

Whitehorse, Yukon**Tuesday, April 29, 2008 — 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 with the Order Paper. Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES**In recognition of Yukon Writers Festival**

Hon. Mr. Hart: As minister responsible for Yukon public libraries, it gives me great pleasure to recognize the 18th annual Yukon Writers Festival known as “Live Words”. Each year the successful event brings Yukon people together with local and visiting writers to celebrate the joys of Canadian writing through many exciting activities.

The opening reception is tomorrow night at the Beringia Centre. It will showcase well-known Yukoner Ivan Coyote, Jerome Stueart, who is teaching at Yukon College, along with Elizabeth Hay, Kevin Chong, Robert Priest and Jon Turk, who are all visiting our territory.

The excitement will continue for the next week as Yukoners exchange ideas, skills and stories with these acclaimed Canadian writers.

The Yukon public is encouraged to participate in readings, workshops, book signings and receptions.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to emphasize that the festival is Yukon wide, with the events taking place in Yukon communities as well as here in Whitehorse.

The Yukon’s abundant literary talent is part of our history. Events such as this encourage Yukon writers to pursue literary successes at all levels.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to say that the 28th Young Authors Conference is taking place on Thursday and Friday, May 1 and 2, at the F.H. Collins Secondary School. This event includes almost a hundred grade 8 to 12 students from schools throughout the Yukon. Workshops, readings and discussion groups assist the students in developing their skills. For our young writers this is an intense but wonderful opportunity to write and be coached by Canadian experts.

Events like these only happen with the support from many community groups and businesses. I would like to thank all the partners and sponsors who have collaborated over the years to ensure the success of this conference and this festival. Financial support from this government, as well as the Canada Council for the Arts and the Writers Union of Canada, made it possible to bring the writers from across Canada to the Yukon.

Special acknowledgement and thanks is due to our Yukon volunteers. Their love of the written and spoken word and their hard work will ensure a successful event.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind Yukoners that the festival events are open to the public; program information is available through the local media and from the public libraries branch.

Thank you, and I invite Yukoners to enjoy the festival. I also at this time, Mr. Speaker, would like to ask my colleagues to join me in welcoming to the Legislature today Julie Ourom, Lori Schroeder and Annie Griffin, Liz Bradley and Liz Kirkwood from the public library system.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further tributes? Introduction of visitors.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Mr. Hardy: I have for tabling 15 questions addressed to the minister responsible for the Women’s Directorate.

Speaker: Are there any further returns or documents for tabling?

Reports of committees.

Are there any petitions?

Are there bills to be introduced?

Notices of motion.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr. Mitchell: I give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Yukon government to add discussions of midwife regulations to the current public consultation on regulations for two other groups of Yukon health care professionals and to have the cost of midwife services covered under the Yukon health care insurance plan.

I give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Yukon government to act on their previous promise of providing a patient advocate in Vancouver, Calgary and Edmonton to assist Yukoners in navigating these cities and attending appointments when travelling for medical treatment, and to have these advocates in place by May 15, 2008.

Mr. Elias: I give notice of the following motion: THAT this House urges the Yukon Party government to establish and fund a youth climate leadership league to provide our Yukon youth with a voice and a strong foundation in the battle against climate change.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD**Question re: Fuel prices**

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Premier. A quick trip past the pumps this morning showed the price of gas at \$1.38 a litre. It is 15 cents higher in Dawson City and we have not yet hit summer peak prices.

Filling up your heating oil tank this winter costs you an extra \$400 over last year each time the truck came by. Yukoners are also being hit with steadily increasing power bills

thanks to this government's decision to increase rates by 30 percent in the last 12 months. That decision is costing families \$400 a year. It all adds up to higher costs. Does the government have any plans in place to address these increasing costs of living for Yukoners?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has, in the context of increasing costs, used the price of fuel as the driver. I think we all recognize that the issue pertaining to the price of fuel globally is one that is far removed from the Yukon Territory's purview — if you want to put it that way, Mr. Speaker. We have a number of programs already that we have introduced, recognizing in the past that there was a trend of ever-increasing fuel prices. One of them, of course, is helping our seniors with the pioneer utility grant.

On an ongoing basis, we're very cognizant of what is happening here in Yukon, what is happening in Canada and what is happening internationally with this ever-increasing cost for energy.

Mr. Mitchell: I certainly didn't claim that the Premier was responsible for the price of fuel. What I did ask was what he was going to do to help Yukoners address it.

In the case of the increases to power bills, the government is directly responsible for the increases. It was this government that decided to jack up the bills by 30 percent. The annual rate of inflation in Whitehorse was 2.8 percent last month. That means things cost almost three percent more now than they did last year. This is one of the highest increases in Canada. The two main reasons are higher gas prices and higher electricity prices.

We are already seeing the high price of gas being blamed for a slower tourism season to come this year. Transportation costs, building costs and housing costs are also all on the rise. What is the government doing to address these rising costs — costs that are hurting consumers?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: This comment about jacking up prices for electricity is another example of the member opposite's propensity to bring information to this House that is in fact incorrect. What the government has done is remove 50 percent of the subsidy, as created by past governments. I think we all recognize that subsidies aren't necessarily the best mechanism to address rising costs for energy, for example.

What is a good approach, however, is conservation. Obviously, the government has implemented many measures to address conservation and provide more efficiency in our overall energy use. It begins, by the way, with a very important program whereby the government will, for example, do home energy evaluations — provide citizens a clear insight into how they can be more energy efficient, thereby conserving, thereby lowering the cost of energy to each and every household.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, in the interest of accuracy, removing the RSF caused bills to go up 15 percent last year; they'll go up 15 percent this year — that's 30 percent.

It sounds like the Premier's plan to address the rising cost of living is to do nothing. We have one of the highest rates of inflation in Canada. Consumers are seeing higher gas prices, higher heating fuel prices, higher electricity prices, higher cost

of transporting goods, higher food prices, high building material prices, higher housing costs and higher rents.

The minister's response is to say, "Times are good. It's not my fault. Don't worry about it."

Well, I have news for the Premier: people are worried about it and they're looking to this government for help.

Does the government have a strategy in place to deal with the higher cost of living, or is it content to sit back and watch people get swamped by these ever-increasing prices for everyday essentials?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: You know, Mr. Speaker, listening to this member is always quite an experience. How quickly, in a momentary lapse of attention, the member can misconstrue comments made by this side of the House.

The government is very concerned about these issues; that's why we have all along been working on many initiatives, such as the pioneer utility grant — which, by the way, is indexed. But here is some more, in accordance with the member's point that the government is doing nothing. I'm going to give some more examples that once again refute the member's position and information: zero interest rate for home repair programs and a home repair enhancement program — zero interest rate; availability of resources; alternative energy systems under residential energy management is another example; zero interest rate for the rental rehabilitation program for energy efficiency items; green home incentive for existing homes; green home incentive for new dwellings — and the list goes on.

What are the intended results? Conservation and efficient energy use, lowering the cost to the consumer.

Question re: Fuel prices

Mr. McRobb: I would like to follow up with the Energy, Mines and Resources minister with a question that relates to his rather harsh approach of electro-shocking consumers.

Yukoners are having to cope with higher costs of living due to huge price increases at the pumps, for home heating fuel, building materials, food, services and, last but not least, his 30-percent electrical bill hikes.

A quick check of the prices as posted on his department's Web site for home heating fuel shows the price listed as high as \$1.38 per litre. That is about \$6.25 per gallon. To completely fill a normal-sized home fuel tank it would cost about \$1,500.

