect these activities with renewable energy development.

Biomass has already proven to be a valuable heating solution in several Yukon communities, and I believe there is an opportunity to explore its potential on a larger scale. Can the minister speak to the opportunities he sees for expanding biomass energy development across the territory?

Hon. Ted Laking: I couldn't agree more. I think biomass offers an exciting opportunity for solving our heating and energy needs here in the territory. There are communities like Teslin that are trailblazers in this regard, and we've had discussions with them about how we could support them in their work or partner with them in their work. We think that the Power Potential Portal offers a magnificent opportunity to start integrating those types of discussions into our energy future. We look forward to advancing these conversations moving forward.

We've also advanced some partnerships with the federal government when it comes to mapping out biomass opportunities in the territory. We need to take a look at all of these types of things as we chart a course forward for energy. But biomass would be a very important part of the future. We have a huge opportunity here.

Tyler Porter: I do appreciate the minister mentioning some of the examples of biomass development in Yukon, including the Teslin Tlingit Council's successful district heating system. More recently, the Yukon Wood Products Association received federal funding to help strengthen the territory's forestry and bioenergy sectors. These initiatives demonstrate how local resources can support more than just our energy needs. They can also create opportunities for First Nations, local businesses, and communities to participate in a growing industry. These initiatives highlight the potential for local resources to not only strengthen Yukon's energy future but also create lasting opportunities for First Nations and communities to benefit from and contribute to a growing industry.

Can the minister share how government can build on these successes to support First Nations and local industry in developing new biomass opportunities?

Hon. Ted Laking: As I already referenced in my earlier response, we've had some promising discussions with the Teslin Tlingit Council on the biomass district heating. Those conversations are ongoing. We think the Power Potential Portal and our work on the winter reliable energy plan provide a good pathway for us to identify ways to work with communities in developing these types of initiatives.

But it goes beyond just advancing the energy project itself. When it comes to something like biomass, we need to look all the way from top to bottom. We talk about the supply chain. How do we get more access to timber? That's why we've undertaken a lot of work to identify new areas for timber harvest in the territory. That's why we've worked to speed up permitting to get access to timber in the territory — because we want to allow the biomass industry to grow because we think that it's going to play an integral part in the future of energy in the territory.

Question — Children's optical program

Lane Tredger: Vision is an important part of our health. Eye exams by optometrists are important for detecting eye diseases and for making sure that people can see well enough to do things like drive safely. Eye exams are even more important for children. Many eye health problems can be treated and corrected but only if they're caught early. When children have eye problems that go undetected, there can be permanent consequences for their eye health and their vision.

Despite the importance of regular eye exams, kids in the Yukon can only get them if their parents pay for them. Some families might be able to use benefits from their work, and some low-income families can apply for coverage. But many Yukon families have to find a way to pay for this needed health care out of their household budget.

Given that there are lifelong impacts for children whose eye problems go undetected, will this government fund regular eye exams for all Yukon children?

Hon. Brad Cathers: As the member and her colleagues should be aware, we did inherit a serious financial problem from the previous government along with their NDP partners. That resulted in them running massive deficits each and every year and leaving us in a situation where fiscal capacity is limited. While we are taking steps to enhance the services that are provided to Yukoners where possible, it does leave us in a situation where we're not able to fund everything that we would like to support.

We will take this request under consideration, but again, the difficult situation that we've been forced to deal with has left us having to make some tough choices and also, in the case of Yukon Hospitals, deal with chronic underfunding that requires this government stepping up with tens of millions of dollars in increased resources to meet the essential needs there, including expanding to provide eight more patient beds this year. We are prioritizing the investments in areas that are essential, but we are left with very limited fiscal capacity to take on new programs. But that being said, I will look into the member's question.

Lane Tredger: The Yukon Government does have a program that's called the children's optical program that covers some eye exams for kids from low-income families. Currently, a family with two adults and two children is only eligible if their total household income is less than $67,000 a year. That's a very low cut-off.

The 2026 annual living wage report found that a household that size needs a household income of over $107,000 a year to live modestly in the Yukon. That's a $40,000 difference from the income threshold for the children's optical program. Many Yukon families fall in that gap. They make less than a living wage but still make too much money to get eye exams covered for their children.

Will the minister of health re-examine the income threshold for the children's optical program so that more families can get eye exams for their children?

Hon. Brad Cathers: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the member for their question. Again, I would just note that we do recognize the need to make improvements to our health care system. As I explained in my earlier response, we have been faced with a very difficult situation as a result of the Liberals and the NDP running large deficits and pushing up against the Yukon's borrowing limit. We've taken the steps necessary to get our finances on the right track to get a path back to balance.

In that context, we've also stepped up and increased resources in areas of urgency, including increasing by tens of millions of dollars the funding available for Yukon Hospitals to address both the urgent operational pressures inherited from the previous government and their NDP partners as well as provide eight new beds.

Again, I will take the member's request under consideration but note that we are very limited in our ability to expand programs and to change income thresholds because of the financial situation. That being said, we've undertaken a number of reviews, including of our chronic disease and benefits programs and medical travel, to determine where we can prioritize the most important needs of Yukoners. But we are limited in our fiscal capacity, and that means we can't do everything that we would like to do.

Lane Tredger: Even for families who do currently qualify for the children's optical program, the coverage is inadequate. According to the Yukon Government's website, the program will cover an eye exam every two years. But according to the Canadian Association of Optometrists, children ages six to 19 should get an eye exam every year.

That's because early detection of eye problems is critical for children. Many eye problems can be caught by an optometrist before the child or their parents or teachers notice symptoms. That's key, because children's eyes and vision are still developing. Even a year's delay in diagnosis for a child can cause lifelong vision and health problems, and that makes this an urgent problem. All children deserve their best shot at healthy vision and healthy eyes, not just those whose parents can afford to pay for yearly eye exams.

Will the Yukon Government update the children's optical program to offer eye exams every year as recommended by the Canadian Association of Optometrists?

Hon. Brad Cathers: I thank the member for their question. However, again, as I noted, we are taking steps to address the most urgent needs. We inherited a very difficult situation from the previous government and their NDP partners of spending money like there was no tomorrow, leaving us with a deficit we needed to get under control.

That has also created a situation where, while we have taken steps, as I mentioned, to invest in some of the most urgent needs, including increasing resources for Yukon Hospitals by tens of millions of dollars and adding eight new beds, we're also investing in Yukon health professionals, including more than tripling our bursary programs to help Yukoners pursue Yukon health careers and receive support.

In doing so, I will take the member's request under consideration, but I would remind them that we were dealing with a situation where the previous government, the Liberals and the NDP working together, spent like there was no tomorrow. We have had to take the steps necessary to get the finances back on the path to balance, while we are also investing in increasing support for health professionals and increasing resources for Yukon Hospitals, which again, was not a priority for the NDP during the time that they held the balance of power.

Question — School infrastructure investments

Adam Gerle: Yesterday, the Commission scolaire francophone du Yukon released an update on several school infrastructure projects and highlighted the continued growth of francophone education in the Yukon. With enrolment continuing to increase and demand for French-language education remaining strong, the commission noted the importance of creating additional learning space and planning for the future.

What is the government's plan to address Yukon's growing francophone school community?

Hon. Scott Kent: We're seeing strong demand for French-language education, and we're working closely with CSFY to ensure school infrastructure keeps pace with that growth. Our government's responding with targeted investments through the fall capital budget to support the continued growth of francophone education in the Yukon.

As an example, we're investing $5.35 million for a major roof replacement at École Émilie-Tremblay to renew and protect this important school facility. We're also investing $4.8 million to install four modular classrooms at high-enrolment schools, including two at Centre scolaire secondaire communautaire Paul-Émile-Mercier, creating additional learning space for francophone students. These investments will help address current capacity challenges, support growing enrolment, and ensure Yukon students continue to have access to high-quality French-language education.

