

Whitehorse, Yukon**Thursday, May 17, 2007 -- 1:00 p.m.**

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Tributes.

TRIBUTES**In recognition of International Museums Day**

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Legislature to pay tribute to International Museums Day, which takes place each year on May 18. In 1977, the International Council of Museums adopted a resolution designating May 18 as International Museums Day. This resolution was passed to remind everyone of the very special role museums play in preserving our cultural heritage. Every museum day has a special theme in order to better coordinate international celebrations. The theme for this year is "museums and universal heritage". This theme reminds us that heritage is universal.

The work that Yukon museums, community interpretive centres and First Nations cultural heritage centres do to preserve our local heritage is a part of a much bigger picture.

These institutions are working each day as part of a global community to preserve the heritage of all humanity. Our government believes that our museums and our entire heritage sector contribute greatly to the quality of life of not just Yukoners, but of people everywhere.

Each of these institutions tells the stories of the Yukon and the many things that have shaped the Yukon and its people: the diverse culture; First Nations heritage; Yukon's natural history; the Klondike Gold Rush; the building of the Alaska Highway and so forth.

These institutions also make a significant contribution to our economy. They provide over 100 jobs in Yukon communities and help to diversify and sustain our economy, generating millions of dollars every year. In total, \$1.28 million in Yukon government funding through the Department of Tourism and Culture will be provided to Yukon museums, interpretive centres and First Nation cultural heritage centres this fiscal year.

As well, the Yukon government is pleased to support the long-time aspirations of the MacBride Museum with its expansion plans for a total of \$729,000. Over the last number of years, the MacBride Museum has taken on an increasing role in heritage programming for the enjoyment of visitors and residents alike. This exciting initiative will further allow the museum to expand its programming abilities as well as providing more space.

We are also very proud of the travelling exhibit "Ice Age Mammals" created by the Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre and several national partners. While on display at the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa, the exhibit attracted over 90,000

visitors. At the Montreal Science Centre, it drew over 160,000 visitors.

Ice Age Mammals recently opened at the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller, Alberta. It has proven so popular that it's now booked beyond the year 2010 at museums across the country and in Alaska.

A component of the Ice Age Mammals exhibit looks at the ongoing effects of climate change, and I think this, in particular, resonates with all of us.

Mr. Speaker, Yukon museums educate, entertain and reveal Yukon's history and heritage through its stories. The Yukon government is pleased to be able to assist these very important collective guardians of our history with additional funding that will help to support their endeavours.

This popularity is further proof of the very main message behind this year's Museums Day theme. Our museums play an important part in interpreting and safeguarding a heritage that is indeed universal and can play a very important part in articulating our role in a changing global environment.

In recognition of International Day Against Homophobia

Mr. Cardiff: I rise on this most important day on behalf of the Assembly to pay tribute to International Day Against Homophobia, May 17. This day is meant to encourage us to understand sexual diversity and to further the inclusion of homosexual persons in our society.

May 17 is symbolic as the day the World Health Organization put an end to over a century of homophobia in the medical field. They removed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses on this day. The theme of the 2007 awareness campaign against homophobia is "Sexual orientation is not a choice." It is a myth that people are able to choose their sexual orientation.

This day against homophobia has come about through the efforts of men and women who have had the courage to speak up and raise our consciousness about sexual orientation. Because of them, we are beginning to include gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual persons in society and, thereby, promote the growth of healthy relationships among people.

Our First Nations have long accepted what is known as "two-spirited" persons. With these positive words, we see how open-mindedness toward diversity is valuable to all of us.

It is with deep concern that we see widespread intolerance of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual persons. Two men were recently murdered in Halifax because they were gay.

Here in the Yukon a few weeks back, there was a frank and touching letter to the editor from a First Nations man who had been assaulted in a rural community because he is gay. The devastating effects of homophobia on individuals and families are very much with us. Hatred and prejudice toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual persons reflects our own fear of being different. Children who discover their sexual orientation have a difficult time and may even become suicidal. According to a recent survey, 87 percent of Quebecers and 78 percent of Canadians in general feel it is important for parents to know their child's sexual orientation so that they can help.

Gays and lesbians want to tell their parents. Unfortunately, homophobia often still prevents them from doing so. We must

all educate ourselves to accept and support the success of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual persons in all walks of life and in our society.

Thank you.

Speaker: Are there any further tributes?

Introductions of visitors.

Returns or documents for tabling.

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motion?

Is there a ministerial statement?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: First Nations, government relations with

Mr. Elias: The three northern premiers are meeting next weekend to discuss and hopefully release joint papers on sovereignty, circumpolar relations and climate change. I say "hopefully" because the agenda for the meeting next weekend has not been released yet. These joint papers are key components of the strategic action plan the territorial governments wish to discuss with the Government of Canada, and Yukon First Nations have a significant interest in these issues.

I have been informed that Yukon First Nations have been left in the dark again. Neither the Council of Yukon First Nations nor the Arctic Athabaskan Council have been involved in the development of these joint papers. I can imagine the Premier saying that he speaks on behalf of all Yukoners at the Northern Forum in spite of the fact that he hasn't consulted with First Nations yet. Is the Premier planning to consult with First Nations on these important issues before the end of next week so he can go to the forum with some confidence?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, we will continue to work cross-jurisdictionally with our sister territories, as we have in the past, as governments. There is a lot of work we have to do among the territorial governments. We will then, once we do our work, engage with other governments -- for example, Yukon First Nation governments, as I'm sure N.W.T. will do in their territory, and of course Nunavut is a bit of a different situation because of the makeup of the territory. So we'll continue in that manner. A pan-northern approach has proven to be very successful for the three territories. It has certainly brought benefits to First Nations north of the 60th parallel. Some of the examples are the northern strategy, the targeted investment program, and of course the recent northern housing trust and the investment therein. All matters are dealt with in due course. We as a government will do our work as we are obligated to do. Of course we will consult with others as we go forward.

Mr. Elias: Mr. Speaker, we're supposed to be walking side by side with Yukon First Nations on issues just like these. Mr. Speaker, the *Co-operation in Governance Act* speaks to the heart of this issue. It recognizes the respective authority and jurisdiction of the Legislature and the Government of Yukon and self-governing First Nations. This is the law of the land,

and it requires us to work together when making decisions that affect all Yukoners. Mr. Speaker, Canada allocated \$5 million to the Yukon for the eco-trust fund for specific purposes of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants. Without asking Yukoners or self-governing Yukon First Nations what we might want to do with this money, the Premier has decided to spend it on the third turbine at Aishihik Lake without any input from self-governing Yukon First Nations. Is this the Premier's definition of working together, or is it the Environment minister's definition?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: When the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin speaks of the *Co-operation in Governance Act*, he conveniently ignores the issue that is part of that whole agreement -- in fact, it is its foundation -- and that is the understanding of and respect for each government's jurisdiction.

We are conducting the public's business within our jurisdiction, as we have in the past and continue to do today, as we will continue to do into the future. We will, as the *Co-operation in Governance Act* stipulates, work with other governments -- First Nation governments in this case -- here in the Yukon and, at the same time, we will cooperate with our neighbouring jurisdictions through protocols, such as we have with Alaska, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Alberta and British Columbia.

I would point out to the member opposite that this government does not request we get involved in decisions that the Vuntut Gwitchin government makes on behalf of its citizens, or the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations on behalf of its citizens, or the Na Cho Nyak Dun First Nation government on behalf of its citizens. We respect jurisdiction and that is a fundamental part of this government's approach.

Mr. Elias: Again, on issues like these, we should be walking side by side with Yukon First Nations.

Another example of this government's failure to work together with self-governing First Nations can be found in the climate change centre of excellence. The Environment minister has touted the strategies and action plans this government has prepared for dealing with climate change. This government used the climate change centre of excellence as its flagship environmental project in their re-election campaign last fall.

This government claims it is going to do this on behalf of all Yukoners. Well, the Environment minister may not be aware that self-governing Yukon First Nations want to be a part of that project. I say that he may not be aware of this because he has not asked.

Self-governing Yukon First Nations are not part of this process and they want to be. They want to be involved as a full partner in the development of this centre.

Is the minister aware that self-governing Yukon First Nations want to work with the Yukon government as a full partner in this, or did the Premier decide the *Co-operation in Governance Act* is just another benign law that doesn't have to be followed?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I'll just ignore some of the comments made, because they are simply not relevant to how we as governments conduct business in this territory. I repeat: it

comes down to our commitments jointly as governments -- First Nation governments and the Yukon government.

By the way, this whole purpose around climate change is for all, and that is why we are working with First Nations through such initiatives and mechanisms like the Yukon Fish and Wildlife Management Board; that is why we work with the Porcupine Caribou Management Board; that is why we will work with First Nations because of traditional knowledge as we modernize our database. These are all contributions to climate change, to research and to adaptation for all Yukoners -- First Nations included.

I would encourage the member opposite to really consider advice he gets from his leader and others in his caucus, because their way is contributing to the problem. The government's way is building the solutions in partnership with First Nations.

Question re: Nurse shortage

Mr. Mitchell: There has been a great deal of discussion lately surrounding the operation of Whitehorse General Hospital. Last week the elected representatives of both the Yukon Medical Association and the Yukon Registered Nurses Association voiced publicly their concerns over the current nursing shortage at the hospital. The chief executive officer of the hospital has taken a different position: basically saying there is no problem.

My question for the minister responsible: does this minister stand behind the chair and CEO of the Hospital Corporation on this issue?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The Leader of the Official Opposition again is not recognizing the fact that the hospital board is set up to run their affairs. The member cannot at the same time profess support for boards and committees and their independence from government and on the other hand encourage government to micromanage every decision of those bodies once they are set up.

The operational issues at the hospital are dealt with by the hospital. Their funding is provided and the accountability comes through a contribution agreement signed by the Minister of Health and Social Services, being, of course, me. As far as the issues related to the overall provision of health care within our system, as government and as the minister responsible, I work with the hospital board; I work with the Yukon Medical Association and I work with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association, among others within the field. We work collaboratively as much as possible, and I have a very positive working relationship with all of them.

Mr. Mitchell: We've heard from the CEO of the hospital and we can only presume that his position is that of the board chair also. The issue here is not sticking up for the chair and his representative; it's not an issue of board independence. The issue here is a very serious one, and that's the health care of all Yukoners. When any of us hear warnings of impending peril of any kind, especially coming from two very credible sources -- the elected officials of both the doctors and nurses -- do we take them seriously or do we dismiss them, as this minister does? It is the responsibility of the minister to address any matter affecting the health care of our citizens.

So I'll ask the minister again: can this minister give this House his complete assurance that he supports the position of the board chair and the CEO on this issue and that he feels comfortable disregarding the concerns of doctors and nurses?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The only thing I'm going to disregard is the attempt by the Leader of the Official Opposition to inflame health care and public perception of this. There are challenges within the Yukon health care system as there are within every system in the country but, on the balance, our system compares extremely well with every jurisdiction in this country.

Our health care system is second to none. It is through the good work of the professionals involved -- the doctors, nurses and the administrators involved in this. The member needs to recognize that operational issues at the hospital are their responsibility. We work with them and we work with the professionals to resolve them, but where there are direct relationship issues there, they need to work on them first. The government does not micromanage every issue.

For the member to suggest there is a crisis, as he has stated before, is not correct. The member needs to recognize that as far as taking action, this government has acted beyond that of any other government. What did the Liberals do in office with regard to health human resources? Nothing. This government acted with the \$12.7 million health human resource strategy, including the investment in the nurse mentoring program and the significant increase to the nurse education bursary, as well as incentives for physicians and other areas that we will continue to work on with the YRNA, the YMA and other health professionals.

Mr. Mitchell: On May 10, the chair of the Hospital Corporation came out and said there were no problems; there was no crisis. The president of the YMA said publicly, "Mr. Aeberhardt does not have the confidence of the medical profession in making those comments."

Now, this is not some faceless person spouting off. This is the president of our medical association. He was, and is, obviously very concerned. Can the minister explain why he should gamble with Yukoners' health by putting our blind faith in the chair and CEO of the hospital while ignoring the warnings from the president of the YMA?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Again, I have to urge the Leader of the Official Opposition to be less inflammatory in his comments and be more cognizant and careful with regard to actually researching the facts. It is clear from his comments that the Leader of the Official Opposition doesn't even know the difference between the chair and the CEO of the hospital.

The member needs to understand the facts. The member needs to spend less time trying to inflame the issue and more time trying to understand it and recognize --

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr. McRobb: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I've heard this twice now, and I believe it's a violation of the House rules and implies a motive, contrary to Standing Order 19(g). The minister saying that the Leader of the Official Opposition

is "trying to inflame" is the same as saying "fearmongering" or "scare tactics", which you have ruled against previously.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: Yes, I agree with the member.

Honourable minister, please don't use that terminology. You have the floor.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see the opposition is very sensitive, and so they should be on this.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: What we need here is for everybody just to take a breath. Now, you have the floor, honourable minister, and I'd like you to conclude your remarks in about seven seconds, and then it's on to the third party's question. So please conclude.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, you left me very little time to respond, but I point out again that the Yukon's system is second to none. This government has acted with a \$12.7 million health human resources strategy, and we will continue to work with the health professionals.

Question re: Community Wellness Court

Mr. Cardiff: The Minister of Justice has stated that government services are provided to complete wellness plans ordered by the Community Wellness Court. In this year's main estimates, one person-year has been added to alcohol and drug services to respond to the wellness plans. What other services besides alcohol and drug services will the government be making available to implement wellness plans ordered by this new court?

Hon. Ms. Horne: The Yukon government is committed to achieving a better quality of life for Yukoners by implementing a therapeutic alternative court to deal with people with health problems, offenders with drug and alcohol addictions, symptoms of FASD and other mental health issues.

Last year we invested \$295,000. This year we are investing \$609,000 -- \$200,000 of that is federal funds.