Many Yukoners are hurting as a result of these drastic price increases, especially rural Yukoners, and they want to know what their government is doing about it.

Does the Energy minister have anything to offer, or is he satisfied with being part of the problem and not the solution?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We on the government side are certainly concerned about the rising world prices of petroleum and energy costs. We are concerned, and we are working with Yukon Housing Corporation through its programs and with the Energy Solutions Centre. We are working with Yukoners to address this issue. We are working on it with Yukoners and will proceed to work on it with Yukoners. It is a concern and we as a government will address those concerns.

Mr. McRobb: Well, he didn't work with Yukoners before deciding to increase their power bills by 30 percent. The minister has already increased them by 15 percent, and he has

announced another increase of 15 percent to take effect two months from now.

Surely the minister and his colleagues recognize the extent of financial pain they have created by imposing these cost-of-living increases on people who least can afford them. This includes seniors, single parents and a demographic known as the “working poor”.

The Yukon government has a responsibility to protect consumers and help them to make ends meet in situations like this. We know the government is sitting on a huge surplus of some \$108 million, yet it has done nothing to help Joe Yukoner in this time of need.

Will he at least commit to deferring his next round of planned bill increases?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The member opposite again is wrong. What is this government doing? Well, we’re expanding our hydro grid. The member opposite was very negative about the third wheel at Aishihik. The amount of diesel that that will eliminate is massive for the territory.

This government is actually investing money on the ground so we can grow our hydro potential so we can alleviate some of these costs for oil and off-site energy costs. We’re doing the hard work. We’re actually investing on the ground to address these issues.

Mr. McRobb: Well, those aren’t doing anything to help consumers in the here and now. To say that Yukon consumers are getting gouged is not overstating the situation. Oil companies are reporting record profits, including Petrocan, which announced today it has exceeded expectations by reporting a more than 80-percent jump, year over year, in first quarter profits. Higher petroleum prices mean higher costs in all sectors, including transportation, goods and services. It hits everyone in the pocketbook. I just heard that gas prices are expected to increase another 20 cents a litre, to \$1.50 per litre very soon. Previous governments have taken specific measures to help the consumers, such as providing them with energy rebates to help make ends meet — but not this Yukon Party government. It’s content to remain part of the problem while offering no solutions.

Will the Energy minister consider helping Yukon consumers by issuing an energy credit rebate?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I beg to differ. The member opposite is certainly going on at great length about the cost of energy globally, and we recognize that that cost for cheap energy is no longer a fact that we can work with. It’s ever increasing. Cheap energy is not something, globally, we can expect in the future.

But the member conveniently ignores other measures to help Yukoners and Yukon families, such as the significant tax incentives that we’ve applied here in the Yukon Territory over the last number of years, putting millions of dollars back into Yukoners’ pockets, such as the child credit and the child benefit incentives to put more money back into Yukoners’ pockets — further assistance for families here in the Yukon to meet their needs — and there’s more coming.

It’s not always the Member for Kluane’s position that is the correct position to take, and I refer to the fact that it wasn’t that long ago that there was a tremendous push by that member

to increase the cost of diesel in this territory, instead of using hydroelectricity.

Question re: Low-income relief

Mr. Cardiff: I have a question for the Minister of Community Services. I’m going to give him a little scenario because he’s the minister responsible for consumer protection and this scenario is drawn from the realities of those on low or fixed income.

It is January and there is no more oil in the tank to heat the house. You call the companies that deliver home heating fuel and they say you have to purchase at least \$400 to \$600 worth of fuel or they won’t deliver the fuel. The problem is you don’t have the money.

Would the minister consider a program that would include interest-free loans to assist low-income Yukoners who find themselves in such a predicament?

Hon. Mr. Hart: For the member opposite, I guess I’ll wait for the second question to come on to see where we can go from this. Obviously, he has a specific scenario which he wishes to bring to the floor and I’ll wait for the second response.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, I’ve got another question for the minister. There are two locations in Whitehorse where you can get a short-term payday loan. Across Canada users of these establishments are overwhelmingly of low income. They don’t have bank accounts and they don’t have credit ratings. Interest rates and fees for these loans are sometimes staggering.

In Canada, section 347 of the Criminal Code makes it a criminal offence to charge more than 60 percent interest per annum; it is called “usury”. Payday lenders in Yukon are essentially unregulated. In some cases, the amount of interest charged along with a variety of fees and service charges pushes the total cost to consumers into the stratosphere.

Why is this government not following the lead of other jurisdictions and ensuring that Yukoners struggling to survive on seriously limited means are not being exploited by payday loan companies?

Hon. Mr. Hart: With regard to payday loans, obviously that’s what the member opposite was setting up for, and that’s fine. We have reviewed, or are in the process of reviewing, payday loans, similar to situations in Manitoba and other jurisdictions. We are reviewing that, but we are also in discussions with other jurisdictions that don’t have regulations with regard to payday loans. We are working on that.

With regard to the availability of these services, payday loan facilities are available to all Yukoners. You can still obtain the appropriate services through a normal banking process, and that’s available to all Yukoners.

Mr. Cardiff: The minister is wrong. If you’re a low-income person, it’s hard to get a bank account sometimes. It’s obvious that business practices that discriminate against those on lower fixed incomes just aren’t on the radar screen for this government, or they’re just barely appearing, maybe.

Low-income Yukoners are feeling the pinch these days with soaring house prices, low vacancy rates and exorbitant rent costs. The cost of food, gasoline, electricity and heating fuel is all going up and there appears to be no end in sight.

It has been 16 years since social assistance rates have gone up. As the signs of economic recession come into focus, it's imperative that people of modest means have faith that the government will do something to protect or shelter them from those conditions.

What is the government's plan for protecting low-income Yukoners during tough economic times?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I believe part of the issue of increasing benefits for those with lower incomes is to provide jobs. We have been doing a great deal in that particular area since 2003. We've increased the number of jobs throughout the Yukon on a tremendous basis. We have a population increase throughout the Yukon. We have increased our social assistance rates. As the member opposite indicated, it hadn't been done for many years. This government has it underway and we have put it in process.

We are looking at the disadvantaged in that particular aspect, as well as the lower income process. We have made adjustments with regard to the income tax to allow for the lower income process. We are working with the underprivileged and working toward assisting them in this time when things are difficult — but they're difficult throughout the rest of Canada. All other jurisdictions are facing much the same situation as we are here in the Yukon.

Question re: Teacher staffing, on-call status

Mr. Hardy: I have a question for the Minister of Education. For the past decade, Yukon people have been consulted in one way or another on what to do about the education system. The current government's education reform process has yet to result in any concrete amendments to the *Education Act*. No one seems to know what will become of the recommendations for reforming the act that came from the previous government's consultation process. One of these recommendations was that on-call teachers be given employee status.

My question is, if and when the minister tables amendments to the act, will that recommendation be included?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: It has now been a year and a half since I've had the role of Minister of Education and I'm very pleased to see the level of involvement and consultation that the Department of Education has had with all of its partners and stakeholders in education. These include other orders of government, parents, students, teachers, the Yukon Teachers Association and our school councils.

The education reform process was a process that was started a couple of years ago. It was a joint Council of Yukon First Nations and Yukon territorial government project and it looked at how to address the education system in order to improve the quality of education for all.

We received the recommendations from the education reform team. Those recommendations have been shared with all Yukoners. Copies are available either from the government or on-line. There is also a French version available.