As Yukon's francophone community continues to grow, our government will continue working with CSFY to ensure students have the space, facilities, and learning environments they need to succeed both now and into the future. I certainly appreciate the relationship and the collaboration that we've had with CSFY over the past year.

Adam Gerle: The minister has spoken about investments in Yukon's francophone schools, including planning for the replacement of École Whitehorse Elementary School. However, I would appreciate it if the minister could broaden his response.

What is the government doing to address school infrastructure in Whitehorse and more specifically for schools in Porter Creek?

Hon. Scott Kent: I appreciate the Member for Porter Creek South asking questions that are specific to his riding.

Through the fall capital budget, our government is investing in school infrastructure across Whitehorse to address enrolment growth, improve safety and accessibility, and ensure students have modern learning environments. We're investing $1.1 million in propane boiler upgrades at Porter Creek Secondary School, $415,000 in lighting upgrades at Jack Hulland Elementary, and $434,000 for a new fire alarm system at Saint Francis of Assisi.

In addition, accessibility improvements are planned at Jack Hulland Elementary School and Golden Horn Elementary School, including ramps, automatic door openers, washroom upgrades, and a new mobility washroom. These improvements are part of a broader $750,000 accessibility initiative for high-use public buildings in Whitehorse. These are practical investments that increase capacity, improve safety and accessibility, and help ensure Whitehorse students have the facilities they need to learn and succeed.

Adam Gerle: I appreciate the minister's comments about both Jack Hulland Elementary School and Porter Creek Secondary School. Can the minister tell Yukoners what investments are being made to support students and educators in rural schools?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Our government is investing in school infrastructure across the Yukon to ensure students and staff have safe, reliable, and well-maintained facilities that support learning. These investments are part of over $23 million in school building and system improvements approved through the fall capital budget across both Highways and Public Works and Education.

In rural Yukon, we are investing $1.4 million for propane boiler upgrades at J.V. Clark School in Mayo, $1.35 million for roof replacement at the school in Teslin, $1.3 million for site improvements at the Robert Service School in Dawson City, and over a million for mechanical upgrades at Chief Zzeh Gittlit School in Old Crow. We are also investing $500,000 in boiler room and heating system upgrades at Ross River School, $953,000 to upgrade public announcement systems at St. Elias Community School in Haines Junction and Johnson Elementary School in Watson Lake, and $250,000 to address roof ice-damming issues at Tantalus Community School in Carmacks. These projects will improve safety, modernize critical building systems, extend the life of school facilities, and help ensure students and communities across the Yukon have access to quality learning environments for years to come.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

We will now proceed to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Scott Kent: I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

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

Bill No. 11 — *Yukon Firearms Act — continued*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is continuing clause-by-clause consideration of Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Draft Segment 014-027

Chair: Order, please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order.
The matter before the Committee is continuing clause-by-clause consideration of Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*.

On clause 7 — continued

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 7?

Carmen Gustafson: I was just going to go back to the last question that I had asked before we rose, which was about the interaction between sections 6 and 7. Section 7 allows the minister to provide financial assistance and other support to the advocate, whereas section 6 allows the minister by order to prescribe remuneration and for payment of expenses. I was asking if the minister could explain the interaction between those two sections.

Hon. Laura Lang: I will just take a minute to introduce my Deputy Minister of the Department of Justice and the Deputy Attorney General Mark Radke to my right, and to my left, I have Drew MacNeil, the Director of Policy and Communications for Justice, who are returning today to help me through this bill.
The answer to the member opposite's question is that section 6 describes funding for remuneration for the advocate, whereas section 7 is funding for operational dollars.

Carmen Gustafson: The payment of expenses is set out in section 6. What other financial assistance would fall under section 7 then?

Hon. Laura Lang: I already explained yesterday that the advocate might be availed to bring programming to rural communities where the current PAL course may be offered more infrequently than what we have in Whitehorse, as an example, or additional firearms-related education, and that would fall under section 7. But again, I remind the member opposite that I did just answer this in terms of this being funding for operational dollars.

Carmen Gustafson: Maybe I'm not understanding why the operational dollars and the expenses would be in two different sections — if the minister could explain that.

Hon. Laura Lang: For further clarity, section 6 relates to funds that relate to remuneration. This can include both the funding that we provide to the advocate for their time as well as travel expenses such as gas receipts to the community of Dawson to support some sort of initiative that the firearms advocate has deemed appropriate.

Carmen Gustafson: Sorry — the financial assistance and other support in section 7 then would be for what?

Hon. Laura Lang: For operations.

Carmen Gustafson: I guess I've been asking questions on this bill long enough that I don't anticipate that if I ask for further clarification, further clarification will be received on that. I am genuinely not understanding why there are the two separate sections that deal with funding this office. But I can ask another question.
Within this program funding, will there be any money spent on recruiting the advocate?

Hon. Laura Lang: At this point, I don't imagine that occurring.

Carmen Gustafson: The program funding and other support in section 7 — because this is an independent office — would there be a transfer payment agreement or some other sort of contribution agreement that would be with the firearms advocate?

Hon. Laura Lang: I can confirm that an appropriate funding mechanism will be put in place for the advocate, and as more details are developed around our approach to this, I will be happy to let this House know.

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 7?
Clause 7 agreed to
On clause 8

Carmen Gustafson: Within this section, there is some reporting that's required. Within that reporting, would there be any measures of success that would need to be reported on?

Hon. Laura Lang: I already answered this question last week, so I invite the member opposite to check Hansard.

I need to make a change to section 8.

Amendment proposed

Hon. Laura Lang: I would like to provide this House with an amendment to section 8(1). I move:

THAT Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*, be amended in the French version of subclause 8(1), at page 4, by replacing the expression "fournit le rapport" with the expression "fournit au ministre le rapport" and by replacing the expression "reçu par le ministre" with the expression "reçus du ministre".

Unanimous consent to dispense with reading amendment

Chair: I ask the House's indulgence to dispense with the Chair reading the amendment.
Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.
Is there any debate on the amendment?

Hon. Laura Lang: As previously discussed, I'm tabling this amendment for consideration of this House to resolve a technical matter that could be addressed through a miscellaneous statute law amendment act. The amendment to section 8(1) is the following: replacing "fournit le rapport" with "fournit au ministre le rapport" and replacing "reçu par le ministre" with "reçus du ministre". These minor amendments, while technical, should provide further clarity in the French and English versions of the bill.

I do again sincerely thank the member opposite, the Member for Riverdale South, for raising his concerns related to the alignment of the French and English versions of Bill No. 11. I recognize that within all languages, there's always an opportunity to seek further ways to clarify, particularly if it makes something more accessible. For this particular section, we are attempting to do that.

Chair: Is there any debate on the amendment?
Amendment to clause 8 agreed to

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 8 as amended?

Carmen Gustafson: Previously, we have discussed some of the reporting mechanisms, and the minister has pointed out that there is within this section a power for the minister to direct the advocate to prepare any other reports or financial statements. I would ask again if within those other reports there would be measures of progress, or how we would know that the firearms advocate is working?

Hon. Laura Lang: The way that we're going to know whether or not the advocate is delivering on the expectations of Yukoners is exactly as outlined in section 8, which says there will be an annual report providing that information which will be tabled in this House. If I as the Minister of Justice deem that more is required outside of that annual report, then I am able to provide that direction to the advocate.

Carmen Gustafson: Often in annual reports, organizations or offices do have objectives and measures of success that they report on. Maybe I would just suggest that would be something that would be helpful to see in an annual report from the firearms advocate.

The reporting mechanism is a measure of accountability or a tool for accountability. However, the reporting is retrospective, as in it happens after the activities are done, after a financial statement, after money has been spent.

Could the minister clarify the budgeting process or the accountability process that's on the front end of that?

Hon. Laura Lang: I do believe I have answered this question multiple times, but I don't know if I'm clearly hearing this particular exact question. There may be a nuance here that I'm just not picking up.