This is a very significant investment. The Yukon government has been working very hard to get the Community Wellness Court up and running and to get the services in place to support the courts. We have added, contrary to the third party, five new positions to assist with the court. A court coordinator, a primary case manager working in the probation office, an addictions counsellor and a mental health worker have been hired to act as the assessment and treatment plan development team. Finally, there is also a community courtworker.

Mr. Cardiff: It's amazing -- we finally got some information out of the other side. Mark that on the wall.

The idea of a special court to divert addicted offenders from incarceration is not a new idea. Vancouver's drug treatment court has been operating for over five years and has lessons for us. That successful program includes not only drug treatment but medical, psychological and social workers on-site, as well as assistance with employment and housing issues.

We can also take a lesson from the Toronto drug court where half the wellness plans don't get implemented because services aren't available. The Yukon's Community Wellness Court has a broader mandate that includes working with people with alcohol addiction, FASD, and mental health problems. Obviously it needs a good support structure in order to succeed.

My question: what other resources have been identified in Justice, Health and Social Services or other departments to deal with offenders' other needs that go beyond alcohol addiction?

Hon. Ms. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I won't answer those questions directly. What I will do is tell the opposition how we plan to help the offenders. We are working closely with Council of Yukon First Nations and other partners to ensure they understand why the Community Wellness Court is a better option for Yukoners. Mr. Speaker, each client that agrees to appear before the court is assessed over a 30-day period. A comprehensive wellness plan will be created that meets their individual needs.

We have a budget of \$100,000 in place to engage NGOs to deliver services to offenders. For example, a contract is now in place with an expert in FASD. This plan will engage the alcohol and drug services and mental health services available to the government through NGOs such as the Committee on Abuse in Residential Schools and community programs. The Council of Yukon First Nations will continue to be at the table as we move forward with this plan.

Thank you.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, a senior Justice official said this week that the department provides some service, but it's also "working with NGOs and others to provide services," as the minister just stated. But the reality is that there are still big service gaps. There is no medical detox facility for those who need it. For addicted offenders with mental health problems, there is one overworked psychiatrist and no residential mental health facility. There is no aftercare for these people when they get through their treatment plan. There needs to be a continuum of care. This government's refusal to raise social assistance rates or provide badly needed affordable housing speaks for itself. For many offenders, alcohol addiction is just part of a tangled web of problems they face.

How can NGOs that are already stretched to the limit take on additional caseloads and ensure that wellness plans address the needs of the whole person when this government won't guarantee those NGOs the stable, long-term funding they need to function effectively?

Hon. Ms. Horne: This is an interesting question because I believe it's the NDP that scrapped the Crossroads plan for the Yukon. I would urge them to stay tuned for planning that is ongoing with this health service.

The old system is not working. Everyone wants to see Yukoners healthy again.

To reiterate to the member opposite, we have hired five new staff members to support the court. We have budgeted the services that are required and we have the support available to make the real changes that are necessary to get our Yukoners healthy.

Question re: Community Wellness Court

Mr. Edzerza: I have asked questions of the Health and Social Services minister on several occasions with regard to treatment -- but with no success for answers. I'll try a more realistic approach.

For just a moment, I would like the Minister of Health and Social Services to reflect on the life of a person who might go through the Community Wellness Court system. We'll call her Josephine. She's 40 years old. She exists on social assistance and has four kids. The two youngest have been placed in foster homes. Josephine is addicted to alcohol, Tylenol 3 and crack cocaine. She has a long record of incarceration.

Now she's facing an assault charge for stabbing her live-in boyfriend, Walter. The wellness plan the court gave her says that if she attends treatment for her addictions and stays clean for six months, she may have one of her children back.

Can the minister tell Josephine what services he can offer her?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, that was quite the question.

I think the member needs to recognize here that the implementation of this therapeutic court is about change. It's about getting offenders to accept responsibility for their actions and, for those who do, giving the court the option of sentencing them into treatment programs rather than incarceration. It is at court discretion. The decision will be made independently by a judge.

The elements in place within our system include our substance abuse action plan, the increased services we have provided to groups and NGOs such as the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon, the Yukon Family Services Association, the Outreach van, and the Child Development Centre to assist with children with FASD.

There are a number of areas where this government has acted both to help those who are affected by alcohol and to help children affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. We will continue to act. We are very proud of our record to date. We have significantly invested in these areas and we are achieving the necessary change within the system to achieve an effective outcome.

Mr. Edzerza: I believe the minister may have difficulty with this issue because this is real; this is not something that he can skirt around; it's an actual life. Josephine needs more than a 28-day residential treatment centre that is available only three times a year. She needs immediate medical detox for days and then monitoring with drug tests until she is ready for treatment. She needs long-term addiction treatment that includes medication and psychotherapy for her multiple addictions. She needs family therapy that will include Walter who is also addicted to drugs and is dealing drugs out of their home. Her two kids are acting out in school and probably need to be involved in family therapy.

Will the minister tell Josephine why she can't have the treatment she needs?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: If the Member for McIntyre-Takhini would take a look at his budget here, he would notice that some of the statistics for alcohol and drug services and the

detox admissions -- and again I remind him that it was his party, the NDP, that closed the Crossroads treatment centre. We reopened it; we are taking the action necessary, and we are enhancing the services. Detox admissions -- if the member would take a look at his budget book, it shows 984 admissions for detox in last fiscal year, 2006-07.

The client service hours: outpatient youth, 4,056; outpatient youth, average caseload size per month, 62; in-patient treatment, total clients served, 82; in-patient treatment, total client service hours, 656; Outreach prevention, community meetings and consultations, 56; prevention and training events, 98.

These are just a few of the examples of how the action is being taken internally and is in addition to how this government is working with non-governmental organizations such as Yukon Family Services Association, such as the Outreach van, to help those who may not be accessing the services in the standard manner through alcohol and drug services. We will continue to do more and look forward to announcing it.

Mr. Edzerza: I'd like to point out that one basic difference between the minister and this side of the House is that we don't live in the past. What's back there is back there. The truth is, half of the people that need treatment can't get it.

Let's say by some miracle Josephine has stuck with the 28-day treatment and tells her probation officer that she no longer is taking drugs. She is on her own to deal with her life. She goes back to Walter, who is not sober -- he is bringing friends home to party. She doesn't want to leave him because he is also the father of her four children. Within two weeks, the inevitable happens and she's back on the bottle and the pills.

Can the minister tell Josephine what aftercare is available to help her break the cycle of addictions and become a productive member of society and a mother to her children?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I know it's difficult for the member to rescript his questions partway through, but if he had listened to my earlier responses, he would hear some of that information. We have increased the funding to services such as those within our system and the new hiring of the youth clinician for mental health to help people on a preventive basis -- because often you have what's referred to as "dual diagnosis clients" who are afflicted with both mental health issues and with problems related to alcohol or drugs. We have stepped forward in this area, expanding the services; we have increased the funding in rural Yukon for a rurally based clinician to assist with mental health problems; we have increased the funding to organizations such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society of Yukon, Yukon Family Services Association and the Outreach van. These are a few examples of the areas where we are stepping forward.

I would remind the member opposite, if he is referring to women attempting to leave relationships that may be somewhat abusive, there is the option of Kaushee's Place -- yet another area where our government has increased the funding to improve the level of service provided, which is in stark contrast to the member's party that, when in office, shut down the Crossroads treatment centre. We reopened it. We are taking action and we will continue to do so.

Question re: Rate stabilization fund

Mr. McRobb: Mr. Speaker, so far this week, we've established that the Yukon Party government will be increasing everyone's electrical bill by 15 percent in the coming year, effective July 1, and a further 15 percent the following July. These increases amount to a 30-percent increase within the next 14 months for Yukon families.

We've also established that this Yukon Party government has rejected our constructive suggestion to continue the rate stabilization fund for the protection of consumers until we see what happens to power rates after the Yukon Utilities Board changes them next year. I'm afraid there's another reason that so far the minister hasn't fessed up to. Given this, can the minister tell us the real reason he's phasing out the rate stabilization fund?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Again, this government isn't axing the rate stabilization fund. We're going ahead with it for 12 more months, starting July 1.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is an advocate of burning diesel. We're looking at a conservation level here that will not only help our environment, but also help the economic regions of Pelly and Selkirk. We're looking at a decrease in electrical rates. We're not looking at subsidies. We're maturing. That's more than I can say for the member across the way.

Some Hon. Member: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Unparliamentary language

Speaker: Order please. Yes.

Mr. Mitchell: These are personal remarks, and he made those numerous times.

Speaker: Yes, I understand that. The honourable member must retract that statement.

Withdrawal of remark

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for making the last remark.

Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. McRobb: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister obviously doesn't take this pocketbook issue very seriously. He doesn't read his own press releases. His release on Monday quoted him as saying it will be phased out. Those are his words, "phased out." Why won't he back up his statement in the House now?

Mr. Speaker, let me try to explain to him how the rate stabilization fund works. It was set up as a long-term program to shield consumers from fluctuating power rates largely caused by mining customers coming on and off the system. It's based on rates from March 1997 and absorbs all subsequent increases. Should power rates return to that level or decrease further, as the minister has suggested, the RSF would go to zero unless, of course, he's wrong again in his predictions. There is no need to phase out the program. So what's the minister's real reason for phasing out the program, instead of allowing it to continue?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Again, the member opposite is not knowledgeable on the subject. He puts figures on the floor that I find incorrect. Yukoners are looking forward to economic improvement in the area. We are looking at a mine coming on-

line. We are looking at taking a mine off diesel. We are looking at improving a community -- Pelly Crossing -- by taking it off diesel and putting it on hydro. This government is going to work. We haven't axed the rate stabilization plan. We have moved ahead with the commitment for another 12 months. In that time, Yukoners can look forward to a rate reduction on the backs of the customers that we are going to acquire through expanding the hydro line to Pelly and on to Stewart. This is good news for Yukon, it's good news for industry, and it's good news for the consumer.

Mr. McRobb: Jacking up power bills for everybody is not good news. The minister does not understand how the program works, nor does he appreciate the impact to Yukon families from his double-whammy bill hikes. As a consequence of the minister's knee-jerk approach, Yukon families will be paying an extra \$400 per year.

I have for filing 12 copies of actual electrical bills from the past year. The RSF benefit from these bills totals \$398.01. The minister can't have it both ways. If he stands by his promise that rates will be lower than the benefit provided by the RSF, he wouldn't have half-axed it this coming year and fully axed it thereafter. The RSF would naturally reduce on its own, as explained earlier. Obviously he doesn't believe his own prediction.

What is the real reason for phasing out the program instead of allowing it to continue?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, it is continuing. I don't know why we've spent two days on this dialogue. It's a waste of time.

We expanded the rate stabilization plan for 12 more months at the 50-percent level. We have committed to work with the Yukon Energy Corporation on getting a reduction. This government has partnered with industry and the Yukon Energy Corporation to expand the hydro line between Carmacks and Stewart so the Energy Corporation can manage the hydro power throughout the Yukon.

This is good news for Yukoners. This is all about conservation, this is all about management, and this isn't about subsidization. Yukoners don't need subsidization; they need lower rates.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Cathers: 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. The matter before the Committee is Bill

No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Vote 3, Department of Education.

Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 6 -- *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08* -- continued

Department of Education -- *continued*

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Vote 3, Department of Education. We will continue with general debate.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, yesterday when we left off in debate there was a question on the Assembly's floor regarding the public's involvement in education, which I think is a very important topic. In order to have a responsive educational system, we have to involve the public, whether that be parents, community members, employers, labour groups, different religions and First Nation governments. All the different sectors, all the different components in our society, need to be able to have an opportunity to influence our educational system in order that we develop the best educational system possible to meet the needs of our community and to help meet the needs of individuals.

There was a question about how the public can get involved in it. Really, we can start off with parents.

When there are parents with children in school, they certainly have the opportunity to get involved with their child's education by, hopefully, helping them with homework, taking an interest in the report cards, seeing the progress, but also with working with the very professional teaching staff that we have throughout Yukon schools.

There are regular updates and meetings between teachers and parents. We have opportunities for things like the three-way conferences where the teachers, the parents and, in some cases, the students can meet together to talk about how the student is progressing through the educational system, what some of the student's strengths and weaknesses are, what the opportunities are, what challenges the child is facing, and what ways the parents and others can help to overcome some of these issues.

The parents have the ability also to get involved with the school principal if they have an issue of a broader nature that they wish to bring to the school's attention, be it a disciplinary issue, a curriculum type of issue or issues regarding how the school is being run and managed. Indeed, parents do contact the Department of Education's officials to discuss the overall management of education. As all members of this Assembly know, we often get contacted by members of the community as MLAs and ministers.

So there are opportunities for parents to get involved immediately with their child's education, and also to look at things in a broader perspective.

Thankfully, Mr. Chair, we have some very committed people in our community and our society who want to get involved and further the development of their school. People do that through participation in many of our school committees, school councils and school boards. The school councils, which are set up for practically all schools in our community, offer parents and community members -- because it is also open to community members -- to have a hand in providing direction to the school. The school councils, among other duties, look after things such as approving the school plan, possibly looking at disciplinary issues or looking at attendance policies. They are really an avenue for the local parents to get involved to make sure that their school is being the best that it can be.

Also, we have other opportunities in our system to include people in a school board. That's one of the other structures that we have in the *Education Act* allowing people in a community to take on a broader range of responsibilities and a greater involvement in their child's education.

Mr. Chair, I think one of the best things about our system, too, is the number of options where the child -- he or she -- going along through the system can also have a hand in directing their involvement in their educational system. When they get to high school age, there are many different options -- choices in their classes or different streams that they can look at in preparation for either employment after school or in pursuing additional post-secondary education. There are different streams that people can participate in, whether they are in primarily the English language or in the French language. There are options that students have about attending our public school system or the Catholic system. As well, in the high school area, we do have some other very good and very progressive areas of education. These include programs like the music, art and drama program, the ACES program, or some of our work with groups that will help out with vocational training and trades training.