I have also discussed in the past two days in debate here in the Assembly how we will be working with our partners in education on the New Horizons project, which will look at initially creating the implementation plan for addressing many of

the issues and concerns brought forward in the education reform project.

Mr. Hardy: The question was this: would on-call teachers be given employee status? The Education minister did not respond to the question.

As the minister knows, on-call teachers are not considered teachers under the *Education Staff Relations Act*. I actually wonder what they are considered. They also aren't considered government employees under the *Public Service Act*, so what would they be considered?

Their status — or should I say their non-status — puts them into the same kind of limbo as emergency firefighters who work for the wildland fire management service. They have no job security; they don't get employee benefits; they aren't covered by insurance; their pay scale is at the bottom of the barrel, yet they are expected to be available, whenever the government snaps its fingers, for the most important people in our society right now.

Why does this government treat people who perform such important tasks as if their work is not really of any value?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I certainly do not agree with the member opposite. The work of our on-call teachers, our substitute teachers or supply teachers is of incredible importance here in Whitehorse and throughout all our communities.

I certainly applaud all those people who come forward and work as substitute teachers. I know how challenging a position it is; I have been in it myself and have taught as a substitute teacher. I can certainly appreciate the challenges that they face in the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, there are other issues that the education reform project has brought forward. These include things like hours of instruction, classroom composition and some other issues that teachers are finding challenging or presenting situations in our schools today. We will continue to work, through our collective bargaining process and with our partners in the Yukon Teachers Association, on how to best address all of these situations in order to provide the best education system for all Yukoners.

Mr. Hardy: I wish the minister would have included on-call teachers as part of those they are going to work with.

Mr. Speaker, what goes around comes around. This government can't attract nurses because they won't offer full-time jobs. It has trouble hanging on to the ones it does have because they are being overworked; ditto for ambulance workers and ditto for teachers on call.

Any school principal could give the minister an earful about how hard it is to get reliable substitute teachers on a consistent basis, especially with teaching certificates, because this government won't provide them with decent working conditions.

So my question is to the minister, and I really hope the minister listens closely and tries to respond to it. Will the minister at least agree to look at how the teacher call-out systems work in other jurisdictions before locking a new education act in place without any improvements to the current Yukon system?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question coming from the leader of the New Democrats; and our commitment to education goes without saying.

One only has to look at the recent increases there have been to the Education budgets over the years; one only has to look at the number of teachers in our system — it has grown from 452 to 473. One only has to look at the number of education assistants in our system — it has grown from 86 to 111. All of this has happened, Mr. Speaker, while we have seen a declining student population, and we've seen a decrease of about eight percent of our student population in the last few years.

Mr. Speaker, this government will continue to invest in education, we will continue to work with our partners in education — which certainly include the teachers — and we'll look at all options from all jurisdictions, and even look at innovative and creative solutions for our own system, so that we can provide the best education system possible for Yukoners.

Question re: Education job cuts

Mr. Fairclough: Three times yesterday I asked the Minister of Education a straightforward question. I asked him if there were going to be any FTE cuts in our schools. The minister ducked and weaved and never answered the question. He did say, and I quote: "We recognize there are changing demographics and changing needs..." I think the translation of that is "yes", but I'm not wishing to assume anything, Mr. Speaker. I'll let him speak for himself.

Will there be any FTE cuts in any of Yukon's schools in the next school year? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite should be well aware of the changing demographics in the Yukon. We've seen a reduction in the number of students in our system. This number has gone down from 6,000 about 10 years ago, to about 5,000 students today. Even in the last five years we've seen a reduction of about eight percent of our students. At the same time, we've seen an increase in the number of teachers in our system. We've seen an increase in the number of education assistants in our system and we've seen significant increases in the Department of Education's budget.

As I told the Yukon Teachers Association this past weekend, there will be no reduction in the number of teachers in our education system. We all recognize that there are changing demographics and changing needs, and members in here are well aware that there are some neighbourhoods increasing and others that are seeing a decline in population. The Department of Education — our principals, our school administrators and our superintendents — will make the best decisions, in the interest of all our students, in order to ensure that it's fair and equitable education and that we address the needs of our students.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Speaker, that wasn't the question. I asked the minister about FTE cuts and he talked about teachers. If he doesn't know the difference then we have a problem here. If there were no FTE cuts, then he would have said so here on the floor during Question Period. Mr. Speaker, that's not right. We'd like to know where the cuts are going to be made and how deep they will be.

Golden Horn Elementary School recently wanted their catchment area redefined to include Whitehorse-Copper. Such a move would have helped Elijah Smith school since it is bursting at the seams. The minister said, "Not now, maybe later" — maybe after the school undergoes some change in demographics or change in needs.

Will the minister confirm that Golden Horn Elementary School will take at least one FTE cut for the next school year? Yes or no?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, we will certainly respond to the changing demographics in our community, the changing population trends, the changing needs of our students and the changing requirements of the education system.

One only has to look at how responsive the Department of Education has become and how it involves its partners — the school councils and others. Mr. Speaker, I've said it several times today: the number of teachers we've had in our system has increased. The school population — the students — has decreased. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to the same level of teachers that we have in our schools — the same number of teachers in our system.

We do have to recognize, Mr. Speaker, that there is a responsibility of the Minister of Education to ensure fairness and equity throughout our system and to ensure that different schools receive the different resources that they need in order to address the pressure points that are going on. We know that we have seen certain growth at some schools, and we're following the recommendations of our advisory councils and working with our school councils to provide the most responsive, fairest education system that will address the needs of all Yukoners, now and into the future.

Question re: Midwifery regulations

Mr. Mitchell: Midwifery is regulated in Canada by provincial and territorial authorities. Currently, some provinces and territories regulate midwifery and some do not. In all regulated provinces and territories, midwives must be registered with the regulatory authority in order to legally call themselves a midwife and to practice their profession.

Midwifery is recognized as a legal and regulated profession in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and the N.W.T. New Brunswick is expected to introduce regulations in 2008 and Nunavut has indicated it will be on-line in 2009.

Why has this Yukon government not moved to introduce regulations so that Yukon women can have the choice of having a midwife attend to them during their pregnancies and deliveries as an option paid for by Yukon health care?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Once again, the Leader of the Official Opposition is incorrect and of course that should come as no surprise, by this point.

However, let me point out there was a group that was formed last year and came forward, and representatives did meet with me as Minister of Health and Social Services to talk about the possibility of regulating midwives and the possibility of having them funded under the public system. As you're likely aware, Mr. Speaker, the regulations are actually housed

in Community Services but, due to the connection with the health system, my involvement in that is obvious.

What I indicated to them at that time — and remains the government's position — is that we are open to the idea. However, the development of that regulation must follow the work of the working group that has been established to discuss this. Those discussions must involve doctors, nurses and other health professionals who would be affected.

A key part in having effective regulations allowing midwives is, if a problem develops in the birth that requires hospital intervention, there must be an effective working relationship between the doctors and nurses — who would be required to intervene — and the midwives. That requires discussion with those health professionals on how the scopes of practice interact. If regulation is indeed in place, at that point in time, we would be open to considering the merits of providing some funding under the system for that purpose. But regulation must come first, because the safety of the woman and her child must be paramount.

Mr. Mitchell: I'm well aware of the midwifery advocacy group, and I also met with them last year. Registered midwives in Canada provide continuity of care so that women and their families have the opportunity to get to know their midwife, or midwives, well before the baby is born and have a familiar caregiver with them during labour and birth, and for their postpartum care. They all offer personalized care from early pregnancy to six weeks postpartum.