Again, what I know is that the advocate is an individual who, once appointed by me as the Minister of Justice, will have the priorities set through my office, and the budget that will be associated with the advocate will be part of the appropriation act for 2027-28, at which time, this House is, of course, able to debate that line item as well as anything else in the Department of Justice budget.

Carmen Gustafson: In 8(3), it does say that the advocate must, upon request of the minister, prepare any report, financial statement, budget, or other record related to the functions and powers of the advocate. If a budget is prepared, according to that section, would that be included in the reporting in subsection 1?

Hon. Laura Lang: Of course, the amounts received by the advocate as well as how that will be spent will be part of the advocate's annual report. Whether or not that is going to be laid out in the same fashion in which a budget is prepared for me — I don't know that because I don't know what that's going to look like. That's a hypothetical question. Until I see what that process is going to be, what I can confirm is that the actual monies received from this government, how that money has been spent, and how that is benefiting Yukoners will be part of the financial component of the annual report.

Carmen Gustafson: In that catch-all in subsection 3, it includes "… other record related to the functions and powers of the Advocate." What kinds of things would be captured by that term "other record"? What is intended to be captured there?

Hon. Laura Lang: As this is a new position for the Yukon, I suspect that what we think the advocate will be doing in six months from now will be different from what the advocate is doing 12 months or 18 months from now. What this provision allows is greater transparency and our ability to be more flexible in what we're expecting from the advocate. Again, it's worded broadly to capture things as they arise and to ensure that we don't hone ourselves into one specific approach.

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 8 as amended?
Clause 8, as amended, agreed to
On clause 9

Carmen Gustafson: This is a very short section. It seems pretty straightforward, but could the minister walk me through and explain this section and what it does?

Hon. Laura Lang: Using existing conflict-of-interest mechanisms is a more efficient and effective means as opposed to creating a new conflict-of-interest regime for this office.

It is expected that an appointed firearms advocate not pursue endeavours that may compromise the advisory and advocacy nature of this position, as outlined in the legislation, or disburse public funds that may be allocated to the office in ways that may benefit the advocate's private financial interests.

Carmen Gustafson: I do understand that this was included as a way to include some conflict-of-interest provision.

Why was the *Cabinet and Caucus Employees Act* specifically chosen, which usually applies to staff in political offices? Why was the choice made to use this particular conflict-of-interest framework?

Hon. Laura Lang: It is the provision that is most suitable for this type of office particularly, as previously explained, as this individual is not functioning as a public servant, and so applying a framework that already exists to a position that is outside of the public service seems the most logical.

Carmen Gustafson: I do think that the minister touched on it a bit in her earlier answer, but what things specifically does this conflict-of-interest provision prohibit the firearms advocate from doing?

Hon. Laura Lang: The advocate cannot be an advocate in this role if they also have an employed position that would specifically conflict with their duties as the advocate. This section well outlines examples to the member's more fulsome question of what this could look like, and I don't believe I need to read this into the House, but if necessary, I'm happy to do so.

Carmen Gustafson: Would the advocate remain able to engage in partisan political activity, as in could they campaign, fundraise, and otherwise engage in political activity?

Hon. Laura Lang: Regarding specific political activity, that would be something I would be very willing to look at on a case-by-case basis. But as I've already outlined regarding conflict, I believe that the *Cabinet and Caucus Employees Act* provides a very reasonable description of the conflict-of-interest provision that we expect from the individual.

Carmen Gustafson: Would the advocate be able to hold membership, for example, in a national firearms advocacy organization or lobbyist organization, or would that be captured by this conflict provision?

Hon. Laura Lang: As I've already said, this position can't conflict with the duties that they have been hired to perform, and so, as I've also already said, I'd be happy to look at these situations as they arise on a case-by-case basis.

Carmen Gustafson: Is there anything in the conflict-of-interest provisions that prevents the advocate from accepting gifts or anything of that nature?

Hon. Laura Lang: The advocate in this role, based on this bill, can't do anything that might conflict, interfere, or create reasonable apprehension that they may be in a conflict.

Carmen Gustafson: Is there anything that prohibits them from accepting gifts in this legislation?

Hon. Laura Lang: I've already answered that.

Carmen Gustafson: In these conflict provisions, there is a piece about disclosure and disclosure of potential conflicts. Is that disclosure made public? Is it publicly available?

Hon. Laura Lang: I offer that the member opposite refer to the *Cabinet and Caucus Employees Act*.

Carmen Gustafson: That's what I am referring to, and that's why I'm asking if the disclosure is publicly available. It's not just me that's reading this. This also goes into the Hansard, and when we interpret the legislation, the Hansard is an important part of that.

I wanted the minister to respond whether the disclosure from the firearms advocate is publicly available.

Hon. Laura Lang: In addition to referencing the act which we're talking about, I would also offer that no, this is not something that would be made public.

Carmen Gustafson: That was quite helpful. I don't have any more questions on that section.

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 9?

Clause 9 agreed to

On clause 10

Carmen Gustafson: Once again, I'm going to ask if the minister can just explain what this section does and how that applies to the firearms advocate.

Hon. Laura Lang: Section 10 of this proposed bill states in plain language: a standard immunity provision protecting the advocate, the minister, and anyone acting under the minister's authority from legal proceedings for actions or omissions made in good faith while carrying out duties under the act.

Carmen Gustafson: I understand that this has been referred to as just a standard immunity provision. Within this provision, would that cover a breach or misuse of personal information that the firearms advocate collects under section 3(2)(a)?

Hon. Laura Lang: As the title already outlines, section 10 simply describes that immunity is applied to actions taken in good faith. This does not mean that if the individual were to purposely breach something like privacy, that this section would apply. So, again, this is under the premise that the activities being done by the advocate are done in a manner that has the intention of the full roles and responsibilities and the intent of this bill in their considered approach and not to be done in any such way that breaches that.

Carmen Gustafson: I notice that this also provides immunity for the minister acting under this act. So, what kinds of acts by the minister would be covered by this immunity? For example, would this section bar an advocate who was removed — or the minister has talked a number of times about this position maybe not being needed for very long — so would this provision bar the advocate from any sort of action against the minister?

Hon. Laura Lang: Section 10 is again under the premise of good faith. So, if there is any action that is done by the minister that occurs on that premise of good faith, then this provision does apply. But I do remind the House that this appointment is an at-pleasure appointment, as outlined in section 5.

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 10?

Clause 10 agreed to

On clause 11

Carmen Gustafson: The regulation-making section is very short. There are only two subsections, the second one being quite broad. It's a very standard provision in regulation-making power. I suspect I know how the minister is going to answer this question, but I'm going to ask anyway if there are any regulations that she knows of that would be required to implement the act that would be coming up shortly.

Hon. Laura Lang: As of this time, there are no plans to create any regulations under the act. The regulation-making powers were included in the event that defining terms used in the act becomes necessary or to address other unforeseen circumstances requiring minor regulations.

Carmen Gustafson: That's quite helpful to know. I do have a question about the broadness of the regulation-making power simply because of the nature of the preamble, which I know we will get to. So, I'm not going to bring the preamble into

this, but I would like to ask the minister about the interaction with the preamble, which is quite broad and goes quite far beyond what this act actually does, and how the broad regulation-making power and the preamble interact and whether this regulation-making power could be used to sort of make parts of that preamble more relevant or more in force, let's say.

Hon. Laura Lang: I would just like to, in this moment, extend my heartfelt gratitude to my colleagues within the Department of Justice for the support that they are providing me this afternoon.

To the member opposite's question: Consistent with the Yukon's *Interpretation Act*, a preamble may be used to construe operative provisions of an act. However, a broadly worded regulation-making power tends to be construed narrowly by courts. So, while a court may use a preamble to justify a regulation made under paragraph 11(b), the court typically interprets such provisions narrowly.