We have a responsive new system that is responding to needs in our community -- that being the Individual Learning Centre -- where those students who have decided to leave school, for whatever reason, will now have an opportunity to re-engage in the public high school system in order to further their own education.

Indeed, there are opportunities for parents and there are opportunities for students to take control and be very active in their own education.

School councils are a very important system. Some would regard them as the voice in Yukon's education system. They offer individuals a rewarding opportunity to get involved in the education of their children. They work with the students, teachers, administrators and the Department of Education to further our common goal of providing the best educational system possible to all Yukoners. They can have a great impact on issues that go way beyond the school environment.

School councils can influence everything from school programming to discipline policies. They help with problem solv-

ing and decision making. They review and approve school plans. School plans are the blueprints of the school's activities and priorities.

They participate in the hiring of the school's principals. They make recommendations on how the school's budget is spent. They may propose locally developed courses. That's a really important area. Our school councils, should they recognize a need in their community, can work with our school council liaison coordinator and the principals to develop courses that meet the unique needs in that community. They may also advise on the length of the school year, on staffing needs, school renovations, school programming and student transportation.

As I said earlier, school councils are really open to all people in a community and don't include only parents. If others have an interest in education -- perhaps they've had their children already go through school or perhaps they have a strong civic responsibility and want to see their school develop to its fullest capacity -- they can also become involved in the school council.

Typically, there are elections. People put their names forward -- and if there are more candidates than there are seats, then there is an election to ensure that there is a democratic process for putting people on the school council. That ensures that they are representative of the views in the community.

Our *Education Act* provides for guaranteed representation. The *Education Act* provides for guaranteed representation of First Nations on school councils. These representatives play a very important role. They bring to the school council their cultural perspective and their ideas. I would encourage all people in the community, if they are interested in education, to come forward and participate in school councils. When we do have the elections, the positions are advertised widely throughout the territory and, as well, there are often vacancies on some of the school councils that are available if people do want to get involved.

If we don't have a full slate of candidates, a member may come forward and ask to be put on the school council. There is an opportunity for ministerial appointments to allow the slate of school councillors to be filled.

Once people become involved with the school council, there is an opportunity for training. The Department of Education provides training sessions for school council members who request them. It also provides a training manual and additional reference materials for new members when they are needed. The new council members can also draw upon the knowledge of experienced members. It is very important to note that there are annual conferences held usually in the spring and also in the fall where school councils can come together to provide a forum to exchange their ideas, to talk about the good initiatives that they have been running, to talk about different approaches and really to share best practices from school to school.

I have had the opportunity to attend the Association of School Councils, Boards and Committees conference last fall and again this past spring. This past spring I also had the opportunity of opening that in conjunction and cooperation with

Grand Chief Andy Carvill. He and I spoke at the opening of the conference.

We do have that avenue for providing input to the communities. As well, the broader organization -- as I mentioned earlier, there is the Association of Yukon School Councils, Boards and Committees. One of the recent developments has been the creation of the First Nation Education Advisory Committee. This is a very important group that is made up of representatives of First Nations from across the territory who meet on a regular basis to discuss education needs, their perspectives, thoughts and opinions. This group meets on a regular basis with the Department of Education officials and allows for another avenue of input into the department's decision-making process.

Also, we invite the Yukon public to participate in our curriculum advisory groups. In particular, we have a First Nation curriculum advisory group right now that is working on the grade 5 First Nation history curriculum and a grade 12 First Nation self-government curriculum.

In answering the member opposite's question, there are significant avenues and opportunity for the public to be involved in the education of our Yukon youth. Also, the Department of Education provides an annual report that summarizes much of what is going on in our Yukon schools and brings forward many of the issues facing people, so that people may be able to participate in a dialogue in a knowledgeable fashion.

As well, the Department of Education is always open to input from others, again whether they be parents, whether they be citizens, whether they be First Nation governments, a labour organization, an employer organization or a not-for-profit group. We've even seen it with organizations such as the Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board, when they have an issue that they feel is important to put forward to the schools, and they do so.

There are also other groups such as Food for Learning, which wants to ensure that Yukon youth know about eating healthy foods and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. So these groups do come forward. We work with the Department of Education. There are people tasked in this department to help facilitate this, whether that be the school council liaison officer or the different principals, the teachers, the administrators or, indeed, all the way up to my office.

Mr. Chair, I trust that this answers the member opposite's question as to how we will involve and engage the community in education. Of course, there is always more that we can do, and the Department of Education will strive to be a responsive organization, responding to the needs of the community and incorporating the views, thoughts and opinions of the community into the education of our youth.

Mr. Fairclough: It's nice to get back into asking questions in this department. Although I know the minister struck out many times in providing answers to our questions in this department, he did answer one question, and that was the cost of the Carmacks school. So I thank the minister for that. It was a very simple question and, if you just open up the books, it would have been right there.

I asked the minister a number of questions in regard to the education reform project, particularly the difference between the minister and the Premier on the whole issue of governance.

It is confusing to the general public when the Premier is saying one thing and the minister is saying another. It is reflected, I would think, in the responses that the project team is getting at the public meetings they are holding. The latest one to take place at F.H. Collins Secondary School, for example, I think had one or two members of the public in attendance.

I asked the minister if he would try to clear this matter up somewhat -- the confusion the public has about what these public consultations are. Is it strictly about First Nation education or is the public actually going to have input into reforming our education system? It is important for the minister to clarify that and perhaps more people would attend the meetings scheduled for public consultation on reforming our education system. There is another one tonight, and hopefully I will be able to make that one at Takhini Elementary School. I am interested in hearing what the public has to say about this matter.

I asked the minister why the whole issue of governance was off the table, and the minister proceeded to talk about the different definitions of "governance", but wouldn't say which one of his definitions of "governance" was off the table.

It is unfortunate that we are not getting any clear answers from the members opposite. I know to the minister this is very much a political issue because it is talked about in Cabinet. It is not so much that the minister can get help, I guess, from departmental people who are here in the House in giving some direction on this matter of governance. I was hoping that the minister could clear that up. Is governance on the table for public consultation or not? Because I didn't get an answer, I have to say that it is not on the table like the Premier said.

There's another question in itself. Who is controlling the Department of Education? Who is on top of this? Is it the minister or the Premier?

When the Premier said governance was not on the table, the expression on the minister's face was one of surprise. I'm hoping we could get clarification of that.

I spoke a fair amount about education reform project and didn't get anywhere with this minister again. I thought in Committee of the Whole -- this is not Question Period -- we could resolve some of these matters and get some clear direction from the minister.

I talked about the Carmacks school and the last question I left off with was whether or not the minister was happy with the contractor -- that's Dowland Contracting Ltd. from the Northwest Territories. I hope to hear the answer from the minister on that matter. Two years of construction have taken place. A number of problems have come up in regard to the construction of this school, including a huge cost overrun, completion dates being moved back repeatedly and no sign, other than sometime in 2007, that it will be completed.

Part of the problem here is that the graduates from this school this year -- there are 10, the largest class we've ever had from this school -- were expecting to graduate from a new school but they're not going to have their ceremony there.

They're not going to have their ceremony in the old school; rather it will be in the recreation centre in that community.

Since we're not going to get anywhere with the education reform project on the floor here, I want to continue asking the rest of my questions regarding the new school in Carmacks. I asked about the mould issue and the leaky roof in the new school. Basically, what happens with moisture is that we've created an environment to grow mould. That's a concern with the students and the teachers and with the community because their children are going there.

The minister did talk about continuing discussions with the department on what they will do with the old school. Now, I did express an interest from the community to the minister about perhaps using the gym of the old school for, I guess, whatever the community wants to do with it.

Here's an interesting suggestion that was made by one of the teachers. I know we have this new section of the school that's a multi-purpose room or whatever it is. It's not that big a room. But one of the suggestions was -- and as we move more into local curriculum development and subjects in this matter -- if it was possible to have a canoe shop in there. The other suggestion was: can we have a swimming pool put into the school? Engineers, of course, have to look at whether or not it's the right type of building and so on. Those are two interesting ones. Others talked about automotive programs and so on in that school.

They don't want all of the old school. They want the gym, because the boiler room is right there, and perhaps the wash-rooms -- or even to keep it as a public community building.

I also heard while I was up there during the Ridge Run that one of the issues coming out of this was the fact that the old school was fairly close to the new one -- it looks like about eight or 10 feet -- and I'm not sure if that's an issue. I'm hoping that if the minister has some answers to that, he can give them to us, and if not, give them by legislative return because the community is interested in seeing how far the department is willing to go to save this building that probably has something like 20 years left in its life. The best part of the school is the gymnasium.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The Member for Mayo-Tatchun has put quite a plethora of issues out on the floor of the Assembly here and I did make some notes. I'll try to touch on all of them.

He started with a discussion about education reform and I would like to reiterate for that member -- and indeed for all members -- that the government is committed to reforming education by making changes to the system that will better meet the needs and aspirations of all Yukoners. I've said it before, Mr. Chair -- and I will likely say it many, many more times -- that education is always one of those areas that is in a constant state of self-review, self-renewal and looking forward. We are always changing to meet the new technology, to accommodate new material, to recognize different learning styles and work at being able to better educate our young people and older people for our ever-expanding world we live in.

That being said, we have embarked on this very important project -- the education reform project -- that is a partnership between the Department of Education, the Yukon territorial

government and the Council of Yukon First Nations. We are jointly going forward with this project. We have also recognized that there are First Nation governments in the territory that are not represented by the Council of Yukon First Nations and we have invited them to participate in this process.

The consultation team has been doing an extensive amount of work. They have had some very focused discussions with specific groups throughout the territory, and now they are embarking on much broader public consultation throughout the territory.

We have had some significant discussions in this Assembly on the areas that the education reform principals have directed them to look into. I don't think I need to go into that entire list again with members opposite, but some of the highlights are: how to make more decisions at the community level and how to increase the lines of communication and meaningful collaboration between the schools and First Nations. Now, the education reform team has been directed to go out and conduct territory-wide, meaningful consultations with Yukoners. We want to hear the candid views of Yukoners on issues relating to the youth of Yukon and what their education needs are. We expect the consultations to conclude by the end of June and then there will be a final report very early in the fall of this year.

The Department of Education always needs to respond to the needs of people in the community. That's why we have recognized many of the needs that have been brought forward in the past. The member opposite and other members have discussed these needs and how they have been outstanding for years, and some would say "decades". This government is taking some very active steps in order to best address some of those. Those include things like the creation of the First Nation partnership and programming unit, having aboriginal language teachers in our schools and the Yukon native teacher education program.

As I discussed earlier, in the First Nation curriculum and resource development, a grade 5 First Nation course is being developed, and a grade 10 course for high school is being designed, at a much more detailed level, on self-governance and the land claim agreements.

Mr. Chair, the Department of Education is responding with increased cultural enhancement funding for Yukon schools. Also, we're working with the Council of Yukon First Nations to provide them with additional funding of \$170,000 to provide education support staff. The Department of Education has recognized that there are challenges youth from our communities face in making the transition from community life to life here in Whitehorse, and we anticipate that, with our partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations and their support of education support staff, these positions will help the students from Yukon communities make a successful transition to life here in Whitehorse while they are continuing their education.

Mr. Chair, this budget does detail the expenditure for First Nation elders in the school program. When we get to that item in the budget, members will recognize that there is a significant increase there. As well, the department is responding with First Nation orientation for teachers. We're also recognizing that

there are advancements being made in the art and science of education and recognizing that methods and practices, such as experiential learning, are very important and we're looking at ways of expanding that. As well, we're recognizing the needs in our community, especially with a very active economy that is looking for skilled tradespeople -- people to go into some of the vocations such as carpentry or electrical or plumbing or those types of skilled professions. We are working very actively to look at expanding our vocational programs.

Now, the member opposite did mention that the school in Carmacks will now be graduating 10 students. I believe he said that that was the largest number of students ever. That is a great vote of confidence in the Department of Education's work, the work in that school and the fact that we now have the best-ever participation at that school. I think that's a resounding indicator of the success of the Department of Education, certainly for the students. I mean, they are, first and foremost, the ones who should be congratulated for their accomplishment, for their dedication to their own learning, their dedication to continuing their education, and the hard work that they put into completing the process.

I am glad to see that school in particular is working very hard with the community to address the students' needs. One more point while I'm talking about the school in Carmacks: I think the principal, Mr. Cully Robinson, and some of the teachers, for example, Mr. Peter Menzies -- need to be recognized for the hard work they've put in. When I was recently in Carmacks, I had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Menzies to see some of the technology work he was doing with students there. Whether incorporating First Nation technology or working with computers, he found a way to engage the students, to get them active in their learning, to make them want to come to school and continue their education.

I also believe there has been a business plan project going on in that school that has now received national recognition. I understand students from that school will be attending the Business Development Bank of Canada's high school business plan awards later this year, and they will be recognized nationally for the great work they have done in putting together a business plan.

The Department of Education recognizes that we do need to find different ways to engage youth, keep them active, find ways to help them learn. That's what teaching is really all about. Teaching is one side of the learning equation; in many cases, teachers are the ones who help the students to learn, and it's great to see.

I appreciate the member opposite's comments about how we could use some of the space there, whether it's for some type of canoe manufacturing -- a neat idea. This government is certainly looking at ways of expanding experiential and vocational learning, and I want to work with the department, the schools and the teachers on how we can actually accomplish that.

The member has touched on some very good points. The Department of Education is being responsive to the needs of the community. It's being responsive to the needs of students, and we are all working toward the greater success of our

Yukon youth so they can grow up to lead satisfying and meaningful lives.

The member opposite has also brought forward the issue of the Carmacks school. This government recognized there was a need to build a new school in Carmacks and we actively went to work with the community to see that that was done. I'm very glad to see that we are nearing the completion of that and that we will have a new school that will serve the needs of the community for many, many years to come.