The Deputy Premier said, on May 15, 2007, "With respect to the issue of midwifery, yes, the Women's Directorate will be very much involved in the review and consultation process associated with midwifery. Midwifery is but one more choice in terms of making birth options available to more women in the territory. We are appreciative and very supportive of making more options available to moms in the territory."

Will the Health and Social Services minister follow the lead of his Deputy Premier, 10 other provinces and territories, consult with the doctors and other health care professionals and put in place the necessary regulations?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: That's exactly what we're doing, and the member knows it. It's unfortunate to see him again trying to — I guess I had better watch my language or you'll call me out of order, Mr. Speaker. It's unfortunate to see the Leader of the Official Opposition not couching his language in a way that appropriately and accurately reflects the facts of the matter in this Assembly.

The Leader of the Official Opposition knows we're doing the work and the Leader of the Official Opposition ought to appreciate the need to work with the health professionals involved, particularly doctors and nurses, to ensure that if midwifery regulations are established, if that is in place as a regulated option for women choosing to have a child through that means, that there is an appropriate interaction and arrangement between the midwife and other health professionals, such as doctors, if there is a need for emergency intervention.

The safety of the patients, the mother and child, is paramount. The work is ongoing but that work does involve health professionals and must involve them in the appropriate devel-

opment of this structure, because we cannot imperil patient safety.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, we don't know that the minister is doing the work because until he stood on his feet today there had been no announcements for many months saying that the work was being done.

About three times in his responses he talked about the safety of the child and mother being paramount. I hope he is not implying that midwifery is not to that particular end, creating unsafe conditions. Just yesterday this government put out a news release announcing a proposed regulation of health care professionals. The release began, and I quote: "Public consultation has begun on regulations for two groups of Yukon health care professionals: psychiatric nurses and medical laboratory technologists".

If he were serious, he could add another one to the list: midwives. The introduction of midwifery can significantly reduce the territory's health care costs and the difference can be about 50-percent less. The record of midwives in this and many other countries is impeccable. There are many reasons to bring this forth.

Will the minister commit to bringing this matter forward expeditiously so Yukon can be added to the ever-lengthening list of jurisdictions offering this service to women?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: The member knows we are doing the work here. In fact, let me remind the member: the member suggests we can simply add this matter for public consultation. What the member is suggesting is that, prior to working with the experts in these matters and with the health professionals who would be affected, we do public consultation without doing the appropriate step of sitting down and working with the health professionals who would be affected and developing the proposal. That work is ongoing right now.

It is very easy for the member to sit there and make his comments, but the member knows very well that the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Community Services staff are doing their good work. They are working with the health professionals in these matters. It does take time to develop regulations. They are doing that work right now, and we look forward to very likely having regulations in place for midwifery down the road. That does require working with the health professionals. Again, I have to emphasize to the member that it has to be something that doctors and nurses are comfortable with and believe is appropriate and effective in ensuring that if they are called to intervene in a birth that has gone wrong at home, they have the ability to take appropriate action and provide the appropriate safety net for home births through midwifery. We do see potential in this area and look forward to that work continuing.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Before proceeding with Orders of the Day, I just want to remind all members this is the second consecutive day that the Speaker has not been involved in the mix in Question Period; however, my observation today, members, is that

the debate is getting very personal. Unless members want me in this debate tomorrow, I'd suggest that all who spoke today read *Hansard* and reflect on what they said. I don't want to be involved in the debate unless I have to. If you force me, I will become involved. So, honourable members, keep that in mind for tomorrow, please.

Notice of opposition private members' business

Mr. McRobb: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the Official Opposition to be called on Wednesday, April 30, 2008. They are Bill No. 103, standing in the name of the Member for Porter Creek South and Bill No. 106, standing in the name of the Member for Kluane.

Mr. Cardiff: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(3), I would like to identify the items standing in the name of the third party to be called on Wednesday, April 30, 2008. They are Motion No. 245, standing in the name of the Member for Whitehorse Centre and Motion No. 243, standing in the name of the Member for McIntyre-Takhini.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I move that 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 (Mr. Nordick): Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Public Service Commission. 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. 11 — *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Public Service Commission.

Public Service Commission

Hon. Mr. Hart: It gives me great pleasure to rise today in the House to present the 2008-09 Public Service Commission capital and operation and maintenance budgets.

As we debate the second budget of our mandate, I would like to take a moment to demonstrate that this government continues to build on past successes as we implement our election platform, *Building Yukon's Future Together: A Clear Vision for a Bright Future*.

This platform is also a template for fostering economic growth, supporting social programming and providing the ability for Yukoners to participate in a strong and diversified economy, to enjoy Yukon's pristine environment and, of course, to live a better quality of life.

I am pleased to say that the members of this government, aided by many members of the Government of Yukon's public service, have been working on behalf of Yukoners to turn this vision into reality.

Our Government of Yukon public service is a strong force. We have in our ranks thousands of highly energetic, innovative and capable people who work hard to provide public service excellence. However, like governments across the country, we need to prepare for significant challenges as we look to and plan for the future.

A major part of our challenges is predicated by changes in demographics.

Specifically, the labour force is getting older. Our government has worked hard with the Public Service Commission to address the upcoming swell in retirements and the ensuing need to attract younger people to the public service as a career of choice.

In 2005, our government introduced the Investing in Public Service — Serving Yukon People initiative. I am pleased to say that our government is committed to our public service by investing in this important and successful program.

This investment will be spent to continue implementing the goals in the corporate human resource plan and will be invested in a range of programs dealing with professional and technical development, knowledge transfer between employees, workplace health and safety, orientation, recruitment, modernization, work/life balance, employee recognition and accommodation for employees with a variety of disabilities.

The investing in public service initiative is how this government values employees and human resource planning in the Yukon public service.

I will provide an overview of both the O&M and capital budgets, and then provide as much detail for the member opposite as I can during the ensuing speech.

First, the operation and maintenance budget for the Public Service Commission is estimated at \$34,772,000. This is an overall increase of approximately three percent, or \$916,000, from the 2007-08 forecast, and is due mainly to the increase in the workers' compensation fund premium rates, employee future benefit increases and wage adjustments negotiated during the collective bargaining.

Second, Mr. Chair, the 2008-09 capital budget for \$22,000 is a decrease of \$44,000, or 67 percent, from 2007-08.

The 2008-09 budget provides funding for replacing computers that are obsolete and/or failing. Under the *Public Service Act*, the Public Service Commission acts as the employer on behalf of the Yukon government. In this role, the Public Ser-

vice Commission provides strategic analysis and assistance to departments, delivers strategic human resource services, delivers staff training and workplace wellness services, manages corporate compensation for employees, manages staff relations functions, including negotiation of collective agreements, provides workforce planning information analysis, workplace harassment prevention education, representative public service planning and policy, and communication development and implementation.

All this work is carried out by seven branches in the Public Service Commission and the O&M dollar amounts in the budget for the program change will cover all of these branches, as well as the workers' compensation fund and the employee future benefits.

All PSC branch budgets reflect changes for negotiated wage agreement amounts and some adjustments from one-time revotes included in 2007-08.

With regard to finance and administration, it shows a decrease of \$15,000, or two percent, which is related to the actual wage levels of the current staff complement. These changes occurred when positions were reclassified and when we had employee turnover.

Under corporate human resource services there is an increase of \$19,000, or one percent due, to required wage increases, offset by one-time costs in 2007 and 2008 with the implementation of a new job evaluation system for management positions. Of note in this branch is that the pilot project for the corporate shredding and recycling buyout project indicated great demand for these services and the program has been added as a core budget item.