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 11?
Clause 11 agreed to
On clause 12

Carmen Gustafson: Believe it or not, even on this section, I have questions. I understand the intent of this section is to bring the advocate under privacy legislation. I just have questions about how that would work in terms of — there are a number of positions — there's the designated access officer, the privacy officer, those sorts of things under the ATIPP legislation, and so will the advocate, as a one-person office, be responsible for carrying out all of the ATIPP functions, or will somebody else be responsible for that?

Hon. Laura Lang: This is an operational detail, and I'm sure the member opposite expects me to say this by this point. I have yet to work out the details, and when I do, if the member opposite or anyone else in this House has questions, I'd be happy to have that debate.

Carmen Gustafson: I mean, the section was included in the act, so I would ask again if there has been any consideration about how the advocate will function under the privacy legislation.

Hon. Laura Lang: I did speak about this yesterday as well regarding in-kind supports, and so this could be a situation where that happens. As I've already said, it is something that I need to turn my mind to in terms of the operational components for the position. But again, whether or not it's the individual or in-kind support, the ATIPP provisions are ensured to be in place following the appointment of the advocate.

Chair: Is there any further debate on clause 12?
Clause 12 agreed to
On preamble

Carmen Gustafson: As promised, I do have some questions about the preamble. The very first part of the preamble reads: "Respect for lawful ownership, enjoyment and disposition of private property free from arbitrary interference is a foundational principle of Canada's free and democratic society."

If this bill is a framework for creating an advocate, as we've gone through, and I'm sure it is, why was this section included in the preamble?

Hon. Laura Lang: The preamble outlines the importance of lawful firearms ownership, including its connection to private property, Yukon's history, culture, and way of life, firearms education, and public safety, safety on the land, and ensuring Yukoners' perspectives are considered in firearms policies and programs. Preambles can sometimes be used by the courts to interpret the act.

Carmen Gustafson: This specific first paragraph in the preamble doesn't reference firearms at all, so what would it add to the potential interpretation by the courts of this act?

Hon. Laura Lang: As with every other section of the preamble, it is a section that outlines the values that are important to understanding the interpretation of this bill but also the understanding of the values that we know are held by many Yukoners and have guided the implementation of this bill.

Carmen Gustafson: The language in this provision specifically says, "private property free from arbitrary interference is a foundational principle of Canada's free and democratic society." Where did the language "private property free from arbitrary interference" come from, and how did that make its way into the preamble?

Hon. Laura Lang: The question from the member opposite is, where did the language come from? The language is not only language I heard from many Yukoners throughout the course of the creation of this bill and prior to this bill during the election campaign, as well as what my colleagues have heard repeatedly from Yukoners over the years — what we've also heard nationally for years from Canadians. What I also know to be true is that Canadian jurisprudence has traditionally recognized the right of individuals to property rights, and I cite as two examples: *Harrison v. Carswell*, 1976, page 219: "Anglo-Canadian jurisprudence has traditionally recognized, as a fundamental freedom, the right of the individual to the enjoyment of property and

the right not to be deprived thereof, or any interest therein, save by due process of law." The second example, and pardon my pronunciation of the last names, *Leiriao v. Val-Bélair (Town)*, in 1991, paragraph 65, it says: "… property rights are considered fundamental in our democratic society…"

Carmen Gustafson: I do recognize that we do have some rights to private property recognized in Canadian law. What the minister read in her first case comes from the *Canadian Bill of Rights*, which reads: "… the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law". The minister has said that she heard from other people — Yukoners — the language around arbitrary interference. Could she tell me if she thinks that there's a difference between what is in the Bill of Rights with respect to property rights and what is in this preamble with respect to private property rights?

Draft Segment 028-044

Hon. Laura Lang: Through the Bill of Rights, the courts codified the aspect of rights and property rights into Canadian law. While we know that this particular bill is focused on firearms, we know that the Supreme Court of Canada has confirmed that property rights are a fundamental right for Canadians.

Carmen Gustafson: I'm not debating whether property rights are a fundamental right of Canadians — that is true. There's just a discrepancy in the language in what the law recognizes as property rights and where the limits of private property rights are, and I'm suggesting that the *Yukon Firearms Act*, by including "free from arbitrary interference", is expanding the understanding of property rights in Canada.

I'm asking the minister why this language in particular was chosen to be included in this preamble.

Hon. Laura Lang: On this question, I'm going to go back to why we're even here. The very issue of the federal program that has caused such debate across the entirety of our country. Every single province and territory has raised issues with this federal program. The actual merit for whether it is a legally sound program is at the heart of discussion by Yukoners, by Canadians, and by provinces and territories. I also just note for the record that the Supreme Court only today concluded the hearing which was brought forward on this actual matter, but they have also reserved their decision, and I am looking forward to eventually hearing what they do decide.

Carmen Gustafson: Would it be correct to say that this — I hear from the minister's remarks — was included as a response from people who are upset about the federal program, and this is language that is used to describe that federal program by people who are opposed to it, and that's why it is in this preamble?

Is that why it's here?

Hon. Laura Lang: It is common language to reflect that these rights can be infringed, but such infringements cannot be arbitrary.

Carmen Gustafson: I understand that is common language that is used, but this is in a piece of legislation.

Would a court use this test of arbitrary interference, or would a court look to a due-process test for depriving somebody of their private property?

Hon. Laura Lang: This is a hypothetical question for which I certainly don't want to speculate what a court might decide.

Carmen Gustafson: The minister said at the beginning one of the purposes of the preamble is to help the court interpret the law. If that's what the preamble is for, the court would be interpreting this. Again, I'm trying to find out why this language of "arbitrary interference" as opposed to "except by due process" is included here and why the choice was made to stray from the common legal understanding of the due-process test as opposed to arbitrary interference.

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe I've answered this.

Carmen Gustafson: The next section talks about: "… diverse cultures and circumstances that respect the values of responsible Yukon firearms owners". Could the minister tell us what diverse cultures and circumstances are envisioned here?

Hon. Laura Lang: As I read this, diverse cultures and circumstances speaks to the diversity of Yukoners in our territory, as well as their diverse life circumstances that make up what our territory is.

Carmen Gustafson: Along with that, I'm going to ask the minister: what are "the values of responsible Yukon firearms owners"?

Hon. Laura Lang: I cannot speak on behalf of every single firearms owner in the Yukon or all responsible firearms users in the Yukon. I am imagining that, while these values can be many things, at the core, I do know this to be true: I know that responsible firearms owners consistently value safety, they value education, they value responsible use, they value safety on the land, and they value adherence to honourable practices on the land.

When I think about the responsible firearms owners in the Yukon that I have spent a lot of time talking with, I think about their constant good intention to make sure at the heart of everything Yukoners are able to safely practise the application of

responsible firearms use on the land in a way that does ensure that they are honouring both what they have been taught through the PAL, what they have been taught through the HEED, how they work together to bring food into community, how they work together to ensure shooting ranges are up to the par of expectation, et cetera. Again, I appreciate the diversity of perspectives I've heard, but again, for me, that common set of values is what really comes to the forefront.

Carmen Gustafson: I didn't hear in that list adhering to the law. Is that one of the values that is included here?

Hon. Laura Lang: That's implied.

Carmen Gustafson: In the next section, it talks about how "Yukon's geography, communities, cultures and traditions give rise to distinct northern circumstances relating to the lawful ownership and use of firearms."

Could the minister tell me what is meant by "distinct northern circumstances relating to the lawful ownership and use of firearms"? What is an example of this?

Hon. Laura Lang: The preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Carmen Gustafson: Since this was drafted and there were instructions given and thought put into it, and now the minister has confirmed that she's also heard from Yukoners, I think she should be able to let us know: What are the distinct northern circumstances that are referenced in the preamble?