I should note for the member opposite that it is really the purview of the Property Management Agency at this time. It is the entity in government that oversees the construction of it and there will be an occasion in the near future when the keys are handed off to the Department of Education and the Department of Education will then become responsible for it. The Department of Education's involvement has been in working with the community to identify the community's needs and working with the architect and building designer to ensure that the design of the building reflects the pedagogical practices that will help to develop the kids in the best manner possible.

My focus on the debate here would really be to debate the Department of Education and some of the investments that we are making throughout the territory in order to provide the best education possible for all Yukoners. If the member does have specific questions about construction, I guess I'll try to answer them but I am not an expert in the construction. I can tell the difference between a piece of OSB and piece of good, one-sided plywood, but please don't expect me to be up on all of the building code techniques. We have building inspectors who are out there actively working on this project, looking at it to ensure that it is compliant with code. There are engineers and quality assurance people on-site working with the contractor and working with the skilled tradespeople who are doing their best to construct this building. There are checks and balances in the system that are designed to protect the final consumer or user of a building, and there are steps to ensure that all the most appropriate construction policies and practices are followed.

The member opposite has put forward a lot of information in his first question, and I hope I have covered it. If not, I hope I have the opportunity to come back and provide more information.

Mr. Fairclough: I was hoping that, despite another department handling the construction -- whether or not the minister was happy with the contractor. If he was, I would have assumed that he would have said so.

I would like information about the architectural changes that took place. If the minister doesn't have it, could he send it by legislative return?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: It's the Property Management Agency that's overseeing the construction of this. I don't have any information on the architectural changes. It is certainly not this minister's intention to start taking home architectural drawings or to make any changes to them. I'll leave that up to the professionals.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, if the minister can gather that information, it is important. There have been a number of changes like, for example, the types of doors that go into the

classrooms and so on. For the minister's interest, it all adds to the final cost of the building, and that's why I'm asking if that information could be provided.

I'd like to move on. Just to correct the record too -- I did make a mistake. They can be made, even by members on this side of the House. I did say that there was a meeting tonight at Takhini Elementary and, according to the education reform project ads, it is on May 24. I'm glad that information was sent in to me.

Yukon College, Pelly Crossing -- this government is committed to building a new campus there but I don't see any planning money in this budget. I was wondering, if there is, could the minister point it out? When can we see planning money going to a new college in Pelly Crossing?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: We in the territory are very lucky that we currently have a fine institution such as Yukon College. Yukon College is governed by a board of governors who make decisions about their expenditures, their capital and operation and maintenance funding. We in the Department of Education do work very closely, though, with the college. It is, after all, our only post-secondary institution in the territory, and we need to work to ensure that it responds to the needs throughout the territory and that we have facilities in our communities that meet the needs of the territory.

In this budget I believe we have \$750,000 going to Yukon College for their capital budget, which they will then have the discretion to spend. Also, this year, we had the opportunity to provide Yukon College with an additional \$530,000 to be used for capital infrastructure. That money is going to be used to upgrade some of the trades and vocational facilities here at the Whitehorse campus. It is also being used to upgrade some of the trades training trailers. Those trades training trailers, or T-cubed, as you colloquially call it, are designed to be taken out to our communities to respond to a specific training need, to bring with them all the tools and instructional materials that might be needed for a local, community-based training program. That was another \$530,000 that has been invested into the capital infrastructure of Yukon College.

As some of our facilities do age, we will always be looking at how to best address those facilities, whether that's through upgrading them, through replacing them, or through looking at other partners in education that might be able to provide space. We will be looking at all avenues as to how to provide appropriate educational space for Yukoners and indeed throughout the territory, including the community of Pelly Crossing.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Chair, I didn't see any planning money for a community campus at Pelly Crossing. When can we expect money for a new community campus in Pelly Crossing? It does not come out of that \$750,000 that goes to the Yukon College. It does not happen that way. That's not how governments budget for community projects. It would be a separate line item. It's not in here. When can we expect it?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I'll be working with the College Board of Governors as to how to address this situation. I know they recently had a meeting of the College Board of Governors in Dawson City, where the College Board of Governors went up, took a look at that facility, and they also looked

at the facilities in Pelly Crossing. I understand that the facilities in Pelly Crossing are currently being leased, and I believe that the college will be looking at making a similar type of arrangement. I believe that they will be looking for new facilities for next September. That being said, we will continue to work with the college on their long-term infrastructure and planning needs and to ensure that they have the facilities that meet their needs.

Mr. Fairclough: I know the minister tried hard, but he didn't satisfy me with his answer. I was in Pelly Crossing yesterday and talked with a few people, and this Yukon Party government did commit to building a community campus. It doesn't have to go through Yukon College, the board of directors or anything. It's about the community and building a facility there. That's why I asked this question. The community people would like to know. When can we see this planning money? It's not in this year's budget. Does the minister even know that his party committed to building a new community campus there?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: This minister is quite familiar with the platform that was put forward by the Yukon Party -- I'm quite familiar with the platform that was endorsed by Yukoners. They looked at the different platforms put forward; they made a decision about who would best be able to govern the territory and re-elected and elected members on this side of the Assembly. We will be working through our entire mandate to accomplish the objectives, the priorities and the projects that were put forward in the platform. They certainly won't all be addressed overnight, but we will be taking steps actively to address them.

This budget does provide additional capital funding for Yukon College. We are working with Yukon College to ensure their sources of funding do continue to meet their needs. There was an announcement of a transfer of \$530,000 for an increase in capital infrastructure. As well, we are working with Yukon College, Tr'ondek Hwech'in and the Dawson City Arts Society on the provision of the School of Visual Arts in Dawson. There is money in the budget to provide for the launch of that program.

So indeed, the Yukon Party is working very hard to live up to and accomplish the objectives and commitments that were put forward in the platform. I look forward to working with the community in Pelly Crossing, with Yukon College and its Board of Governors to ensure that we have appropriate space for the college in the community immediately and in the years to come.

Mr. Fairclough: If I took that answer to the people in Pelly Crossing, they wouldn't be very satisfied with what the minister had to say.

I'd like to move on. I've raised many times in this House the concerns of the citizens of Mayo. They've done a report; there is continued pressure on everyone to try to make some changes in regard to the education of our children there. There are many issues raised; the department is fully aware of them.

I want to know what the department had done over the last year to address the issues raised in Mayo. What can we expect? Has the minister tabled any reports? How are we going to resolve their issues?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I don't want to take up too much time today in this Assembly in repeating myself, but if the member opposite does have an opportunity to review the Blues, he could take a look at the answer that I gave at the beginning of the day on how to involve Yukoners in the education of their children, whether it is by meeting with the teachers or the principal or the Department of Education or working with the school council.

One of the important tools that a school council does have is the adoption of the school plan. The school plan outlines some of the objectives, some of the ways and some of the means of providing education and the delivery of education to children in their school. I would encourage the school council to be involved with that school plan and, if there are issues with how the plan is being implemented, there are avenues to bring that to the Department of Education's attention so that we can take steps to ensure that the school plan is meeting the needs of the community and is being implemented efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Fairclough: That's a very poor commitment on the part of the minister. I've been raising issues with his department in regard to Mayo for a long time and the minister is just sloughing it off on his system. He won't engage himself as a minister in resolving any of these issues. There is no commitment to talk with the First Nation on this matter at all; there is no commitment to go into the community to talk with the public on these issues and to try to resolve it. It is too bad. Let's move on.

The teachers every year do take money out of their own pockets to provide supplies for students in the schools. I think the average is about \$500 out of their pocket. Is the department at all committed to ensuring that there is some kind of teacher tax credit to put the money back into their pockets?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I apologize for the delay here. We're just looking for some of the specific numbers to address the member's question.

Indeed, the government has taken very seriously the needs of the schools and our educators to provide the programming and services that we do. It was only a couple of years ago that this government undertook a major school needs project -- the budget for that was \$1 million -- where the minister of the day and others visited all Yukon schools, I believe, to identify programming and needs in each school and were able to address those.

Also, we have in this budget a significant amount, \$305,000, for cultural programming dollars, which are available to schools, so they will have a budget to provide many of their special programs. These funds can be used for things like buying supplies for the bison hunt or putting on a community feast or working with the community to buy other materials for drum-making projects or woodworking projects or that type of thing.

I am working very closely with my colleagues to find ways to expand our funding for vocational and experiential education. I think those are very important initiatives in the program. There has been significant dedication from teachers. I said

many times that teaching is a passion, it's a driving force, and people get into it, and our teachers really do give their all.

I know there are many teachers out there who make personal contributions, whether they buy additional materials or treats or stickers or prizes for their students or professional materials for themselves. This government has really focused on being able to provide the schools and the teachers with the funding they need to have the school make those acquisitions and programs.

There has been some discussion by different parties about tax breaks that are profession specific. When people have looked at them in the past, if people made the maximum allowable expenditure of \$500 -- I am not sure how the member opposite has come up with that statistic so maybe he could share the background on that with me -- I believe the tax break on that was about \$55. So there was a significant amount of paperwork to go through to have a bit of tax savings. It has been the government's objective to ensure that the teachers have the best materials possible and sufficient materials to work with for their kids, and we will work with the schools and the school councils to provide them with the funding they need to offer programming in the schools.

Mr. Fairclough: This information came straight from the teachers themselves. Regardless of what government does for improvements to bring in materials or whatnot, they still have out-of-pocket costs that I think the department will never be able to address. Teachers know what is needed in the class because they deal with it day to day. Sometimes they have to purchase things for the next day and they can't wait to go through government processes. The amount they looked at was \$500. I asked whether or not the department is considering such a tax credit up to \$500.

I would like to ask the minister this question: would he look into it, in the interest of teachers?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I am going to take this opportunity to thank all teachers for the incredible work they provide and for their dedicated service. I thank them for making the personal investment in educating all our kids. It is often a very thankless profession, but I would like to pass on my sincere thanks to them for doing this.

I will continue to work with my colleagues and the Minister of Finance to ensure that the Department of Education receives adequate funding to provide the services for education through the territory. I will continue to work with my Cabinet colleagues on allocating resources to ensure that the needs in our schools are met, whether for books or for extracurricular materials or different supplies. I want to work with our school administrators, the department and the teachers to ensure they have the appropriate tools they need to do the job.

Mr. Chair, if there is a specific question on taxation and how that would apply to income tax, I would ask the member to raise that with the Minister of Finance, as it's the Minister of Finance's purview to work with the Government of Canada on tax credits and the whole tax regime. I would encourage him to bring that up, but I will make the commitment to work with my colleagues to ensure that the needs we have for the right tools in the classroom and in our schools are met.

Mr. Fairclough: I just asked the minister to look into it. That would have been a commitment. He said he worked with his colleagues, but he didn't say that he'd look into this tax credit. It's unfortunate. You know, a lot of these issues could have been resolved in general debate on the budget itself but, guess what? The Premier wanted to go into specifics, so we end up asking these questions in departments, where we get referred to somewhere else. You know what? That minister is going to refer to someone else, and it gets lost. That is part of the problem in moving away from past practice in this House.

Okay, no commitment there. And it's too bad, because it's teachers' out-of-pocket money.

The minister did say that, in the past, they've provided this one-time money of \$1 million to address some of the priorities of schools, and a lot of them did come up with some projects. That is good. I would like to know if the minister is interested in setting up an innovation fund that students, teachers, school councils and the schools can apply to for monies that don't fit into any other programs that we have here. It's all about innovation. I was wondering if the minister would consider that. Perhaps in the fall, if the department could look into that a little more clearly and bring some information to this House, I could ask that question again. It would be great for any of the teachers or students or school councils to think of new and interesting and innovative things that they want to do. It could be where students are perhaps having problems in certain areas and can apply for monies, for example, in film making and so on. Maybe that's not the best example to use, because some students have already gone down that road. I'm thinking about students in Pelly Crossing over the past years and so on.

That's one example other schools can apply for. I think that perhaps we could see some really interesting things come out of this if they had an avenue to apply for dollars that do not exist in any other program.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: My colleagues are reminding me that we always try to take under advisement some of the good ideas that our schools come up with and we try to find ways of accommodating them.

In one of the schools in my own community -- for example the Ghuch Tla Community School in Carcross -- the principal, Brian Shanahan, has done some great work with kids with power point presentations and making videos. We saw one just a couple of weeks ago where the school went out on a bison hunt and the students put together a video of their successful hunt. It was a really neat way of learning and great way of communicating with others. That is one of the cornerstones of our education system: we want to work with people to teach them how to communicate.

We always do try to recognize good ideas and to make changes in our curriculum to adapt to it. We always try to make changes to our school-based budgets to allow them to have the flexibility to acquire some different tools, different materials. School councils have involvement in how those monies are budgeted.

We do have the cultural inclusion program, which has an amount of \$305,000 in it this year. It allows different schools to tap into this budget to provide programs or neat events in their

communities, so we have been very responsive to the needs brought forward in our community.

Earlier on the member opposite commented that I didn't make a commitment and I am afraid I need to correct the record on that. I did make a commitment to work with my colleagues in Cabinet and with the Minister of Finance to ensure that we have the appropriate tools, supplies and materials in our Yukon schools necessary to provide a good quality education.

I also recognize that there is a need out there for more experiential learning programs and more vocational training. I will commit to working with my colleagues to expand that. I think there are many opportunities throughout the territory where we can engage Yukon youth to facilitate their learning, to keep them interested, and help them to acquire the skills necessary for involvement in the workforce and involvement in a happy, meaningful life. We will always work with all our partners in education and our teachers and school administrators to ensure that we have the right tools needed to provide the best education possible. I trust that responds to the member opposite's question.

Mr. Fairclough: It's a response, but I didn't hear the minister say that he's interested in creating this innovation fund. I've listed working with schools and trying to get some of their projects funded and so on.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Fairclough: You are?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: It sounds like an interesting idea. I'm not going to commit to doing it, but I'll commit to ask: does it make sense to do this? We have a fund for cultural activities. Do we need to have a fund for other programs? I'm not a really big fan of always just setting up different funds.