Employee compensation shows an increase of \$18,000, or one percent. Slight changes are related to actual wage levels of the current staff complement.

Under staff relations, we have an increase of \$31,000 or three percent due to the actual wage levels for the current staff complement and the agreed-to cost sharing with the Yukon Employees Union for the union president's position. As well, additional budget has been provided for long service awards to recognize long service public servants.

The human resource management systems branch budget has decreased by \$11,000, or two percent, because the 2007-08 forecast included a revote of \$34,000 for a software contract.

This is offset by changes to wage levels and the staff complement.

The policy, planning and communications branch budget has an increase of \$64,000, or seven percent, due to changes to the staff complement and wage levels due to reclassification and the agreements.

The staff development branch shows an increase of \$7,000. This budget provides for the change to staff complement and wage levels, as well as a one-time approved budget item for a two-year corporate health and safety audit contract.

Besides branch activities and the collective agreement adjustments, the Public Service Commission budget covers two significant areas of corporate responsibility. The first is the workers' compensation fund. The Yukon government pays assessment premiums to the workers' compensation fund to

provide coverage for government employees who suffer work-related injuries. This is a legislative requirement under the *Yukon Workers' Compensation Act*. This budget shows an increase of \$133,000, or three percent. This increase results from a premium rate increase effective January 1, 2008. The rates increased to \$2.14 from \$2.02 per \$100 earned.

The second significant corporate expense in the Public Service Commission budget is to cover changes in future employee benefit liabilities for leave, termination, pension and retirement benefits. The employee future benefits program shows an increase of \$670,000, or four percent. This is an increase required per the actuary report to maintain the liability balance at the required level. Employee future benefits money forms part of the accumulated surplus and net financial position of the government and is treated as any other government monies.

This budget provides government-wide benefit costs for employees that are non-discretionary and not directly attributed to the departmental operations. They include employee termination benefits liability, non-pension post-retirement benefits liability and the employer's pension plan contributions related to employee pension buybacks and transfers.

The employee termination benefits liability records the accounting liability for the Yukon government to pay out earned leave and severance benefits when employees terminate and/or retire. Each year the Public Service Commission adjusts the balance of the account to pay out departments for employees who have terminated or retired and to reflect changes to actual liability based on the actuary's estimate. At March 31, 2007, the estimated liability was approximately \$50 million.

Non-pension post-retirement benefit liabilities include the government's future liability for extended health and life insurance for eligible retirees and for employees who will retire in the future. This is a required change in the accounting practice that started in January 2005. Again, amounts are determined by actuary estimates. At March 31, 2007, this amounted to close to \$36 million.

Finally, there is the employer share of the pension contributions related to employee buy backs and transfers. The buy back arises when employees elect to buy back past service with the Yukon government or to transfer service for other employees where service can be transferred within the plan.

The federal Treasury Board has ruled that the employer must match the elected payments at the rates that the board determines. The total Public Service Commission budget for both buybacks and transfers is estimated at about \$3.2 million for 2008.

All of these initiatives are corporate expenses that cover employees in all departments. The Public Service Commission is also the corporate lead on programs managed through the investing in the public service or the IPS framework.

Mr. Chair, one IPS initiative in particular benefits Yukon families. That is the GradCorps internship program, and 2008 marks the fourth year this program has been running. Since 2005, twenty-one interns have been employed by the Yukon government. As a succession management initiative, GradCorps is working both from the perspective of graduates being

hired and from the perspective of the human resource community. The 2007 intake group will be ending their internship later this year, but seven of the 14 in the first two intakes in 2005 and 2006 are still employed as Yukon public servants.

The employee developmental assignment program or EDAP is another IPS initiative that is aimed at succession management. Through EDAP a successor employee may be hired to learn from another employee who has a set retirement day. Recruitment and interviews are held at the front end of the process so that when the retirement date arrives there is a trained person ready to fill the position.

I want to commend the Public Service Commission on the foresight shown in implementing both GradCorps and EDAP programs. With an aging workforce, we must be able to sustain the public service programs and services for Yukon people. It is only by taking creative approaches to succession management that we will be able to do so.

The supervisory success program, the management development program and the Yukon government leadership forum are other example of future-thinking approaches to employee development and retention. All of these programs offer professional development and training for our employees.

The management development program was conducted as a pilot last year and is recruiting for the fall of 2008. After consulting with the government's human resource community, the Public Service Commission has also worked with Royal Roads University to bring in the strategic human resource management graduate level certification program. Qualified human resource practitioners are one of those groups that will become increasingly more difficult for organizations to hire.

We are not immune to this eventuality, so we are taking steps to provide career growth opportunities right here at home.

Public Service Commission has also introduced a rotational assignment program as another succession management initiative. As an aside, I want to say that the second "report card" on the initiatives within the IPS framework will be issued during the National Public Service Week in June of this year.

Why is all this attention to succession management so important? Mr. Chair, let's look at some of the statistics that make clear our situation.

As of December 31, 2007, there were 4,564 employees in the Yukon government workforce and 4,682 jobs, meaning that some employees have more than one job — if they work part-time or have seasonal jobs, as well as another position.

In 2007, 118 people retired from our workforce. As of December 31, 2007, 14 percent of all employees who responded to our workforce census stated they were aboriginal. According to the 2006 Canadian census, aboriginal people represent 25 percent of the whole Yukon population and approximately 21 percent of the Yukon population aged 25 to 64.

This shows us we must continue to take steps to be a public service that is representative of the people it serves and we are working on that.

In 2007-08, there were 21 First Nation Training Corps positions in nine departments and corporations. In 2007-08, eight First Nation Training Corps participants completed their training. Three were retained by the Yukon government, one was

hired by a First Nation government, two were hired by other employers, one is receiving further training in the Yukon government, and one has returned to college.

Temporary assignment agreements are also signed between the Yukon government and the Yukon First Nation governments. There were four new temporary assignments in 2007. Temporary assignments are a good way to introduce Yukon First Nation people to the Yukon public service. Likewise, they provide an opportunity for Yukon government employees to come to a better understanding of the processes in the First Nation governments.

I'm pleased to be able to say that the Public Service Commission will be undertaking renewed steps to engage First Nations with their final agreements in representative public service plan discussions in the coming months.

Public Service Commission will also provide services to people with disabilities who are seeking work in the Yukon public service, as well as accommodation services to assist employees who are injured or become ill to return to work.

In other areas, the Public Service Commission's everyday work includes providing compensation services, information management planning and services, data analysis, research and policy, and communication delivery.

Mr. Chair, I will conclude by saying I believe, given its significant corporate financial responsibilities and its corporate role in major policy initiatives, human resource services and planning, compensation and staff relations, the Public Service Commission manages its budget well on behalf of the Government of Yukon.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for the brief outline of the department's responsibilities and what we can see in the budget. I will be brief too. I have a few questions for the minister and some of this is follow-up from the briefing we had with the department.

One thing said in the briefing was the department has cleaned up the backlog of harassment cases, and the reason for the backlog was a staffing shortage, which has been dealt with and we're now back in line with other jurisdictions. I would like to know if this is indeed the case. What can we see now for staffing? Will we continue to have the same level of staffing to deal with the amount of casework we have? Can the minister elaborate a bit on that?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We now have four full-time people working in this particular area and, as the member stated, we are back in line with other jurisdictions on this very important problem in the government. As he stated, we are in line with other jurisdictions, as far as cases underway.