Hon. Laura Lang: I feel like I have spent a lot of time on this bill, and I appreciate my colleagues' time listening to our debate. Without seemingly being rude, I will repeat again: The preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Carmen Gustafson: I guess we are here for the same reason. I still don't have an interpretation of what this section means, so I guess we'll just leave that to whoever is reading it.

There are references to cultural, historical uses, heritage, northern way of life, use of firearms to support safety on the land. I'm not disputing any of that. But is there something about the current *Firearms Act* or federal firearms program that this act is a response to that does not support these things?

Hon. Laura Lang: We are not here to debate the federal firearms legislation, and I believe I've answered this question previously.

Carmen Gustafson: The minister has made it very clear several times that the role of the advocate is to respond to the federal firearms program. She has brought up the assault-style firearms prohibition and compensation program several times. I agree — I'm not here to debate the merits of that legislation or what it does or doesn't do, but the firearms advocate act is the Yukon Party's response to what they have heard from Yukoners. There is a lot in this preamble about interpreting this act, which is kind of unnecessary for actually creating an advocate, so I'm asking if there's something in federal legislation that prohibits firearms supporting safety on the land or historical and cultural uses of firearms being part of a northern way of life for hunting, trapping, sport, recreation, and subsistence hunting. I'm asking about the reason why this legislation was created.

Hon. Laura Lang: Again, we are not here to debate federal legislation, and in fact, the preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Carmen Gustafson: I would remind the minister that the promise from the last election was a Yukon firearms act that would appoint a chief firearms officer by the territorial government, and that's not actually what this act does. But we'll move on from that.

The next section down reads — I'm just going to read the first part of it: "The safety and well-being of Yukon communities are enhanced by the promotion of the safe and responsible use of firearms…"

Can the minister confirm whether the emphasis here is on the safe and responsible use of firearms or, as she discussed very early on in debate, is this talking about promoting the use of firearms?

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe I've been very clear that a key component of this bill is exactly as it's written here: "The safety and well-being of Yukon communities are enhanced by the promotion of the safe and responsible use of firearms, including through engagement, public information, training and the creation, administration and delivery of educational opportunities". Again, I remind us that this section, as well as the entire section, reflects the input we receive from Yukoners, as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Carmen Gustafson: Just to clarify — this section is about promoting responsibility and safety in the use of firearms, and not promoting firearms. The advocate's role is promoting safety and responsible use.

Hon. Laura Lang: I've answered that question.

Carmen Gustafson: Are there any known safety or responsible-use concerns that we know of that would fall under this section of the preamble that the advocate would be targeting?

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe I've answered this question.

Carmen Gustafson: Contrary to how it may look, I'm not actually finding this super fun, and I'm not trying to ask questions again that I feel have been answered — but I suppose the minister has answered those questions. Again, within the safe and responsible use of firearms, does that include compliance with firearms legislation as it's written?

Hon. Laura Lang: I have just answered this, but the answer again is yes.

Carmen Gustafson: Just in the very last paragraph here, recognizing Yukon perspectives and northern circumstances, we have heard from the minister that the advocate will listen to all views of Yukoners. I hope it's safe to assume that this section of the preamble includes perspectives and circumstances that may be opposed to the promotion of firearms and/or people who want to see, as was reflected in the "what we heard" document, additional restrictions or requirements of firearm owners. Can the minister just confirm that this last paragraph is sort of all-encompassing of perspectives of all Yukoners?

Hon. Laura Lang: I previously answered this question a few weeks ago, and the answer is yes.

Kate White: I've been going through other pieces of legislation trying to find a similar spot. Near the bottom, it says, "The Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes the importance of ensuring that Yukon perspectives and northern circumstances are understood and considered in the development and implementation of firearms policies and programs affecting Yukoners". Can the minister direct me to another piece of legislation where it includes the Yukon Legislative Assembly in this way? I mean that genuinely — going through legislation, I can't find another example where it includes the Yukon Legislative Assembly in this capacity in the preamble.

Hon. Laura Lang: At this moment, I'm not aware of any other examples.

Kate White: Can the minister walk Yukoners through why the Yukon Legislative Assembly and this title was used in this way in this paragraph? I'll read it again, and the reason why is I'm trying to understand the drafting instructions or trying to understand the intent behind it. It reads: "The Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes the importance of ensuring that Yukon perspectives and northern circumstances are understood and considered in the development and implementation of firearms policies and programs affecting Yukoners".

I've checked lots of other legislation, and I was hoping that with the officials — if it was used other places — that the minister could direct me, and respecting her response — now I'm trying to understand why this paragraph is written in this way. Why is the Yukon Legislative Assembly used in this way in this one paragraph?

Hon. Laura Lang: This section reflects the independence of the office. We know that it is speaking on behalf of Yukoners, and we also know that the preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners before this election, during this election, and currently. It is what was the majority of the voice we heard in the "what we heard". As a reminder, the preamble in totality is our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Kate White: I'm going to try to ask again, because I don't understand. I, for example, have previously referenced the importance of the preamble in the *Education Act* because of the importance of the *Education Act*. It doesn't have: the Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes the importance of ensuring that Yukon children have access to education. It doesn't reference the Yukon Legislative Assembly in the same way. The *Residential Tenancies Act* doesn't have a preamble.

I went back to look at the *Movable Soccer Goal Safety Act* because this was a piece of legislation that was previously brought forward by the government. It says, for example: "Yukoners support taking action to minimize the risk of such a tragedy ever happening again."

There are lots of different choices for language. I'm just trying to understand the one paragraph where it says: "The Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes the importance of ensuring that Yukon perspectives…" — and so I'm trying to understand why this body, this space, this room was included. It could say, "The Yukon Government recognizes the importance of ensuring that Yukon perspectives and northern circumstances…" It could say that "Yukoners recognize the importance of ensuring Yukon perspectives…" Why does it say, "The Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes…"?

Again, it's not in any other legislation that I could find or that the minister has directed me to. I'm just trying to get an understanding of why this specific space that we're standing in now is referenced at the end of the preamble.

Hon. Laura Lang: I appreciate the member opposite's questions on this particular section. I am not going to reread what I've said now a number of times, but what I will offer is that it does offer a distinction between the Yukon Government and the Legislative Assembly, noting the independence of this individual and noting it is a position that is reflective of the majority of Yukoners' voices for which we have heard from.

Kate White: Just please bear with me for a second as I pull up the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*. I'm just trying to get a sense of someone else that is arm's-length from government and see what is included there.

The reason why I'm trying to understand is that the minister is sitting with officials who could say why it was chosen. Again, I'm asking because it's weird — not that I've read every single piece of Yukon legislation, but I've read a lot of legislation. I'm just trying to get a sense of why it was included.

I'm looking currently at the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, which is an arm's-length office. This one just has the common thing, which says, "The Commissioner of Yukon, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly..." I'll just take a second longer and thank members for that allowance. I'm just taking a quick look at the *Elections Act* that is arm's-length from government, and I'm looking for that preamble. It's real-time searching right now. It doesn't include a preamble, certainly doesn't talk about how "the Legislative Assembly believes in free and unencumbered elections." I could look at the Ombudsman —

I guess the point I'm trying to get to is that, with the officials in the room, there must be a reason why it was written this way. "The Yukon Legislative Assembly recognizes the importance…" I appreciate that the minister has responded in a way that I'm sure she believes that I would understand, but I do not. I'm still trying to understand how the decision was made to include this in this one paragraph, because it could say a lot of different things. Yukoners recognize the importance of ensuring that Yukon perspectives. That to me makes more sense than the Yukon Legislative Assembly. I'm just trying to get an understanding of why it was written in this way.

Hon. Laura Lang: Thank you, Deputy Chair; I appreciate your patience.

I just wanted to make sure I had everything correct in terms of timelines. Today — the timeline is today. The intention in drafting the bill was to show the division between the executive and the Legislative Assembly, and that language we do know evolves, for which is now reflected in the bill.