What I am a fan of is providing the budget so the people can make the best decisions for what they need and make decisions that are responsive to their community's needs. But it could be something to look at.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that and hope that he's not accusing this side of the House of providing direction to him on matters. I know it's only a few, but I've listed a lot of concerns with respect to the Carmacks school and there are a lot of things that the department could be looking into.

I have one final question about the school council in Old Crow. A principal is being hired. Is this principal going to be hired in the absence of the school council?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I had a discussion yesterday with the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin about this issue and again, earlier today, right before session, I did have an opportunity to have a chat with him. There is a school council in Old Crow and our superintendent of schools for that area is in the community right now and is working with community members to ensure community involvement in the process for bringing in a new principal.

Mr. Edzerza: I just have a couple of questions I'd like to ask the minister, but first I'd like to start out by saying I can't believe what I just heard from him a few minutes ago. I think this is the first time I have ever heard the phrase "teaching is a thankless profession." I've always heard praise for teachers and

I certainly hope that isn't the truth, because they are very valuable to everyone in the community.

I feel obligated to ask a couple of questions on the issue of the education reform project because, in my humble opinion, things were going very well with the education reform process. I don't know where or when it went sideways, but apparently it has. First Nations, I believe, are attempting to establish a sense of belonging. This is part of the culture of First Nation people, to develop that sense of belonging. If there is no sharing of responsibilities in the decision making, First Nations will feel they are being rejected again.

Ever since I have been involved in territorial politics, I have heard over and over and over again from different levels of government the concern about First Nations and the difficulties they have in the education system. In my humble opinion, again, I believe part of the reason for this is because First Nations feel they are not being heard and this system belongs to the government, so they don't get involved as much as they should.

My question would be: was it the government's decision in isolation? Was it made because of public pressure or maybe some pressure from another political body? What made the government decide to put restrictions on what was included or excluded from the education reform process?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: There are a lot of thankless professions out there where people do invest a lot of time, energy and commitment. I think the profession that we find ourselves in is often a thankless position. We have all made a commitment to work in the best interest of our communities and our constituents and to bring forward their issues and concerns and, in this type of format, we are often more criticized than thanked. It is very infrequent that a member from the opposition thanks a member on the government side for making a right decision or a good investment. Thanks are few and far between. I know it is the nature of an opposition to oppose, but there are instances, I am sure, where all members could agree that government is making a good decision or a good investment.

I mentioned that teaching is often considered a thankless profession. My mother was and is a teacher. There were days when she would come home, and she would be tired and frustrated, and she would question the value of what she was doing, and she would feel very down. She would get up the next day, go back to her classroom and work with her kids, and she would find her reward wherever she could, whether that was having a child say thank you or when a child was having one of those moments where he or she grasps a subject. My mother has been retired for several years now, and she recently had an incident where one of her old students had managed to track her down. My mother moved residences last fall and she was in a new house with a new telephone number, but one of her own students, a young fellow by the name of Ben who is now 18 years old, had finally tracked her down at Christmastime with a gift. Even though he hadn't been a student of hers for about 10 years, she had made such a profound difference in his life that Ben tracked my mother down, brought her a Christmas present, and said thank you. I think that is incredibly valuable.

I think that each of us, if we pause and reflect on education and the educators who have had an impact on us -- I think it is an incredible exercise to track them down. The Internet is a great tool now, and you can find practically anybody quite easily. If there was an educator who made a difference in your life -- and I expect that there was at least one or two for each one of us in this Assembly -- take a moment on a Saturday afternoon, track them down, and say thank you.

I should add that I was asked to speak at the Yukon Teachers Association annual general meeting a couple of weeks ago. When we started that meeting off, the first thing that I asked everyone in the room to do -- there were several hundred teachers there, but I asked them to stand up, turn to the right so they could see the back of the person sitting next to them, raise their right hand, and then gently and thankfully pat the person on the back in front of them and thank them for their job.

All our teachers need to be thanked. All our teachers must be recognized for their significant contribution to the lives of young people in the territory. Every chance we get, we should take the opportunity to thank a teacher, as I've done today, and recognize there are some great educators out there. Let's recognize them and let's praise them for their accomplishments and make sure they feel they are a valued, contributing and important part of our community.

I thank you, Mr. Chair, for indulging me in having that moment to set the record straight on that one.

With the education reform project, I've mentioned this a number of times in the Assembly. We in the territorial government recognize that changes or improvements need to be made to the educational system to ensure we increase the outcomes and opportunities for all members in our education system, especially for those of First Nation ancestry.

This budget does go through a significant number of areas where we are putting our money where our mouth is and making the commitment to work with the community, to work with people to provide material that is culturally relevant, provide educators who are culturally sensitive, provide enough teachers to work with our young people and make investments in our community so we can have the best education system possible.

The education reform project has been struck. It has been given the task of providing a final report that will identify key issues and goals in education, outline barriers and recommend strategies to remove those barriers. That is their key task. I believe that was the task of the education reform project when it was originally conceived and it was the task that was originally given to the group by the member opposite, when he was the Education minister.

It was the goal that was created when the different proponents or partners in this project sat down and identified what it would do. Again, this is a project that is done in partnership with the territorial government and the Council of Yukon First Nations. A seat has been provided to those First Nations who are not members of the Council of Yukon First Nations and it is this executive group that has the task, duty and responsibility of overseeing the education reform project.

I have tabled the directions the principals have given to the education reform team. Many, many times in this Assembly,

members have heard me discuss the objectives of the project and some of the areas to be engaged in and focused on.

The members have seen the letter of direction signed by the Minister of Education, the chair of the Chiefs Committee on Education, and the chair of the Liard First Nation. As the letter states, the principals of the education reform project have met and determined the best steps forward for the education consultation. We have met, we have provided direction; we will continue to meet and continue to work together.

Once we get the report of the education reform team, we'll take a look at their recommendations and the various orders of government will look at how to best incorporate some or all of the recommendations. I can't say that every recommendation of every report that I haven't read will be incorporated, but the various orders of government will take a look at the recommendations and see how they can be addressed and incorporated into our educational systems in the territory.

As we go forward, the Department of Education will continue to do an analysis of how it is achieving its goals and objectives of education. I know members in this Assembly don't want to discuss the goals and objectives of education, but the Department of Education certainly does. We will review the direction we're going in, we will review the goals, we will review our objectives, and we will continue to review how the implementation of our projects and the expenditure of funds match with these goals and what the intended outcomes of the system are.

We will continue to meet with our partners of education, be they First Nation governments, school committees, school boards, school councils, or the business community, the labour community, the francophone community, the Catholic community and other stakeholders and partners in education, to ensure that the broad objectives and needs of the community are being met and are reflected in our educational system.

We will be in a state of reform and renewal in order to meet the ever-changing needs and expectations of our education system. I look forward to working with the new co-chair that has been identified by the Council of Yukon First Nations and with my other partners in the project, and seeing the project through to completion. I also look forward to working with the teachers and educators in the Department of Education, to best address the recommendations that are made on how we can change and modify our public education system here in the Yukon in order to best meet the needs of all Yukoners.

Mr. Edzerza: I don't believe the minister even came close to answering the question. For the record, I would like to state that the new co-chair that the minister -- I just read a press release where that very co-chair says he already has problems with the direction set down by the Premier, that governance is off the table. I don't know how this minister can stand up and say they are working collaboratively when that is the second co-chair who has said they have an issue here.

However, I felt obligated to make some comments on this because, as a citizen of this territory, I am very concerned about the negative impacts the failure of this process could have. I have been thinking about this issue for some time. What is going to happen to the education system if this process fails?

I certainly was not in favour of splitting up the education program. In the past I wasn't, but today I am not so certain about that.

I'm almost compelled to believe that if this process fails, then all the First Nations have to band together and take over education. They are going to be forced into that, and that might cause some jeopardy to a new school being built in Granger, for example. It may have a lot of impact on all the elementary schools in the Whitehorse area, especially. I think it is not unbelievable that First Nations have the capability to do this, because I believe they do and I think they will have ample support from outside of this territory and inside of this territory from retired educators to educators who are active superintendents and whatnot in other provinces. There already has been some communication on that.

I would like to ask the minister to go back to his colleagues and have more discussions on being willing to share responsibilities, and to reconsider their position about excluding First Nations from being part of the decision making here. After all, I mentioned yesterday that at one time this jurisdiction belonged to the First Nations until the influx of non-native people came to this territory. The First Nations were the first peoples of this territory, and now they are becoming second-class citizens of this territory.

When it comes to decision-making processes, they need to have more input than they have. I just asked the minister to have more discussions with his colleagues and to reconsider this decision to exclude the First Nations from having any say in the jurisdiction, because after all, the First Nations shared the country with the people. Now, I think the governments are obligated to share some of the responsibilities with the First Nations.

Will the minister go back and ask his colleagues to reconsider this?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I would first like to thank the Member for McIntyre-Takhini for his comments today. I appreciate hearing his different perspective on things. I've said it to him before -- I said that before when we were colleagues -- that I appreciate the different perspective that he brings. He and I don't always see eye to eye -- in fact, I don't agree with some of the comments that he just made here today, but I appreciate his point of view, the perspective that he brings and the wisdom that he shares.

I would also like to thank the member for some of his past efforts in the Department of Education. I think he was a very good advocate for education. He certainly worked very hard with a lot of his colleagues on some aspects of education. I would like to thank him for his past good work. I would like to wish the member opposite luck in his role. I hope that he finds a good fit with his colleagues and that he can continue to work in the best interests of his constituents.

I would, however, like to caution -- and it is a friendly word of caution -- about bringing forward comments made by other people into this Assembly. In this Assembly it is our role to put forward our positions and our thoughts. If there is a quote from someone else, I would encourage him to find ap-

propriate ways to do so in a manner that does not allow for the misinterpretation or misrepresentation.

I look forward to working very closely with the new co-chair and the other partners in the education reform project to ensure that it is successful. The Grand Chief, the Premier and I have, on separate but many occasions, had discussions about the importance of the reform project and the Grand Chief said that failure was not an option in this, that this project must succeed, that we must find ways of improving an already very good education system in order to make it more responsive to other needs in the communities.

The member does have my commitment that I will work with my partners in this project to ensure that it does come forward with recommendations that will lead to a better education system or education systems throughout the territory. It is also very important to recognize that Yukon's self-governing First Nations have significant rights, responsibilities, opportunities and obligations. They have the ability to make choices in order to provide the best governance possible for their citizens. They, as an order of government, have the right to make those decisions as they see fit.

Mr. Chair, I will commit to working with my colleagues to provide the best possible public government system to all Yukoners. I will commit to being responsive to the needs of communities, and I will find ways to involve all Yukoners -- Yukoners of First Nation ancestry, Yukoners who speak French, Yukoners who are Catholic, Yukoners who live in Whitehorse, Yukoners who live outside of Whitehorse, Yukoners who are young, and Yukoners who are old. I will strive to involve all Yukoners in education in the Yukon.

It is important to have these different perspectives. It's important to have the different ideas. It's important to make decisions -- here in the Assembly, here with the budget and outside of the Assembly in the Department of Education, in our schools and in our classrooms, outside of our classrooms -- that best allow for education to take place. We in the territory all have a responsibility to educate our youth, whether we be community members or parents or elders, or you name it. Everyone has a role to play in either the formal or informal education of Yukon's youth.

I will do my best to work to provide a system that will help our young people develop the skills and abilities that they need in order to grow up and lead meaningful lives in our community.

Mr. Cardiff: For the record, I'd just like to clarify with the minister that the comments my colleague was referring to were made on the radio. If the minister would read the radio transcripts, he could read them for himself verbatim.

I'd like to start out a little differently here today. The minister said something about you don't often get thanked -- or, people don't often get thanked. I'd like to start today by complimenting the school bus driver that I recently moved out to the Carcross Road -- what I call the beautiful Mount Lorne -- for the minister.

Actually, it's quite beautiful out there. It reminds me of Haines Junction, only not as many people -- not as many tourists -- but there are way more dogs.

I'd like to compliment the bus driver I either end up passing or following, because he's probably one of the most courteous drivers I've ever seen on the highway. He consistently pulls over and lets cars by when he's picking up students. I think that's good for highway safety -- which I'm sure the Minister of Highways and Public Works is interested in -- but it's also good for our students to have safe transportation and not have a bunch of irritated, in-a-hurry drivers piled up, waiting to try and speed by a school bus. So, I'd just like to pay that bus driver a compliment. I think that's really admirable -- the extra length that he goes to. I've seen it quite a bit in the last little while.

I'd like to delve into some of the comments that the minister made in his opening comments -- in one of the opening comments that he made. This is about a level of service in our schools. I would like the minister to clarify this. I don't have the percentage in front of me and I can't even remember if the minister used a percentage, but he said there is a high level of access to computers and ADSL in the school system in the Yukon -- higher than anywhere else. If the minister has that figure in front of him, I would appreciate hearing it one more time and then I have another question for him.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: According to a 2004 national report issued by Statistics Canada on information and communications technology, the study indicated that, on average, every 2.9 Yukon students have access to one computer with high-speed Internet at their school. The national ratio of students to computers is 5.5 to one.

The Department of Education recognizes the value of this technology and recognizes that this is a very important tool to work with and train our youth on. The department has made a very significant investment in technology in providing it in the classroom. Also, as we are in the north and communication is often a challenge, I think the Yukon has embraced Internet access much more than in other jurisdictions across Canada. We recognize how valuable a tool it is, and that is why we made the investment to provide a computer for every 2.9 students in the classroom.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for that answer, actually. I appreciate that, and it is admirable, and I think it's good for our students to learn -- it just seems to be the way of the future. I know somehow I got sucked into it too. My next question: the minister's saying one computer for every 2.9 students. Can he break that down and compare the Whitehorse urban area to the rural communities? Does he know what the difference in that ratio is?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I don't have the number of computers per school handy. We'll endeavour to find that information for him. Perhaps that could be one of those other indicators that we include in the school's annual report. There is a very high investment in computers that do go out to our rural communities. They, too, have access to them.