Mr. Fairclough: So the minister is saying that we are keeping the additional staffing that was required — was it additional staffing or was it just hiring for vacant positions? If it was hiring of additional staffing, are we now keeping that staff?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We had a vacant position for which we hired and filled.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that.

In the briefing there was also the issue of the \$244,000 for a safe and healthy workplace. This was announced in the

budget highlight and I think it was a bit of a surprise for the department to see it announced in such a way, as this is a contract wage and a one-time expense. It was a demand by Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board.

Have we seen this contract filled or is it still out for tender?

Hon. Mr. Hart: As the member opposite indicated, the directive from the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board is to do the audit. As part of the audit process, some 600 interviews will be conducted with employees in all government departments and at all levels of management throughout. One-third of our interviews will be with employees in the communities. All interviews are slated to be completed by the middle or end of May of this year.

Information from these interviews will assist us in establishing a baseline for our current programming. The next steps will include YGAP analysis, action plan, and recommendations to address deficiencies in our current system. The auditor's final report will be delivered to the health and safety leadership committee, we anticipate, near the end of July.

Mr. Fairclough: Can the minister tell us whether it is normal for this to be highlighted in such a way or just included as part of the budget? I am just wondering — it's a dollar amount and I don't believe that we'll see anything come under that amount, once we identify that amount of money for a contract.

Hon. Mr. Hart: As I said, this was indicated earlier; it was a contract that was put out for this job — again, a requirement of the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board. This contract was identified and, as such, was reported in the budget as per the total amount of the actual contract.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that. I only have one more question here and it's in regard to the computer use guidelines that were established out of the computer investigation. Now everyone who gets hired must sign on to these guidelines and, after that, there are reminders and tips sent out sporadically — information, talks and sessions are supposed to be done in Highways and Public Works. Is this happening and, if not, why not?

Hon. Mr. Hart: For the member opposite, he is correct: all new employees do go through this review of what they can utilize on their computer. Also, the Department of Highways and Public Works on a regular basis puts out information with regard to the system and how it can be utilized.

Mr. Fairclough: I know we have a lot to debate in this budget. I thank the minister for those answers. I have to thank the staff members for giving the briefing. It was a good briefing and it was in some detail, and a lot of the opening remarks by the minister covered off a number of the issues I wanted to bring up. We don't have any further questions in this department and I thank the minister for his answers.

Chair: Is there any further general debate? Seeing none, we'll proceed clause by clause on Vote 10.

Mr. Hardy: I would request unanimous consent of the Committee to go back to general debate.

Unanimous consent re revisiting general debate of Public Service Commission

Chair: Mr. Hardy has requested unanimous consent of the Committee to return to general debate on Public Service Commission. Do members agree?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

Mr. Hardy: I will be very brief. I just want to get some questions presented to the minister. I was listening to the debate and the minister's comments, and he did supply answers in some areas I had questions for, and I appreciate that. However, I am going to put a few questions forward that he might have touched on. He can touch on them again or he can get back to me at a later date in regard to this.

I will list all my questions at one time and then sit down and that will be pretty well it.

What is the Public Service Commission doing to reduce workplace injuries and lower the assessment rate the government pays? This is particularly around the assessment rates we're paying and how we can adjust them.

Does the government believe it's on track — we will have enough well-trained employees to maintain excellent public services as the current employees reach retirement age? My understanding is there were 118 government employees who retired in 2007 — or something around that — and there's an expectation of 125 to 145 over the next three years. I also recognize that investing in the public service has \$1.4 million in this budget. How will we ensure that the quality we have within the public service right now is kept at that high standard, based on training and bringing people on and having that mentorship you often need, no matter what degree a person has?

There's an extremely important part of mentoring that needs to happen — how we're bringing people on for that? Also, should we be looking at expanding the hiring of people for that training portion as well, not just when people retire? I do recognize there is \$400,000 for the recruitment incentives for the second year of the three-year plan, but the succession planning really needs to be monitored and developed over a longer period. I would like the feedback on that one.

Regarding people with disabilities, how long is this project scheduled to run and what plans are there to provide other opportunities for people with disabilities in the public service? Again, it's forward thinking; it's planning down the road. Right now, there are shortages all over in so many areas, whether it's nursing or social services — it's quite endless. We need to be ensuring that all people are given really good opportunities to be engaged in the jobs that are available through government.

Another question is regarding union rights. People know that last year the Supreme Court of Canada confirmed the right of all Canadians to join unions and benefit from union organization in securing good wages, benefits and on-the-job-protection.

My question: why has the Public Service Commission taken the position that this right doesn't extend to certain categories such as teachers on call? There was a question already asked today regarding that.

I would like to hear from the minister responsible for Public Service Commission in that regard, as well as the emergency firefighters. Is the minister prepared to revisit that position? For example, if the on-call teachers decide to try for union certification, is this government planning to challenge that, even with that ruling?

On the subject of workers' rights, can the minister tell us how many grievances are currently on the books and what is being done to clear up any backlog?

We do know that the percentage of Yukoners of First Nation descent is about 21 percent but in the government I believe the figure is about 14 percent. So what specific steps — and the minister might have already touched on this, but I would just like a bit more clarification — are being taken by the Yukon territorial government that will result in a staff more representative of Yukon demographics, and specifically what is being done to have more management positions filled by First Nations? It is easy enough to hire entry level jobs but specifically at management position levels, what is being done in that area with First Nations?

As well, Yukon government employees number about 4,500 and some, and about 11 percent of the workforce are auxiliary, casual or term. There are some negative impacts with this in crucial areas such as recruitment of nurses, as I've already mentioned, or just hanging on to people who are working but never get an opportunity to move into full-time positions. I can name a multitude of examples — some have been auxiliary for six years, seven years, eight years. There are a couple of examples of people who are still auxiliary, casual or term after 12 years. You know, what is frustrating for them is that they are obviously good enough to do the job, because they keep getting called back for these positions, but they don't have the same benefits and they are not treated the same as full-time employees. You really have to wonder after many years of treating people that way if there isn't some form of abuse happening here.

I am really interested in hearing what the minister's opinion is about that and what they are trying to do, if they are trying to do anything. My question: what assurances can the minister give that auxiliary or casual term positions are not being overused to save the money on employee benefits — because that is what most people say it is — and is there a process in place to assess the use of these types of positions, department by department, to determine if it is the best course of action or if more staff positions need to be created, which of course would strengthen the workforce?

I have a couple more. Am I going along at a slow enough pace? It's all right? If not, it will all be in *Hansard* and I don't expect the minister to stand up and answer every single question today. If he can, that is wonderful; if he can't, I look forward to responses to my questions in another forum within the next few days.

I have a couple of other questions that could be considered. Are there plans to create more Yukon government jobs in rural communities? I am very concerned about jobs in the communities. It was the NDP years ago who really tried to move some sections of departments out into the communities to generate

income in those communities and that seems to have shifted back. Many of those positions are terminating and we are seeing a shift back to the Whitehorse centre, which is something we have to be very careful of. Although I am a representative of Whitehorse Centre, I am also a Yukoner and I really believe that we need to have that kind of investment. The impact the government can have on a small community — we need that kind of investment in those communities. One way to do it is to ensure that we continue to try to create government jobs in those rural communities.

Finally, what programs are in place or in the works to provide more opportunities for youth to work in the public service? I will leave it at that; I really appreciate everyone allowing me to put these in general debate instead of trying to do it line by line.

Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Hart: For the member opposite, the three questions turned into many more than three, but I will try to address as many of them as I can.