What we also know is that in 2022, Yukoners were already significantly raising their voice in opposition to the federal program, and I give as an example Motion No. 436 that was supported by both the Yukon Party as well as three members of the then-NDP party:

THAT this House urges the Yukon Government to ensure that territorial policing resources are not diverted to assist in the implementation of the Government of Canada's gun buyback program.

Then, subsequently in the Spring Sitting of 2026, Motion No. 54 stated:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to acknowledge the unique northern context by establishing a carve-out exempting the three territories from the Assault-Style Firearms Compensation Program and related prohibitions.

The NDP neither supported nor opposed that motion. I also note that at this point we have heard unanimously from Canadians the opposition to this program. All provinces and territories have confirmed grave concerns with the program.

I am appreciative of our legislative drafters for coming up with language that reflects a modern time that is representative of an independent officer in the form of the advocate and the voice of Yukoners.

Kate White: I appreciate the response from the minister, and again I'll reference the *Movable Soccer Goal Safety Act*, where it says in the preamble: "Yukoners support taking action to minimize the risk of such a tragedy ever happening again".

It seems to me that looking at the preamble where we have Yukoners, Yukon geography, Yukon communities, does the minister not believe that it would be more powerful to say "Yukoners recognize the importance of ensuring Yukon perspectives…" rather than "the Yukon Legislative Assembly"?

Hon. Laura Lang: I feel very proud of the preamble and that it reflects the input we received from Yukoners.

Brent McDonald: In the first paragraph of the preamble, it declares "… property free from arbitrary interference is a foundational principle...". Can the minister tell us which section of the act gives that principle any effect?

Hon. Laura Lang: Deputy Chair, I've already answered that.

Brent McDonald: In my opinion, I don't think you have. There have been some other very similar questions, but I would like to ask that again: Which section of the act gives that principle any effect?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Deputy Chair: Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Scott Kent: Deputy Chair, subject to 19(c), the member opposite is persisting in needless repetition, and I would ask that you rule on that.

Deputy Chair: Official Opposition House Leader, on the point of order.

Lane Tredger: The point refers to unnecessary repetition. I believe the member did clarify why he was asking it a second time.

Deputy Chair's ruling — Repetition of questions

Deputy Chair: There has been much debate on this topic.

I remind members to refrain from repeating questions that have already been answered.

Member for Klondike, please continue.

Bill No. 11 — *Yukon Firearms Act — continued*

Brent McDonald: I'm unclear if the Deputy Chair viewed that question as repetitious. I don't want to ask it again, but I'm unclear as to whether that was considered repetition or not.

Deputy Chair's ruling — Needless repetition

Deputy Chair: In the opinion of the Deputy Chair, I do see that there have been repetitive questions of this nature, so I do rule that this question is needless.

Member for Klondike, please continue.

Bill No. 11 — *Yukon Firearms Act — continued*

Brent McDonald: The preamble condemns arbitrary interference, and yet section 5(2) lets the minister remove the advocate at pleasure and without cause. Why does the act protect against arbitrary action in its preamble and then authorize it in its body?

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe the purpose of debate right now is for the preamble and not moving into other sections. I remind Members of the Legislative Assembly that, given we are debating the preamble, the preamble is a section of the legislation that provides background and it does not give direction of an operational nature.

Brent McDonald: Can I ask where the act speaks to property rights outside the preamble?

Hon. Laura Lang: Again, focusing on the section of the preamble for which we are debating, as a reminder, the preamble can provide background and not merely help interpret operative provisions. We also know that Yukoners were concerned that federal legislation interfered with their property rights. The advocate was created partially in response to those concerns.

Brent McDonald: The preamble states that Yukoners are best served by evidence-based policies. Does the minister consider undocumented conversations as evidence?

Hon. Laura Lang: The preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners, as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Brent McDonald: The preamble refers to diverse cultures. Why does the preamble not mention First Nations by name?

Hon. Laura Lang: The preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Deputy Chair: Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Brent McDonald: If the Chair will humour me — I'm not sure where we left off, and my question was: Why does the preamble not make any mention of Yukon First Nations?

Hon. Laura Lang: I believe that Yukon First Nations are Yukoners, and the preamble speaks to Yukoners. As a reminder, the preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Brent McDonald: The preamble lists subsistence harvesting as a cultural use of firearms, but subsistence harvesting in the Yukon is a constitutionally protected right of First Nations under final agreements. Why is it only described as a cultural practice in the preamble?

Hon. Laura Lang: As we know, many Yukoners are subsistence hunters, and nothing in this bill impacts First Nations' harvesting rights.

Brent McDonald: Was any consultation with any self-governing First Nation included as consultation for the wording of the preamble?

Hon. Laura Lang: I've already answered this question over the last number of weeks.

Brent McDonald: This is the first time we've been talking about the preamble, so I don't understand how it could have been discussed weeks ago. I'll offer the opportunity to answer again: Were any First Nations consulted in the wording of the preamble?

Hon. Laura Lang: As I have previously stated, Yukon First Nations were all invited to participate in providing advice and their considerations to me on this bill. I presented this at the Yukon Forum. I've also met with individual First Nations — specifically the chiefs and their advisors — and this preamble, as it is written, reflects the input we received from Yukoners as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Brent McDonald: The preamble speaks of the safety and well-being of Yukon communities. Firearm harm in Yukon also includes suicide, intimate-partner violence, and unsafe storage. Why does the preamble not include any of these statements in regard to community safety?

Hon. Laura Lang: The preamble reflects the input we received from Yukoners as well as our interpretation of how best to implement our commitment to Yukoners in the last election.

Linda Moen: Just going back to the numbers, I'm having difficulty when we're talking about an act that affects all Yukoners, but I haven't heard numbers — like, how many Yukoners have been consulted? There's vague mention of meetings with certain groups. Certain people were invited to the table — vague about which First Nations were consulted, who showed up to the table, and what was said.

When we're asking for transparency and we ask about numbers, can they offer a number of how many Yukoners were consulted about this bill?

Hon. Laura Lang: I have answered this question previously, and the focus of debate right now is on the preamble.

Linda Moen: As I mentioned before, I take copious amounts of notes, and the minister has mentioned the number of Yukoners, and the word "unanimously" was mentioned.

If there's been unanimous support for this bill, I would like to know how many Yukoners were consulted on this, as she mentioned in this preamble.

Hon. Laura Lang: We've been hearing from Yukoners not just on this particular bill, but we've been hearing from Yukoners since before 2022. So, as a reflection for Hansard, I recognize that for this bill, particularly on the content of this bill, we heard from 268 individuals. We've also attended Yukon Forum. We've met with Yukon First Nations individually, and in addition, we've been hearing from Yukoners for years on the content of what they would hope to see in something unique to the Yukon like an advocate position.

Preamble agreed to

On title

Title agreed to

Hon. Laura Lang: I move that the Chair report Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*, with amendment.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Minister of Justice that the Chair report Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*, with amendment.

Motion agreed to

Bill No. 204 — *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*

Vote 55 — Department of Highways and Public Works

Deputy Chair: The matter now before the Committee is general debate on Vote 55, Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Draft Segment 045-056

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

The matter before the Committee is Vote 55, Department of Highways and Public Works, in Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*.

Hon. Linda Benoit: First, I would like to welcome my officials to the House and thank them for coming. To my right, I have Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works, Tracy Allen, and to my left, our ADM of Corporate Services, Richard Gorczyca.

I rise today to present the 2026-27 transfer from the contingency fund for the Department of Highways and Public Works. Highways and Public Works is at the heart of daily life in the Yukon, ensuring people, goods, and essential services can move safely across the territory. Whether it's snow and ice removal, brushing and clearing, or ongoing maintenance and repairs, our team works year-round to ensure safe and reliable transportation and public spaces.