Also, it should be noted that not every child is going to need a computer at all times of the day. So the child might have access to a computer for two or three hours in the morning or three or four hours in the afternoon. There is a bit of a difference, too, between our primary school allocation and the sec-

ondary school allocation. Really, it depends on when the child needs to have access to these types of tools.

Yukon youth have embraced the technology and use it quite a bit, and we're glad that we can provide the tools necessary to provide them with a positive learning atmosphere and the tools necessary to be very current with their education.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for that answer. I look forward to receiving that. This will probably come up later, and I just want to ensure that the services that are available in Whitehorse are available at a comparable level, I guess, in rural Yukon -- which would lead me to another service that's provided through the schools but may not be the minister's responsibility. I'd like to know because I think it is a matter of concern for the minister, seeing as how it's providing services in the school to our students. It's about their health at school. I actually have a couple of questions in this regard.

I'm curious whether the minister has had any conversations at all with the Minister of Health and Social Services regarding dental therapy services in the school. It is a very important thing for children to ensure they're educated about keeping their teeth healthy and that they have the services of a dental therapist. Dental therapists -- as the minister put it earlier -- often consider themselves to be in a thankless profession too, especially with the wages they get paid. They get paid way more in other jurisdictions and they get paid way more in the private sector than they do working for this government.

Unfortunately, the government does a fairly poor job of recruiting and retaining dental therapists. I know that's a matter for the Health and Social Services minister, and I can put that minister on notice now that my colleague or I will probably be bringing that up with him.

I think it's important, because it is an important service for our children and it's important for their health. There seems to be a shortage of dental therapists available to provide that service here in the Yukon.

Has he had any conversations with the Health and Social Services minister regarding dental therapists?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I want to follow up on the member opposite's previous question regarding computers in our schools and how they were supported in 2005-06. The information technology and support services responded to over 3,000 help calls throughout the year. They visited all the schools over the summer break and updated them with the latest versions of the curriculum software. I believe they might even have the technology to do some of that remotely so they can do that as software updates come in. I did have an opportunity to meet with the information and technology support services branch and they also have a thankless job in keeping the thousands of computers in our system updated and consistent with technology. As you can imagine, when there is a new software upgrade -- whether it's Vista or the Mac operating systems -- they do have a challenging job in getting them all upgraded. I remember in a past career, where I was involved with computer sales, I was selling them grosses of mice balls because the computer mice were being taken apart and used inappropriately. So they do have a challenging job in keeping all of the technology up to speed.

Porter Creek Secondary School, Del Van Gorder School, Ross River school, l'École Émilie Tremblay and Wood Street Centre School received new hardware for their computer labs. Network hardware infrastructure in Yukon schools was upgraded to allow for future fibre optic capability. Whitehorse Elementary School and Wood Street Centre were upgraded to fibre optic connectivity.

With regard to other issues and specifically with health issues, I'd like to tell the member opposite that this government does take a very cohesive, unified approach. We don't have the approach of one department being responsible or working in silos; we work very closely with our colleagues. There are some initiatives that involve Health and Social Services, that involve Justice, and we do work very collaboratively across the Cabinet and caucus table.

The Minister of Health and Social Services and I have had several different discussions on the health of young people in the territory. It is an issue that he is concerned about and one that I am concerned about. We have had discussions regarding dental therapy; we have had discussions regarding food for learning; we have had discussions regarding active living; we have had discussions regarding the *Canada Food Guide*; we've had these discussions around the Cabinet table and in our own face-to-face chats as well.

So, yes, the Department of Education is very interested and very concerned about the health, growth and development of students beyond just the cognitive learning. We are working with the whole child, their future health and how they prepare themselves to make healthy lifestyle choices in the future, whether that be around substance abuse or whether that be around dental care or whether that be around active living or whether it involves the food that they eat. We do recognize that there is a role for the Department of Education to play in that. As I'm sure the member opposite can expect, the role and breadth of material that we are working with to help the children is ever expanding.

In our primary schools, our key focus is on literacy and numeracy. We also have the responsibility to work on our other programs: science, history, languages, culture, art, music, drama, vocational training -- everything. We do try to work with our teachers to include in the curriculum information that will lead to healthy lifestyle choices in the future, especially regarding dental care, eating right and active living.

Mr. Cardiff: What I really wanted to know was whether or not the minister had asked the Minister of Health and Social Services to try to get the department to hire more dental therapists so that we could have dental therapy services delivered in our schools.

One of the things, actually, that I became aware of when I first became an MLA was a pilot project at Golden Horn School, much in the same vein, I guess, as what we were just discussing. It was a pilot project for vision screening. For young people to be able to be literate and be able to have numeracy skills, they need to be able to read what's on the board. They need to be able to read what's in front of them. The project at Golden Horn School was actually quite successful. It was actually done by volunteers, which is something that this

government would probably really think is good, because it doesn't impact as much on their budget. I think it's a valuable project, and it helps students. The idea of the project is to refer students who have vision problems, have those problems screened, and refer them to an optometrist so that they can see what's on the board, they can see what's in front of them in the book, and I think that it has proven itself so valuable that it warrants a territory-wide application. I'm wondering if the minister has considered that or if something like that will be implemented in the near future.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The member opposite has brought forward some very important issues. We do spend an awful lot of time with the kids and see them on a day-to-day basis so there is that recognition.

I know from my personal experience -- I wear glasses and it was recognized fairly early when I was reading with a book next to my nose that I had a vision problem. That was discussed with my mother on a regular basis. It wasn't so much a professional diagnosis as it was pretty obvious that I had a vision problem.

So I know that those are issues that do come up, and teachers do meet with parents. They discuss not only the intellectual development of the child, but also their social and physical development. We also have professionals in our schools, whether they be the speech and language pathologists or the other physiotherapists, to work with children who do have challenges, whether they be diagnosed challenges or just needs that are recognized. We have the ability to respond to that. Of course, vision is one of those important things that the professionals who deal with the sensory perceptions would work with.

I appreciate the member bringing the issue forward. I don't have any specific statistics or indicators on it with me at this time. I will make a point of discussing it with the special programs people. They do an awful lot of work, as I said, with physiotherapy, language and hearing difficulties. The Department of Education is very responsive to the needs of folks.

Also, if I can just touch on the member's comment about dental therapists, the Minister of Health and Social Services very much recognizes the need to have dental therapists, and he does recognize the need to staff the department appropriately and according to the need. I know he does work very hard to provide the best possible level of staffing in his department and for our departments throughout the territory.

Mr. Cardiff: With regard to dental therapists, it just occurred to me that it is actually a three-way street -- where the problem is. Number one, the Minister of Education needs to put pressure on the Minister of Health and Social Services, and the Minister of Health and Social Services needs to put pressure on the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission so they can basically be recognized through the collective bargaining process and be paid appropriately. This is something that I mentioned earlier -- that the wages and retention for dental therapists is part of the problem.

With regard to the vision screening, I hope the minister is not missing my point here. I am not suggesting that every class in every school get screened every year. This was done by vol-

unteers, and with proper training -- if the Department of Education had someone who could train the volunteers to do this, it would make a big difference.

It is like dental services. Rural dental services are not very available. Rural optometry services are not very available either. So if you can screen those kids and identify them in grades 1, 3, and 5 or something like that, and have a group of community volunteers do that screening, or a couple people in the department who would travel from school to school and do a screening project like that, it would be very helpful to our students.

I am just going to change here a little bit. I heard the Member for Mayo-Tatchun talking about the desire of the community of Pelly Crossing to have a new college campus.

As somebody who is intimately familiar with that facility -- although, I freely admit that I haven't been there for awhile -- it has been an issue for quite awhile. It's something that really needs to be addressed in that community. I think it is incumbent upon the government to step forward on projects like that.

That brings me to another commitment this government made during the last election. This commitment may not be too well-known, and that's unfortunate. I hope the Premier listens to this because this is a commitment he made during the election in Watson Lake.

I know the government says it has a big commitment to trades training, but he made a commitment to a vocational training centre in Watson Lake. Could the minister identify any monies in the budget that are in there for this facility or for planning or some sort of consultation? The Premier announced it prior to a consultation process and I'm wondering if the minister could fill me in on that.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I think the member appreciates that, sometimes when I'm up answering the question, other folks are finding additional information, so sometimes I do have a bit more information to share with him regarding the previous question.

I wanted to let him know about the special programs branch, which is part of public schools. In that, there are 14 positions and it addresses areas such as psychological services, speech language programs, occupational therapy and sensory impairments.

These professionals do work with our schools and with our teachers. They do work here in Whitehorse, and there is significant travel for staff to visit other communities and schools.

With regard to the area of vocational training and trades training, I know that this is a very important topic and one that came up as we went door to door and met with all our constituents during the last election. I know the Premier has extensive consultations and contact with his constituents in Watson Lake and they do certainly contact him directly with issues of importance to them.

One of the priorities I think we've all heard about throughout the entire territory was the importance of developing a skilled workforce. I know throughout the territory, and indeed throughout all of Canada, there has been more importance placed on other areas of education. For example, when I went to school, it was expected that everyone would go on to univer-

sity and there wasn't as much encouragement to pursue a career in one of the professional trades as maybe there should have been. I think it's really important that we work with the different groups in the territory, be they Skills Canada or some of the union organizations, and indeed the Department of Education's advanced education branch looks at trades training to promote that area.

I know the member opposite is very well versed in the Women in Trades program and initiative. I think that has been a very successful one in recent years in encouraging people, especially females, to participate in trades. In fact, right now at Yukon College and throughout the territory, we have very high participation levels in some of our trades training areas.

So we will continue to work with Yukon College and with our different schools to provide different learning opportunities, be they experiential learning opportunities or vocational opportunities. If the member had an opportunity, when he was in Carmacks seeing the new school -- I don't know if he had a chance to see some of their technology classes, but the work the students were doing there was very impressive.

In regard to Watson Lake in particular, I know there is a planning exercise underway in the Watson Lake Secondary School to include skill development programming. So, work is being done in that community to expand its skills development programming. I want to assure the member opposite that we will be working throughout the territory to expand and develop skills, vocational and experiential learning opportunities for all Yukoners.

Mr. Cardiff: It is interesting that the minister brings up the Carmacks project. I did see the shops and it was quite gratifying to see some of the materials installed there when I had had the opportunity to build with some of those materials and make the fittings for some of the ventilation in the shop.

The minister knows that I, as tradesperson, am a supporter of trades training. I am well versed in that area. The Premier made a commitment to a vocational training centre in Watson Lake -- what shape or form does that take? Is it something that happens in existing facilities? Is it a new facility? Is there money in the budget for that new facility and to equip that new facility?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the member opposite's zeal to see a change happen. There is a process that we need to go through with this. There are facilities in Watson Lake, and there is an exercise underway right now to look at what exactly is needed -- what space requirements are needed for that, what the options are for space, whether the existing spaces could be used, and what additional budget would be required in order to provide this type of programming.

There are planning exercises that have to be done. It is impossible all of the time to make an announcement and then the next day tell people what colour the paint will be on the outside of the building. I would ask the member to allow us the opportunity to work with the school and the folks in the community to develop an appropriate project.

We are going to continue to work with all Yukoners. I'm very happy to hear that the member opposite was gratified to see some of the programs going on in our communities. It's

great to hear that kind of positive reinforcement that what we're doing in our schools is good and that we are going in the right direction.

I think we have a lot of very positive indicators that we are going in the right direction in a lot of areas. For example, when we look at our apprenticeship program, as of April 1, there were 346 Yukon residents registered as apprentices. Of those apprentices, 20 percent were Yukon First Nation individuals and 27 of them were women.

From 2001 to 2006, 163 graduating Yukon apprentices achieved trade certification. Of those, 147 also earned their inter-provincial standards, or Red Seal, meaning that their certification is recognized across Canada.

We are working very hard with the Yukon apprenticeship program to provide Yukoners the ability to develop the necessary work skills that they need to succeed in the very gratifying and satisfying area of a trade career.

We will continue to work with our partners in education. We will continue to work with the communities and with Yukon College to provide the best possible programs we can.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Chair, with regard to the vocational training facility in Watson Lake, I'm supportive of it. The minister said, I believe, that there are facilities available there, and therein comes the problem. I actually spoke with the minister about this last fall and I hope that something has been done to address this issue. I spoke with him about it outside the Legislature because I was concerned.

There is a building adjacent to the school in Watson Lake and it was provided to that community on the understanding -- this is the way that I understood it from a person who visited that community and was talking with people there. There is a facility and it was provided to that community cultural activities. It was to doing things like trapping workshops, like drum making and beading and other traditional pursuits such as drying of food and tanning of hides.

The unfortunate part is that they built this nice building but there were no programming dollars for it.

There is a segment of the population down there to whom that would be very valuable -- to have that type of facility, to have the opportunity at school to learn about their traditional culture and to have other students learn about the first people's traditional culture in that area. It would also be a valuable way of engaging First Nation elders and other elders from the community in the education system in Watson Lake. But if there are no dollars attached to programming, a facility is not going to be enough. I spoke to a group of people in Dawson last weekend about political will, and that's what it takes. It takes political will to do this kind of thing. You need to believe in what it is you're doing.

There were concerns raised in that community that that facility would be taken away, and that's what would be used for a vocational training facility. As much of a tradesperson and supporter of trades training that I am, I am not a supporter of doing it at the expense of local traditional cultural activities in our schools. I think we need to pay equal attention to both of those things.

So can the minister provide me with some assurance that this building that was provided in Watson Lake for traditional cultural activities is not going to be the vocational training centre? Will he also give me a commitment to ensure that there is money in this budget somewhere for programming for this facility in Watson Lake? I'm talking about the facility where students can pursue traditional cultural activities with other members of the community.

Chair: Order please.

Committee of the Whole will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 6, *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, Vote 3, Department of Education.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the comments from the Member for Mount Lorne regarding the importance of special programming and cultural-related programming going on in our schools. In fact, this is a very important initiative that the government is very happy to support.