With regard to health and safety on the job, I will say that I did discuss that earlier and the audit will take care of many of these issues. It will highlight our field and work safety program; we have to look at our workplace accommodations and deal with department support. As I indicated earlier, we are also looking at addressing the analysis and the YGAP analysis of what is required so we can meet any deficiencies. That will be underway shortly and we anticipate having the results of that by the end of May, and hope to report to Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board sometime in July.

With regard to dealing with services ensuring that we have the best amount of public service available and the succession process, I did go through a substantial run of those items previously when the member was not present. I will briefly go over a few things, and some of them actually cover some of the other questions that the member opposite has as well.

We have the recruitment incentive program, which he also discussed and, to date, we are looking at five proposals that have been improved for signing bonuses in hard-to-fill positions. They include Economic Development, Finance, Environment and Health and Social Services.

Again, those are in specific areas where it is very difficult for us to compete, and so we've had to make some adjustments in order to attract the appropriate qualified candidate.

In addition, I did state and I will go through a few of the items for the member opposite with regard to succession planning. Most of these are through our IPS program or the individual. The first one on the list is GradCorps, Mr. Chair, and these are one-year internship programs that provide recent Yukon graduates with work experience in their field of study. They range throughout many departments in government. I've personally met with several of these groups as they get started. I will state that it is a very successful program and as I stated earlier, we also have been able to maintain a few of these youth in our public service. I would have to say that is a fairly successful program from that point of view. I believe that answers a couple of the questions from the member opposite.

Also, we have the supervisory success program. We have the employment developmental assignment program — and again, that is a very important program, because it provides the opportunity to backfill a position when we know the person is retiring. We can go forth with the program to find the appropriate candidate, get him or her into place and have the current position holder there to train that individual so that when the individual does retire the person taking over is well trained. It is very successful and a good program. I've seen it in action and I'd have to say that it is very successful.

We're also looking at the rotational assignment program. Again, it provides an opportunity for many employees to experience the knowledge throughout the government.

Also, we are looking at a succession planning fund. Again, this is to address unique succession management needs outside of the other two programs that I mentioned, that being the rotational assignment program and EDAP. There is also the career development and assessment centre — again this is an assessment centre approach to on-line assessments; there is the management development program; there is the professional and technical training program. All these items are considered necessary to assist our staff and maintain qualified public servants.

The member did hear me correctly; we had approximately 118 retirees last year. We anticipate that it's going to be approximately 140 next year and so the task continues to get harder.

I might add that we are also in competition with many other jurisdictions throughout Canada with regard to this expertise in the government, and so it becomes very important for us to maintain our edge so that we can attract youth to the public service.

I will say we have been very successful to date and I am assured that our main reason is because we do pay a little bit better than our southern neighbours, and to date this has been keeping us in good stead.

With regard to disability, the workplace disability employment office in PSC offers the services to people with disabilities who are seeking employment within the Yukon government. Services include familiarizing individuals with the Yukon government hiring process, assisting people with disabilities to develop resumes, interview skills, and discussing workplace accommodation. Programs and services offered by the office include managing the auxiliary on-call pool, the corporate documentation destruction and recycling initiative, providing wage subsidy resources and a combination of funds to departments for hiring people with disabilities, providing outreach and education to enhance public and government department awareness of programs and services offered, and also providing expertise to support various disability-related projects.

We work with partner agencies to provide training and knowledge to clients and employers to help ensure persons with disabilities receive and maintain jobs within the Yukon public service. From April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008, the office placed 25 people in 93 positions in the government for a total of 439 weeks of work.

With regard to grievances, as of December 31, 2007, there were 173 open grievances filed at various levels in a grievance process, ranging from level 1 grievances heard in the departments to more formal adjudications.

According to Statistics Canada, the number of aboriginal people employed in the Yukon has almost doubled between 1981 and 2001. The Yukon government works to develop a representative workforce through various initiatives, such as: public information sessions focused on helping people to prepare applications and to prepare for interviews; preferential and restricted competitions that take place; the workplace diversity employment offices, including the First Nation Training Corps; the temporary assignments between Yukon government and the First Nation governments; core strategies in corporate representatives in the public service plan and traditional territory RRSPs.

As of December 31, 2007, 14 percent of all employees who responded to our workforce census stated they were aboriginal. According to the 2006 Canadian census, aboriginal people represented 25 percent of the whole Yukon population, and approximately 21 percent of the Yukon population between 25 and 64.

With regard to the number of auxiliary on-call and casual positions, in many cases with regard to casuals, I will state that they are on casual because that's all they want to work. I have spoken to many of these individuals and that is satisfactory to them.

With regard to auxiliary on-call, our department has been reviewing our auxiliary on-call and has worked with the union on several areas in this regard. I have to say we've been reasonably successful in addressing many of our auxiliary on-call issues. We've also developed the reinforcement positions, so it basically provides these individuals with greater status than just auxiliary.

We have it set up in a few of the departments so these individuals can be called upon on a regular basis, and then we can work with them to fill the necessary gaps we have, as well as provide them with some consistent working base.

With regard to jobs in communities, the member opposite talked about some jobs leaving. I will state that we have recently created four permanent jobs through EMS — two in Dawson City, two in Watson Lake. From what I understand, we have also reinstated jobs within Faro with regard to Health and Social Services.

I did touch on the member's last question with regard to youth under the GradCorps. I feel that is a very good program for students getting out of our local high schools. It has been very successful to date. As I mentioned, from those students — the 21 who got into that program — we have two who are still with us. We are just going to have seven of the next 14 coming due at the end of May. We anticipate garnering some future employees out of that process also.

Chair: Is there any further general debate? Seeing none we will proceed clause by clause in Vote 10.

Mr. Fairclough: We've heard some of the answers to our questions and some details by the minister. We accept his opening comments about the department and the budget and

believe they are detailed enough. Therefore, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried

Chair: Mr. Fairclough has requested the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required. Do members agree?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$34,772,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$22,000 agreed to

Public Service Commission agreed to

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for five minutes to await officials.

Recess

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11. We will now proceed with Vote 11, Women's Directorate.

Women's Directorate

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to be able to present the 2008-09 budget for the Women's Directorate. Starting with the capital budget, the Women's Directorate capital budget for 2008-09 is \$5,000, and it covers expenses for a couple of new computers and some office furniture.

With respect to the operations and maintenance budget for 2008-09, the total policy and program development main estimate is \$1,125,000. Program delivery accounts are \$842,000 in the 2008-09 mains. Program delivery can be broken down into three basic allotment areas including personnel, accounting for \$517,000. There is no change this year in personnel.

In the realm of public education, the main estimate is \$157,000. These funds are allocated for the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues annual women's forum as well as our northern strategy funds and general public education initiatives.

In the area of violence prevention, the main estimate is \$126,000 and resources are distributed in the following two allotments: transfer payments accounting for aboriginal women and violence prevention funding, and \$26,000 for initiatives that have also contributed to reducing violence against women.

Mr. Chair, I certainly look forward to questions on the Women's Directorate budget.

Mr. Elias: Well, that was a two-minute introduction from the minister and I was caught off guard there a bit.

As always, I would like to thank all the staff within the Women's Directorate and recognize all the hard work they do on a daily basis to achieve the Women's Directorate program objectives. Your work is very much appreciated and respected. I take this opportunity to thank you all here today.

I do have a couple of questions — and they're rather specific — about the minister's promise on February 5, 2008. It's with regard to the 30-unit apartment complex that was for single mothers and children and lone-parent families.