Each year, we carefully plan and allocate resources to meet the evolving needs of our communities. However, a growing population, inflation, and the effects of climate-related events have meant that demands on the department and its budget are increasing. This request reflects the need to address these pressures so that Yukoners continue to receive the level of service they expect and deserve.

For the 2026-27 fiscal year, $2 million in operation and maintenance funding has been allocated to the department from the contingency fund. This represents a 1.1-percent increase over the existing main estimates and brings our total O&M budget to $188.5 million for 2026-27. Of the total request, approximately $1.7 million is needed for repairs and preventive maintenance on fire and life safety systems, increased costs for Property Management lease renewals, and services like electricity and utilities for water, sewer, and garbage removal.

Climate change continues to add complexity to the department's work, as increasingly frequent and severe events such as washouts, wildfires, and landslides place growing pressure on government roads and buildings. This year, emergency maintenance and repairs related to washouts and landslides required an additional $366,000.

Deputy Chair, this request is not about expanding programs but about maintaining the essential services that Yukoners count on. Without this investment, we may risk slower response times, reduced service levels, and higher long-term costs. Supporting this request ensures that our roads remain safe, our buildings remain functional, and our communities remain connected.

Brent McDonald: Mr. Deputy Chair, I thank the officials for coming to help answer some questions.

Transportation O&M seems to be budgeted for $5.3 million below what the department actually spent last year. Can the minister tell us what changed to make this year cheaper?

Hon. Linda Benoit: In the previous year, in 2025-26, we did do a one-time injection of $5 million into the road and airport equipment reserve fund — into the RAERF.

Brent McDonald: Could the minister tell us what the outcome from the Yukon's application to the Arctic Infrastructure fund is this year?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We haven't heard the outcome of the Arctic Infrastructure fund applications that we've made yet.

Brent McDonald: Has the community aerodrome radio station program in Old Crow been fixed, and is it operating currently?

Hon. Linda Benoit: The community aerodrome radio station in Old Crow currently does not have staff working there as CARS operators. We are actively recruiting for the position, but we've been unable to find staff to date.

Brent McDonald: I wonder if the minister could give us an update on the Nisutlin bridge. I saw the tender posted recently and I'm wondering if that closed and if the minister could give us any idea of costs and timeline.

Hon. Linda Benoit: What we have posted for the Nisutlin Bay bridge is a request for qualifications. That is a tender that's looking for qualified contractors, and once we have a list of those, then we will be looking at posting the actual construction contract. There is no updated estimate right now as this process carries on.

Brent McDonald: In regard to the Nisutlin Bay bridge, was there work done to identify the cause of the previous dysfunctions in perhaps the design or geotechnical work to make sure that's not going to happen again in the new design?

Hon. Linda Benoit: As the member opposite is likely aware, we've hired a new engineer of record. They're actively working on a new design to carry on the remediation and building of the bridge. We will go back and assess root causes of what happened previously, but right now, we are focused on moving ahead, and we have faith in the new engineer of record that they can do this job.

Brent McDonald: I wonder if the minister could give us an update on the Burwash Landing school. Has there been any increase in costs, timelines, or budget?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Work continues on Kêts'ádań Kų in Burwash Landing. Walls are up, and the roof is starting to go on. We're excited to see construction carry on.

There's been no budget update since the last update I provided. Right now, we're expecting work to be completed likely in the fall of 2027, with handover shortly after that.

Brent McDonald: Can the minister tell us if the reasons for the design flaws on the Burwash Landing school in regard to, I believe, geotechnical or earthquakes — how that was overlooked in the original design?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Due to code changes early in the project, additional seismic requirements were identified that required changes to the design. Again, we're focused on going forward on this project, and there will be an assessment done here as we go along. But right now, we're just looking to finish the school.

Brent McDonald: I apologize; I missed a question on the Nisutlin Bay bridge. Are there any further consequences for the designer that parted ways on the project, or is that a clean cut and moving forward?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Assuming that the member opposite means the engineer of record, they are currently still responsible for the work that they did to date, and we'll work with them on any warranty work that needs to be done there. As far as any assessment of what happened in the past, again, our focus right now is on moving forward.

Brent McDonald: Could the minister give us an update on the status of the coroner's building — if work is restarted on it, if there's been any new site created, or any improvements?

Hon. Linda Benoit: That question would be better directed toward the Minister of Justice.

Brent McDonald: The Teslin school roof, I believe, is scheduled for repairs. Does that fall under the Minister of Highways and Public Works' jurisdiction?

Hon. Linda Benoit: With regard to the roof replacement at the school in Teslin, that is in the Department of Education's budget. We will manage the project for them, but it is theirs.

Brent McDonald: I have a general question about procurement. Is it common for the government to fund significant and expensive repairs on a building that they lease?

Hon. Linda Benoit: It depends on the terms of the lease, and each leased building is different.

Brent McDonald: I wonder if the minister could provide us an update on the progress for the new convention centre here in Whitehorse.

Hon. Linda Benoit: That question would be best directed to the Minister of Economy, Tourism and Culture.

Brent McDonald: Could the minister provide us with an update or perhaps even the future of the Ross River pool?

Hon. Linda Benoit: That question would best be directed at the Minister of Community Services.

Brent McDonald: Is there overlap in Community Services and Highways and Public Works on this file? Because I note it does turn up in the briefing notes.

Hon. Linda Benoit: Highways and Public Works assisted Community Services in assessing the old building and the site that's there, but we retain no responsibility for the pool itself.

Brent McDonald: Have there been any changes or can the minister update us on the Takhini River bridge replacement timeline?

Hon. Linda Benoit: The Takhini River bridge did undergo significant maintenance this summer, so it is still expected to be functional for another 10 to 15 years. However, we have started doing some long-term planning, so we are planning for that bridge replacement already. There will be public engagement in the future to form part of the assessment process.

Brent McDonald: What's been done with the federal funding for active transportation improvements given this work has been put off?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We are working with the federal government on reallocating that funding.

Brent McDonald: Have the regulations required to bring the *Traffic Safety Act* into full effect been enacted? If not, is there a timeline for the new act to fully come into force?

Hon. Linda Benoit: There are 11 regulations that need to be brought into force before the act is fully brought into force, and we are doing work on those regulations right now. I think we're probably three to four years out from having them all completed, depending on timelines and consultations and things like that.

Brent McDonald: Could the minister tell us how many local food producers have been added to the government's online marketplace since the six that were listed at the time of the Spring Sitting?

Hon. Linda Benoit: As of the date of my briefing note here, we were still at six local food producers, along with other local suppliers. I would note that the Department of Health and Social Services and the Minister of Health and Social Services have been doing significant work on incorporating local food producers into their contracts as well.

Brent McDonald: The Auditor General made recommendations on government procurement. Could the minister give us an update on the progress of accepting or implementing these changes?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We did accept all five recommendations from the Auditor General's 2024 report, and two have been fully completed. Work is ongoing on the other three, and we've made significant progress.

Brent McDonald: Could the minister give us an update on the review of the First Nation procurement policy planned for 2026?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We did go out for a request for proposals for contractors to do the work to complete that review, and contract evaluation is currently underway, and we expect to award by January.

Brent McDonald: I know there have been a bunch of new rest stops put out, and I know travellers are quite thankful for them. Is there anything different being done to improve the maintenance across all of the rest stops?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We are working on a territory-wide rest area strategy to guide future improvements and investments along the highway network. In the meantime, contractors are required to meet maintenance and cleaning standards established in their contracts. Department staff do conduct regular inspections, and contractors must provide evidence that the work has been completed. Deficiencies are addressed with contractors to ensure facilities meet expected standards.

Brent McDonald: I would like to ask a question about headlights on vehicles and their brightness. Is the department looking at any kind of enforcement or specifications for helping reduce what I would call the illegal brightness of headlights on vehicles?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I do believe I've addressed this already in Question Period once this Sitting, but I would remind the member opposite that this is currently a federally enforced regulation and that the federal government has done some consultation and is currently doing some more studying of that matter. We're awaiting those results from the federal government.