We are actively supporting this process with our cultural inclusion program. Cultural inclusion funding is available to all Yukon schools for the development and implementation of cultural activities, projects and programming. The funding starts with a base of \$5,000 and then an additional \$25 per student based on the previous June's enrolment is calculated. The amount budgeted for 2007-08 is \$305,000. The cultural inclusion program funding initiative involves the schools, school councils and the First Nation communities working together to increase and improve the cultural programs, projects and activities in the classroom and throughout the entire school.

The cultural inclusion funds in the past have been used for cultural activities such as carving, moccasin making, beadwork, bison hunts, canoe building and other cultural project materials for the classroom and for culture camps.

A new application process was initiated for 2006-07 for the cultural inclusion program funding as it is designed to increase the collaboration for cultural inclusion at the community and school level. The three parties who are encouraged to complete the funding proposals together include the school, the First Nation and school council representatives. The funds then can be directed to the school or to the First Nation to administer. The amount that is being requested in this budget is \$305,000. This is in addition to programs and funding allocated for projects such as the elders in the school program, First Nation language program and for the community-based orientation program.

We have taken the matter very seriously -- the one that the member opposite brought up -- and we are putting funding forward in our schools support them in putting on the programming that the member opposite was talking about. We do make funds available to the schools to put on this programming. We are also working with the community to design the type of programming. We also have to work with the students to ensure that they are interested in the programming and that they do want to participate in it.

In all facets of school life, we try to make it attractive and interesting to the students to gain their interest, but I think the member knows, as a parent, sometimes it is a challenge to interest all kids in all things all of the time.

With regard to Watson Lake vocational training, the Department of Education has met with the Watson Lake Secondary School administration and the Watson Lake school council and Liard First Nation to discuss vocational training needs of the community. I would expect that, at the same time, there was discussion about the cultural inclusion and the type of cultural programming going on. It is expected that the vocational training program will take place in the industrial arts shop within the Watson Lake Secondary School. The traditional arts pilot project is being reviewed by the Liard First Nation, Department of Education and the Watson Lake school council. The department is funding a review of the Kaska curriculum project and the traditional arts pilot project. This contract will run from June to September 2007. All stakeholders agree that there must be consultation to clarify what programming the community wants and where it will all take place.

I think we can all agree that in our communities we don't always have access to every building that we need for niche or specific programs. In fact, the focus of many of our community centres is on being a multi-use facility.

We don't always have the luxury to be able to say that this is a task-specific building. In most of our communities, such as Mount Lorne, the community centre is used as a multi-use facility, which one day might be a home to ranger training, the next day for a community meal and the next day a workshop on some issue of particular importance to the community.

We do try to get the best use out of the facilities we have and to make sure that they are utilized to be as efficient and effective as they can be for the community. Really, one of the best examples that I can think of for this is the use of the Carcare building on Fourth Avenue by the Journey Far carver program. This is a case where we have a former car dealership now being used for the Journey Far carver program. We do have workbenches outside and inside there under an awning kind of carport. It is a space that was designed for another use, and the folks running the program have made some fairly minor changes to the structure, but it certainly provides a great area in which to do their work.

The very short answer for the member opposite is yes, we will continue to provide cultural inclusion funding to all schools to encourage them to put forward cultural projects that are agreed to by the school council and their First Nation. We are going to work with the community of Watson Lake to ensure it has trades and vocational training that meets the needs of the citizens there, and that it is an appropriate venue. We will continue to look at where we can expand these programs throughout the territory.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for that answer. I am glad to hear that he took to heart what I said last fall. It sounds like there might be something positive happening on both fronts. That's a good thing, I believe.

I am going to try to roll two questions into one here, so the minister knows in advance. One is actually with regard to the

previous question. He brought up the cultural inclusion fund, and I can't find that. It has to be in some line item here, but it actually goes to show how we on this side of the House don't get all the information in advance we could use to debate the budget.

My question about the cultural inclusion fund is: is this a fund you have to apply for and, if so, who applies for it? Is it the school council, the school administration, the First Nation, a non-profit group in the community, or does the department apply to the fund to make sure the programming happens in that community?

Just to follow that up, the Member for Mayo-Tatchun talked about an innovation fund for schools. The minister brought up the cultural inclusion fund for schools. Perhaps the minister can point out to me where I would find that in the budget.

It has come to my attention -- and we're going to go back to trades training -- that the budget for shop classes in our high schools -- to provide materials for students to complete shop projects -- is sadly lacking. I would encourage the minister to establish a fund that could be applied to by shop teachers, school councils or the appropriate people so they have adequate funding to provide supplies to their students to do the shop projects required of them to pass the class.

I've heard this not only in Whitehorse, but I've heard this in communities as well. And not only have I heard it, I've actually loaded the pallets, years ago in my previous career, to ensure that some of that stuff was provided to the high school here in Whitehorse. But I did hear it in communities as well. There are First Nations and local companies that are donating materials to our schools, and my hat is off to them -- to those First Nation governments or community groups or community businesses that are donating materials.

I'll go back to something I've said here before. You know, it's going to be a grand day in the Yukon when public education is fully funded and our students are getting the services they need and deserve, and we sell chocolate bars -- which is probably appropriate, given the minister -- to pave our highways because you see that too much now, where there are students and school councils selling chocolate bars to fund the education system.

A little while ago, there was an interesting article -- a news transcript -- which I don't have with me at this time. It was about corporate funding of public education and the amount of fundraising the public education system actually has to do. I think that does a disservice to our system. I'm not saying that they shouldn't be involved, but I am saying that it's a public system and should be funded appropriately.

This is a concern to me that, as a tradesperson and someone who participated as a young student in the industrial arts programming in Powell River -- they had a great shop facility there. Admittedly, that was probably 35 or 37 years ago. I don't recall any of the projects that I had to do for my class costing me anything. For any of the over and above projects I wanted to do, the material was provided at a reduced rate. I honestly believe that if we really want to support trades training in the territory and if we really believe in it, we not only have to give

them the tools and the teachers to provide it, but we also need to give them the materials to work with. It is ludicrous that shop teachers have to go begging for shop supplies.

Would the minister commit today to providing some sort of capital fund for shop materials so that shop teachers aren't hamstrung in their ability to provide materials for their students?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I agree a lot with what the member opposite has just said. I know that the members in my caucus also agree. We really do appreciate everything that our partners in education do, whether they are the local hardware stores or local construction companies. I intend to work very hard with my colleagues to provide just what the member opposite is talking about. I think it would be of great benefit to our Yukon schools and students if we increased the funds that we have for trades training and vocational and experiential learning.

So, yep, going to work.

He did raise some questions regarding the budget line item for the school cultural activities. I would direct members to the First Nations programs and partnership unit. This is a very important department within the public schools branch. I discussed this department many times in this Assembly. It works in liaison with our teachers and educators, the department and First Nations to ensure that many of the issues and concerns raised by First Nation people and governments are being addressed. It looks at how we address the issue of language instruction, cultural inclusion and culturally appropriate training, stay-in-school initiatives, and the relationship between the Department of Education and the First Nation Education Advisory Committee and the Chiefs Council on Education.

The First Nations programs and partnership budget is a little over \$1.5 million. The line items in there include the First Nation elders in school program, the First Nation community orientation program, stay-in-school initiatives, the First Nation curriculum development, which also includes a curriculum advisory board looking at our grade 5 and grade 10 curricula, and they will look at other curricula once we get those initial ones completed.

As well, this includes a line item for school cultural activities.

I believe that answers the member's question of where it is in the budget. Once we get into line-by-line, I should be able to give him more detail about that. I think I have answered the member's question, so I will turn the floor back over to him.

Mr. Cardiff: Bear with me for a brief deviation. I am talking about the budget, but I hope that all Members of the Legislative Assembly are listening at this point -- and especially any members who are participating in the Standing Committee on Rules, Elections and Privileges -- because what the minister just said is very pertinent to what we are trying to do here today. We're trying to debate the budget. He directed me to the line that says First Nations programs and partnerships, \$1.533 million. He listed off a whole bunch of stuff.

If the government wants the opposition to be constructive in debate and in line-by-line debate, if we were provided with the information the minister has just provided us in our budget book, it would be a lot easier to debate these budgets line by

line. I hope that the chair and members of the SCREP committee are listening, because this is a prime example of why it is so difficult to go into line-by-line and why we on this side choose to explore a lot of these things in general debate, because we don't have the information as to where they are located.

I thank the minister for the information and the segue into the line-by-line departments.

I'd like to move on to another area of concern. A review of the literacy strategy was commissioned. The date on it is January to March 2006. It was done for the Department of Education, advanced education branch.

I'm curious if the minister has a report on his desk or in the department on this literacy strategy review, if there is a new literacy strategy and, if not, when will it be available for public comment?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I thank the member opposite, the Member for Mount Lorne, for bringing up literacy initiatives. Literacy is one of those very important areas in which the government is making some significant investments. In fact, this budget sees about a \$4.8-million investment into literacy initiatives. These include: contributions to Yukon Learn, for the home tutoring program, for reading recovery, for the literacy for math program, for full-day kindergarten, the Yukon essential skills program, the Learning Disabilities Association of Yukon, the Literacy Action Committee, the Whitehorse Correctional Centre and the Kwanlin Dun House of Learning.

Literacy is one of those issues that were front and centre in the last territorial election campaign, and it is an issue that I went to work on immediately. We had just seen the reduction in funding from the federal government to some of the organizations here in the territory. Just for the information of the member opposite, I immediately wrote a letter to the federal minister responsible requesting a reinstatement of those funds. I then contacted the Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations and he and I jointly wrote a letter to the minister responsible for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. As well, this is an issue that is very important on the national front. I work with my ministerial colleagues from across Canada. I was on the Council of Ministers of Education. We jointly took a position that literacy funding across Canada should be increased and that we should work with the federal government on this. A letter was drafted by the CMEC to the federal minister responsible. I am very gratified to see that there has been a reinstatement of funding for literacy groups here in the territory. I should also add that, at the time, there was bridge funding that was provided from the territorial government to literacy organizations to allow them to keep their doors open while they waited for the funding from Ottawa to arrive.

The Department of Education -- the government -- has made a significant contribution to education. We'll continue to work with our partners in education to ensure that Yukoners have opportunities, whether they be for young people, graduates of the system, older people or people in our correctional facilities, to expand their literacy capabilities and to gain the skills they need to carry them through the rest of their life.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for that answer. Education has become a passion for me. I'm not sure if I heard the minister actually say what the outcome of this review was, because that was the question. Maybe I missed it while I was shuffling paper.

I'm going to give the minister just a little bit of background about what I have come to understand about literacy. It goes back to some of the comments that the Premier has made and the surveys done. The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey showed that the Yukon has the highest rate of literacy in the country. The other day, the Premier said something about -- I can't remember the number -- the number of literacy projects funded in the Yukon.

Well, we do have the highest rate of literacy in the country, and the reality of it is that most of the people who fall into that category live and work in Whitehorse. It's right here in this building and in other government buildings where there are highly educated people with good literacy skills. But we're falling behind in other areas and in other communities.

According to the statistics that are available, and from studies and analyses of that IALS survey, one-third of the Yukon population was still performing below the threshold for coping with the increasing skills demand of a knowledge society. When we do a deeper analysis, there is a large disparity between the education and literacy levels of rural Yukon and Whitehorse. Rural communities and First Nation communities -- Yukon-born people -- have much lower literacy rates, according to Census Canada, than the average Yukon level. The large population in Whitehorse and the concentration of highly educated people here is distorting the statistics and distorting the survey. It says that we have the highest rate of literacy in Canada.

Part of the problem is that, when there's a survey that says that the population of Yukon has the highest literacy rate in the country, it's no wonder the federal government thought they could pull the funding -- not that they just pulled it here; they pulled it across the country. That shows how short-sighted they are.

We have to do that closer analysis because, when there's something that says that we have the highest rate of literacy, it is used by funding agencies to not fund literacy programs. They think that there is no problem and that they don't need to fund literacy programs. It has also been used by this government to praise their achievements.

I will acknowledge the minister's commitment to literacy. I am sure he believes in it. As a highly educated individual, he values literacy and he has valued literacy to get the credentials he has today.

Another thing on the government Web site is that the implementation of the Yukon literacy strategy will assist individuals in acquiring the skills to live responsible, healthy, independent lives. The literacy strategy review is the driving force behind the government's efforts to prepare Yukon people for current and future training and employment opportunities.

If that literacy strategy review is the driving force -- we have a copy of the questionnaire that went out last year. It says the questionnaire would have been completed in March 2006.

So it would have been completed and there has been a year to compile the results and come up with some input to a new and, I hope, improved Yukon literacy strategy.

One of the other things -- and this is what I see is the problem, in short -- is that there is funding but it is just whether or not it is adequate enough and whether or not it is directed in the right direction and to the right priorities. Over the last few years, I have heard from communities about how they struggle on a daily, weekly and monthly basis about whether or not they are going to have programming.

One of the actions in the old literacy strategy was to have a community literacy fund -- we are back to funds -- similar to the training trust funds -- funds that would be relevant to and accessible by all communities. The reality is that it is not really happening the way it should.

The Literacy Action Committee was supposed to have capacity to approve multi-year funding with an emphasis on programs rather than projects. Currently the Literacy Action Committee funds projects -- not programs. They fund projects to a maximum of \$6,000 a project.

This is like listening to the former Government House Leader talk about boutique programs. You start up a little program, pull the funding and let somebody else look after it. Here we're providing a little bit of funding for a little project. The literacy needs aren't being adequately addressed by projects. They need to be adequately addressed by multi-year funding for programs in communities.

I'll go back to what I said earlier. Rural communities, First Nation communities and Yukon-born people have a much lower literacy rate. That's where we need to direct a lot of funding. I applaud the efforts and funding this government provides to the Yukon Literacy Coalition and to Yukon Learn and others involved in literacy training. The college does a lot of work in literacy too -- I know that. I've been involved in that myself.

Some communities want to do more. They want to provide more services to their communities. These are largely non-profit societies that are grassroots and come right out of the community. They don't deserve to be dished out \$6,000 for a little project that's going to last for four to six weeks. People get into it, they get really involved in it, they get excited about learning things, they're learning how to read and write, they learn about numeracy and then, after six weeks, it's over. Where do they go? It's like a 28-day addictions treatment. You get out of the addictions treatment and are sent back to the same situation you were in before.

If we're going to address this issue, if we really strongly believe that literacy is important, we'll address the issue now so we don't have to address it generations down the road. Let's deal with it now.

Let's put it behind us and provide adequate funding for literacy.

The minister, by the way, I'm told, did not answer the question about the questionnaire regarding the literacy strategy review. When can we expect a report?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I know the member opposite is very passionate about this, and this is a very important issue to him personally -- well, indeed, it's important to all Yukoners. Liter-

acy, and having a community and society made up of people who are able to participate fully -- not only from the employment benefits of literacy and being able to read, but also the personal enjoyment as well as the doors that literacy opens -- is very important. The Yukon government recognizes the importance of this, and we will be providing over \$4 million in literacy project initiatives in 2007-08.

The member hit on some very good points of "put an end to it". One of the challenges we face is that there is a bit of a time lag between when investments in literacy are made and when we see many of the downstream results. For example, the grade 1 reading recovery program is a very intensive program designed to work with kids as soon as it's identified that they might have difficulties or challenges with reading. An intervention is done to get the kids' learning and reading accelerated, so that they don't fall further and further behind. There is a significant amount of effort to work with the young children immediately when it's recognized they might have some challenges.

So with the investments we're making in reading recovery -- well, when you work with a six year old today, we won't see that translated into adult literacy rates increased for another 12, 15 or 20 years.

We are also taking steps with the Wilson reading program to work, again, with those children who are a little bit older and are having challenges. As well, we have the literacy for math program again for our children, and there is also the home tutoring program. There are programs to work with the children in our school system to give them the best opportunity at the best possible age. When children are going to school, they are there and ready to participate and learn, which is very different from a situation where an older person would have to return to a learning environment.

We also recognize that there is a certain important responsibility to work with those people who are not in our education system and provide them with learning opportunities. We do that, as the member opposite knows, with initiatives through Yukon College and Yukon Learn. Yukon Learn is a not-for-profit organization in the territory. We work very closely with them. I was on the phone with Debbie Parent not too long ago, who is the executive director. We were discussing some of their very good initiatives, which I think will make the member opposite a bit happier. They do include significant community involvement.

Also, we do a lot with the Learning Disabilities Association. Joel Macht from LDAY was in my office earlier today. We were talking about programs that they have underway. The Department of Education will continue to work with them. They are a very important organization and most members in the Assembly have supported them in one way or another. We just had Ronald McDonald day not too long ago, where many of us volunteered and helped out with the Learning Disabilities Association. If anyone would like a ticket for the Learning Disabilities Association raffle, they can contact the MLA for Mount Lorne. He would be more than happy to sell them a book of tickets, I am sure.

We will also work with our other partners in learning, such as the Kwanlin Dun House of Learning and other organizations throughout the territory.

The member did raise the issue of the Literacy Action Committee, which is an organization -- kind of a funding body that works with the Department of Education to provide funding for projects throughout the territory. What I have heard is that it is very important to keep a level of awareness going about literacy. It is important to create awareness around literacy initiatives and, at the same time, we also have to work with our partners who provide the tutoring, the one-on-one time.

I am afraid I need to dig into my work a little bit more to answer the member specifically, to find out where we are at with the adoption of a literacy strategy, new objectives or new criteria. I think the member opposite can appreciate that there is an awful lot that has been on my plate as the new Minister of Education for the last six months. I am trying to work with our different partners in education, as I mentioned to the member opposite. We went to bat immediately with the federal government and met with the partners to provide some bridge funding. We are continuing to work with our partners in literacy, whether it is the not-for-profit organizations or Yukon College or First Nations or our initiatives in the schools, to ensure that Yukoners have very good literacy opportunities now and into the future.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for that answer and his frankness about what is happening with the report -- and also his honesty about having to dig down and work harder. I think we can all take something -- I'll rephrase it. The minister took offence to that, but I'll rephrase it because maybe I'm not the greatest communicator in the world either. His frankness about having to go and look deeper into the files to find out exactly where they are at with any new things in the literacy file -- I appreciate that.

I have to look pretty deep in the budget book to find out what is in each individual line because we don't get provided with that information. That amount of information can actually be overwhelming, I guess, but it is a lot of work. I do appreciate the minister's efforts in the Department of Education.

We are getting close to the end of the day, and I would like to get a few more questions in before I turn it back to the Official Opposition. I have a question about teachers, specifically about substitute teachers -- I believe they are called teachers on call. I have heard from some teachers on call who have concerns about the way they are treated. I don't believe they are members of the YTA, and I don't know if that is why -- I don't think it would be a big problem to extend some sort of benefits and rights to teachers on call as other teachers have. That is my understanding. Could the minister confirm that substitute teachers do not have the same benefits and rights as other teachers?

I am just going to expand on this a little more. Part of my concern, I guess -- as it's another one of my critic portfolios -- is if they are considered to be employees for the purposes of workers' compensation benefits? And I don't know exactly what schools and the department -- "use" isn't the right word, but when you call a teacher on call and get them to come in and

perform the tasks, they can be participating in any number of activities, including out-of-school activities. They could be used not necessarily as chaperones, but as teachers' assistants to ensure the group of students is having a good educational experience and that it is a safe experience.

My concern is with whether or not they're covered by employee or teacher liability and insurance packages when they're performing their duties. It's about the benefits and rights of teachers on call. It's about workers' compensation and it's about employee or teacher liability and insurance packages.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Speaking as a past substitute teacher, I did have the opportunity in my life before the Legislative Assembly to be involved as a substitute teacher and I taught four-year-olds, kindergarten, grade 2, grade 7 and some of the high school classes. So I'm very familiar with the issue of substitute teachers and how they are called at the last minute -- that's the nature of having a substitute teacher -- and the reaction and reception of some students in the classroom. If there was an easy solution to the issue of how to have a class behave or respond appropriately when a substitute teacher comes in, then substitute teachers across the planet would have come up with that many years ago.

I appreciate that it's not the easiest environment to go into, but it is a necessary area. We don't have the ability, if a teacher is ill, to just close down that class. There has to be someone to take their place. So we do call upon our very professional and capable substitute teachers to be able to respond at a moment's notice, literally. Sometimes there's a phone call at 8:30 asking if you could be there for 8:45 to come in and teach a class that you might not be all that familiar with. We do recognize the value and importance that they have for our educational system and we do know that we need quality people who are available to meet the needs, whenever they're called.

I'd like to put the member opposite's fears at rest, though. Substitute personnel are hired on a casual basis to replace teachers, just as when any employer hires a temporary worker. When they are in that work -- that employers' employ -- they are covered by Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board benefits. And when substitute teachers are hired by the Department of Education, the department makes the appropriate Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board contributions. There is some protection there. There is the appropriate withholding of taxes. They do receive the appropriate unemployment insurance benefits or other normal withholding taxes on their pay form.

There is a bit of a difference, though, with temporary teachers. Temporary teachers are those employees who are hired to replace permanent teachers who are on long-term leave or for temporary programming in Yukon schools. Temporary employees are members of the bargaining unit and have access to all the benefits of the collective agreement.

Mr. Cardiff: I was more interested in other benefits, as well. I know that it's hard when you're in the situation where you're not working very often. But if you are working more often, you should be entitled to some of the other -- I wouldn't call them "extra benefits". I would call them "necessary bene-

fits," like dental programs, dental benefits, extended health benefits -- things like that.

Being employed on a regular basis, it depends on how often they get called. But if they're there for a substantial period of time, maybe they should get a temporary teaching assignment -- I don't know. But there are a couple of other concerns regarding this as well.

There is some concern from parents and also students about what qualifications are needed to be a substitute teacher. Is there a mechanism in place to review the performance of teachers on call to ensure that the services they are providing are adequate for students and that our children are receiving a good education when there is a substitute teacher? They are dedicated people. They are showing up for work and filling a gap that is necessary. But just as we review the performance of other employees and do evaluations of teachers, principals and other individuals, I am wondering whether or not there are any reviews or mechanism to evaluate the performance of a teacher on call.

I think if we were a bit more vigilant, it might answer the other question I have, which is that it is my understanding that, if one is a teacher on call, work experience does not count toward teaching experience. So it is more difficult for teachers on call -- substitute teachers -- to compete for part-time or full-time teaching jobs. Some of these people doing teacher-on-call work are actually fairly highly educated. They are doing it because that's what they like to do, they do it because that is what is available or because they can't get a job in the profession in which they have a degree or diploma. They do it because they want to teach kids.

If the experience they are getting in the classroom as a teacher on call doesn't count toward teaching experience, then it is harder for them to compete.

Seeing as how we are getting close to the end of the day, I am going to actually roll a couple more questions into this and then I will let the minister wax eloquently and fill me in on all the developments. I would like to cover off a couple of things in the advanced education area.

I have three or four questions, and if the minister can't answer them today, he can provide the answer when we next meet here in the Legislature, or if he would provide a legislative return, it would be much appreciated. I just want to cover off three questions. I know it's hard, but some of them could be yes-or-no answers.

The Yukon native teacher education program was opened up a few years ago. I am wondering whether or not the government is planning a full evaluation of the program to ensure that it's still achieving its objectives and meeting the needs of the people who are in those classrooms, and is also graduating teachers who are getting jobs in the Yukon.

The fact they've opened up the Yukon native teacher education program doesn't necessarily mean that there still isn't a need for an after-degree program for some of those teachers on call who might want to become teachers and address the shortage of teachers we are going to be facing in the future -- people with degrees who would like to participate in an after-degree

bachelor of education program. That was being considered at one time. Is that still being considered?

I have one last question for the minister today. Is the Department of Education reviewing or participating in the study that the college is currently doing with regard to the need for a university here and whether or not the college will become a university or move slowly toward becoming a degree-granting institution? I am curious if the Department of Education is participating in that or if they are just watching what's going on.

I thank the minister for his time today. I look forward to reading his answers in the Blues.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I am quite surprised by the opposition member who has just commented that I would wax eloquently -- I'll take that as compliment -- and who said I was speaking honestly -- that is another compliment. I believe the member opposite even said that I was helpful. I will endeavour to answer the member's questions.

I think it is important to point out that substitute personnel are hired on a casual basis. They aren't expected typically to be in there as a long-term replacement teacher. Instead, if that were the issue, we would go with a temporary employee who is hired to replace permanent teachers while they are on long-term leave. Those temporary employees are members of the bargaining unit and have access to all the benefits of the collective agreement.

With the issue of casual substitute teachers, those teachers are compensated at rates that reflect their qualification levels and they do have access to the lesson plans that teachers prepare. In most cases when a substitute teacher goes in, there is a lesson plan for the day's activities.

There is the supervision of the principal, who does either typically and informally oversee the substitute teacher. I know that when I was a substitute teacher, the principal would check in every once in awhile to make sure that things were going along smoothly. The principals also then discuss those folks who are operating successfully in the classroom. I believe the ones who do perform well are typically the ones called back the most often.

There is the issue the member raises about giving credit, or recognizing teaching time, as that relates to experience. I just want to remind the member that there is the teacher hiring protocol that is in place and provides a structure for how we in the Department of Education go about bringing on new hires. Any discussion or modification to that would need to involve our partners in education and, importantly, involve the Yukon Teachers Association and how we would make changes to that.

I think the YNTEP program is a very successful program. It is building upon our need to develop our own home-grown teachers, so to speak, who are aware of life in the Yukon, life in Yukon communities. We will certainly work with the college to ensure that it continues to be a successful program. I'm not aware of any strict formal review of that program being undertaken. As I've mentioned before, programs are always under a state of review, either through evaluations done by students or looking at the teacher outcomes that come out of this. So there is always that look at how we make the program better. But that certainly is one of the areas I will discuss with the Yukon

College president and Board of Governors as we have our discussions about how best to work with Yukon College to provide the best possible secondary education here in the territory.

As for a bachelor of education after-degree program, that really hasn't been an issue that has been explored in recent years. If the member opposite has some more information or wants to bring some to my attention, I would urge him to do so. With regard to looking at a university, I know that Yukon College is very much looking at how it can provide assistance to Yukoners to help them with their post-secondary education. We have some articulation agreements now with the University of Regina for the social work program. There is a program with the University of Fairbanks for the masters of public administration. There is also YNTEP, which does offer a degree.

I know that there are discussions going on right now between Yukon College and Royal Roads University as to how there can be some kind of partnership or facilitation there for working with Yukoners to use their degree services. I know there is a strong interest by the current Board of Governors to look at other areas of importance. We will continue to look into these areas in order to provide ways that Yukon can best provide post-secondary education.

As I mentioned the other day in my opening comments, I believe that there are more than 900 Yukoners attending post-secondary institutions outside the territory. Those are Yukoners who are receiving the Yukon grant. I am very gratified to see that Yukoners have the opportunity to take courses at other institutions, and often it is at the centre of excellence for that field of study. It's great to see that Yukoners have these opportunities and that they avail themselves of them.

I hope that clears up the member's questions.

Mr. Fairclough: We have no further questions in this department. I request unanimous consent of the Committee to have all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried

Chair: Mr. Fairclough has requested the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 3, Department of Education, cleared or carried, as required. Is there unanimous consent?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$115,894,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$9,984,000 agreed to

Department of Education agreed to

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I move that we report progress on Bill No. 6.

Chair: Mr. Cathers has moved that we report progress. *Motion agreed to*

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: Mr. Cathers has moved that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 6, entitled *First Appropriation Act, 2007-08*, and directed me to report progress.

Speaker: You have heard the report of the Chair of Committee of the Whole. Are you agreed?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

The time being 5:30 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Tuesday, May 22.

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.