Kate White: Just a follow-up to that. Is there anything in the new *Traffic Safety Act* that would help Yukon deal with the concerns of safety that have been highlighted by the headlights? I understand that it's federally regulated, but my remembrance or recollection of that debate, including the briefings that we received going into it, was that there were different mechanisms to address safety concerns of Yukon travellers.

Is there anything in the new *Traffic Safety Act* that allows Yukon Government to tackle that in ways outside of what the federal government is doing?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for their question.

Vehicle manufacturing standards are primarily federal, and our responsibilities are related to vehicle operation, inspection, and enforcement. We'll continue to work within our jurisdiction with federal partners as standards evolve.

Kate White: I think the concern that I probably share with many is that it's not the headlights that come on vehicles when they're manufactured; it's aftermarket parts.

I know again, based on my recollection and discussion of the new *Traffic Safety Act*, that there were mechanisms, for example, when licence plates are covered — which I hope we tackle at some point — when there's a film or something where you cannot easily see someone's licence plate number, it becomes an issue, for example, if you're involved in a collision. But it's not about manufactured vehicles; it's about aftermarket parts.

Again, is there a mechanism within the new *Traffic Safety Act* that allows that to be addressed in Yukon?

Hon. Linda Benoit: As part of the ongoing work to bring the *Traffic Safety Act* into force, we are developing regulations to address vehicle equipment issues, which could include those related to headlights. The department is prioritizing the completion of the regulations that need to happen to enable the act while ensuring they're practical, enforceable, and improve safety outcomes.

I would also add that we look forward to receiving data from Transport Canada about the work that they have done that could help guide us in the future.

Brent McDonald: I wonder if the minister could tell us if there's anything in the Yukon highway traffic act that relates to noise concerns for commercial vehicles that may have altered exhaust or emission controls.

Is this something that is within the jurisdiction of the act?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I'm wondering if the member opposite could clarify their question. Are they referring to the *Traffic Safety Act* yet to come into force or the *Highways Act*?

Brent McDonald: I guess either if both of those are within your jurisdiction.

Hon. Linda Benoit: As we've just discussed, there are multiple pieces of legislation that this could fall into, and as we do our legislative work going forward, we're happy to look at that issue.

Brent McDonald: I have a question about highway camps and staffing.

Can the minister give us an idea of, especially on the Klondike and Dempster highways, how many vacancies they experienced this year and if any vacancies remain?

Hon. Linda Benoit: Currently in Dawson City, we have six staff, and ideally there would be seven, and the seventh one is going to start on November 19. That said, we are almost always recruiting for northern camps, and so that is always ongoing to fill those positions. It looks like we currently have four filled positions in Mayo, three in Stewart, five in Klondike, four in Ogilvie, and six at Eagle, and we're actively recruiting for those camps.

Brent McDonald: I understand the difficulty staffing some of these.
Does the minister think that those vacancies had an effect on highway maintenance this summer?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I would say that absolutely, when you are short-staffed, it does affect highway maintenance. On the North Klondike Highway this summer, we did have to pull maintenance staff from other areas to complete work there.

Brent McDonald: Has Highways and Public Works initiated or budgeted for the road safety assessment requested by Carmacks and supported by Dawson City?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I would ask that the member refer that to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Kate White: Thank you, Deputy Chair, and I appreciate my colleagues letting me step into this.
When this question was asked initially, the reason it was asked is because it involves the highway in current conditions, and then in future conditions and when the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources said that it was going to go through the YESAB process, that brings back the question: How does the Department of Highways and Public Works work with communities to ensure the safety of the travelling public on those highways? When the questions are asked and we're talking about planning for now and into the future, I think it still stands.
How are the minister and the department working with the community of Carmacks and Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, who highlighted their concerns about the current increase in big truck traffic but also increases in future?
Understanding that this takes time and planning, what is being done currently, and how are the minister and Highways and Public Works involved in that planning?

Hon. Linda Benoit: As the member opposite referenced, there will be a requirement through YESAB that this traffic be looked at when we start talking about future planning, and my officials at Highways and Public Works will obviously provide insight and information into that process and work with YESAB as required.
Currently, we do maintain the highways to the best of our ability with the budget that we've set out. Maintenance needs do vary across the network and work is prioritized to address the most pressing safety and operational needs first, but we will carry on maintaining the highway as expected, and we do have carrier compliance officers at the weigh scales who are actively involved in ensuring that heavy truck traffic is up to standard and that they're meeting standards for maintenance and that kind of thing.
But as far as future looking goes, that process will roll out in the future. We will also have the Yukon Energy Corporation in this House in the coming weeks, and some of those questions could be addressed there, as they refer to the Whitehorse Power Centres.

Brent McDonald: Can the minister tell us what Highways and Public Works is doing to help prevent the spreading of invasive species along all the highways, especially with all the brushing work that's been happening?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I'm happy to let the member opposite know that we've recently signed an agreement with the Yukon Invasive Species Council so that we can support them doing a 2027 invasive plant roadside survey, and part of their work will inform our work going forward. We do work with them on these things.

Brent McDonald: I'm wondering, given an especially warm fall this year: Would the minister look to extending ferry crews longer into the fall if conditions exist, rather than just having a fixed date for removal?

Hon. Linda Benoit: I think I've talked about this in this House before. It is not just about whether the water is still open as to whether the ferry comes out. It does depend on freezing temperatures as well. There are things that don't function properly once the temperature drops below zero, and some of them are life safety devices.
Again, removing the ferry requires advance coordination with contractors and seasonal staff. Given the logistics involved, we do use a firm seasonal closure date rather than extending the operations day by day.
That said, we'd be happy to look at the weather data from the past few years and see if we can extend those days next year.

Brent McDonald: I realize this happened before the minister's time in office, but the Dawson highways crews always pulled the ferry out using their own government workers. They have the equipment, the skills, the expertise, and I'm wondering if the minister knows why there was a switch made from doing that to hiring a Whitehorse contractor to do it.

Hon. Linda Benoit: Unfortunately, I don't know why that change was made. I can endeavour to find out for the member opposite, but it's likely going to depend on some historical knowledge and whether that's still here.

Kate White: Just on that note, I appreciate that the minister is going to go back and look at the reason, but is there a willingness to go back to when it was Yukon Government employees and highway staff who were doing the ferry removal over

the contractor? Understanding that those are sometimes seasonal jobs in the community, extending any kind of hours is probably helpful.

Is there a willingness to look and maybe go back to making sure that it's locals who are doing the work as opposed to contractors from Whitehorse?

Hon. Linda Benoit: We can certainly look at whether we have the available expertise and equipment. Some of those things may depend on when in the year the ferry is being pulled versus where other equipment is working and that kind of thing.

Justin Ziegler: I have a few questions about the CAR station situation in Old Crow. I would like to know how many positions are vacant in CAR stations and in which communities.

Hon. Linda Benoit: To the best of my knowledge, Old Crow CARS is the only station that the government hires CARS operators for. The rest of the CAR stations are run by independent contractors who hire their own staff. We have at least one vacant position in Old Crow.

Given the time, I move that we report progress.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Minister of Highways and Public Works that the Chair report progress.
Motion agreed to

Hon. Scott Kent: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Deputy Chair: It has been moved by the Government House Leader that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.
Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Tyler Porter: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 11, entitled *Yukon Firearms Act*, and directed me to report the bill with amendment.

Also, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 204, entitled *Second Appropriation Act 2026-27*, and directed me to report progress.

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

Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Scott Kent: Madam Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

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

Speaker: Pursuant to an order adopted earlier this Sitting, this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. on Monday, November 16, 2026.

The House adjourned at 5:27 p.m.

Written notice was given of the following motion today:

Motion No. 203
Re Scheduling witnesses appearing in Committee of the Whole on electrical infrastructure and services (Kent)