I do support the concept; however, I do have some concerns with the minister's projected timelines of three years to complete the apartment complex. Can the minister shed some light on what the site location will be and how that decision will be made? I am very interested in the program objectives with regard to who can qualify to reside at the complex. Will services be provided at the complex, such as a daycare, some women's program delivery services like violence prevention, healthy families or economic security?

Some of the questions I've been receiving: what happens if the tenant's situational factors change? What are the criteria or the rules with regard to who can or cannot stay?

Some of the other concerns I've been receiving are with regard to ensuring the highest environmental standards to conserve energy, facilitate recycling and composting — using the most efficient means to build such a building.

I recognize the Women's Directorate doesn't usually build buildings but it seems this is a responsibility of the minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation as well. I understand that. One of the questions I've received: will single fathers with children be invited to live in the complex?

Basically, what can Yukoners expect to see at the end of the day in this 30-unit complex? There are a lot of questions that seem to be unanswered here. I'll begin with those questions.

During Question Period earlier in the session, the minister mentioned there is \$960,000 allocated in the Yukon Housing Corporation and I notice the minister responsible sitting immediately to her right. I just need confirmation of the \$960,000 that I found in the budget under "Work-in-Progress" and "Capital Expenditures", blue pages, page 18-4, under "Changes in Tangible Capital Assets and Amortization". Is that the \$960,000 the minister was referring to?

I'll begin with those questions.

Chair's statement

Chair: Order please. Before proceeding, I do want to remind members that we are on Vote 11, Women's Directorate.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Chair, it is with great pleasure that I'm able to say a few words with respect to advancing housing security for women in the territory. I just wanted to start the discussions in the Legislature pointing out that this government has been very progressive in terms of making more affordable and accessible housing available to all Yukoners.

As I have articulated on the floor of the Legislature, it is interesting to note that, in fact, the last social housing units were built in 1994 under a previous Yukon Party government and the New Democrats in the late 1990s. Under the previous

Liberal administration there was not any social housing that was built.

So, our government has made great strides on this particular front. I just referred to the athletes village, wherein the Government of Yukon built 48 units of affordable seniors housing and 24 affordable housing units for college student families.

The government has also created social housing units in Haines Junction. In fact, I had an opportunity to take a tour of that particular facility just recently on the weekend during the Association of Yukon Communities' annual general meeting. It's a sixplex for seniors in Haines Junction. They are also looking at adding another three units to that particular complex.

Building on that success, with this government's commitment to build another 30-unit affordable housing initiative, there will be well over a hundred new units of affordable housing in the territory, thanks to the Government of Yukon working very closely with the Yukon Housing Corporation and other respective departments.

I just wanted to touch on the affordable family housing initiative. I have also clearly stated on the floor of the Legislature that affordable, accessible housing is of utmost priority to this government. It's a priority to me, as the minister responsible for the Women's Directorate.

We know that access to such housing helps reduce the incidence of violence against women and children, and it is for this very reason that we went to work; we went out for consultation in the months of November and December with numerous stakeholders, and we were able to produce an overview of what individuals thought, particularly women who were on the wait-list for social housing, women who are housed within social housing units right now and women's organizations and others.

At the end of the day, it was certainly confirmed that women and children have the most pressing need for housing in the territory. With this particular initiative we will be working to meet the largest gap in social housing that currently exists, that being housing for lone-parent families of which women and children comprise the largest percentage of those on the social housing wait-list.

The member asked with respect to single fathers and, yes, the decision was made to include single fathers in this complex — albeit there are relatively few compared to women and children — but this is a lone-parent family affordable housing initiative.

It was certainly reflected in the report — the consultation that was undertaken — that in fact, women in particular — those who were consulted saw the need for such a housing initiative, but that it not be restricted to just single moms. Acting upon and responding to those concerns, the initiative is going to meet the needs of single fathers and families as well.

With that said, we are looking at being able to address about 50 percent of those on the social housing wait-list to this day, which is a very significant number of individuals. We will be working to meet their housing shelter needs.

The member opposite referred to site location. No decisions have been made. I believe the decision to really proceed

with the housing initiative was made just recently. We have identified \$960,000 within the Yukon Housing Corporation budget. That will certainly go toward planning; it will go toward site selection, and all the appropriate processes that will go according to the various sites.

Depending on the area, the housing initiative may or may not include central features such as childcare. If in fact there is a facility to go up near a childcare centre, then it would probably make a lot of sense to take a look at accommodating those existing childcare centres — if it was within ready access. If it wasn't in a location that housed childcare, then we would be looking to identify central features.

Again, this is all really raised in the consultation report — the consultation with stakeholders that was undertaken in November and December. The Women's Directorate will be leading further discussions and consultations with stakeholders as we proceed with the planning of this particular initiative. I'm really excited, and I'm very proud of the government's level of commitment to address this area. It is a most pressing need but there is a real opportunity to be very creative.

The report — and the report is on-line under the Women's Directorate Web site — talked about other centrally located features, which could include a communal living space — that is a gathering space — perhaps a communal kitchen for individuals and families to be able to enjoy meals together and other family-related activities. It could very well be comprised of a number of different features, including indoor activity areas for children or outdoor activities for children.

Again, we recognize that the final determination of these particular features has not been finalized but that there will be ongoing discussions, working with our stakeholders to ensure that whatever the Government of Yukon does put up reflects the aspirations of this particular target area of lone-parent families.

The member also made reference to green standards. I can confirm it will be planned to be built to green home standards and, if at all possible, to exceed green home standards — seeing a great opportunity to exemplify great standards that can inspire others to do the same.

It will be designed for high energy efficiency with effective indoor air quality, ventilation systems, and so forth. I'm very pleased to concur it will be built to super green standards.

In terms of women's programming, this will be an opportunity to dialogue more with women's organizations and the stakeholders, when we go further into the planning process. In terms of opportunities, whenever we can have workshops, there are so many different program options that may be available and those will be investigated. Again, that was something that was identified in consultation — having a centrally located design feature, which may or may not include a space for facilitating such programming.

In terms of being able to advance women's equality and meeting the needs of families with children, anything that can be provided — and I say that with the key: this particular housing initiative is all for being able to provide that loving, nurturing, safe and protective environment so families can live

healthily and take advantage of some of the different programs out there.

So I think that is all that I have been able to cover. Again, we are looking at two to three years — maybe less than three years, maybe two and a half years — and that will depend on site selection, whether there are zoning changes and whether or not there are different planning processes associated with different site selections. We will have a better idea of that by year-end when we will have a site selected and we will be able to proceed with more definitive planning as well.

Mr. Elias: I would really like to thank the minister responsible. She was very concise in her response to my questions and answered the majority of them, with the exception of the criteria or the rules with regard to people who will actually end up living in the building, if their situational factors do change while they are in the complex. I thank the minister for that response.

I would like to change topics, with regard to the Yukon Human Rights Commission that just recently released their report on human rights of women and girls in the Yukon. There were some statistics of concern within that report and I would like to bring up one of them with regard to 55 percent of Yukon women and girls reporting that they have experienced discrimination. This is of concern, and I am wondering how the minister views this problem and a solution to it.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: We certainly congratulate the Yukon Human Rights Commission for undertaking this very important initiative. This, after all, was an initiative that was able to take advantage of funding made available through the Women's Directorate — the women's equality fund that we were able to announce about a year ago in order to advance women's equality on a number of different fronts.

The Yukon Human Rights Commission received \$20,000 to advance this consultation with women and girls throughout the territory. They did an exemplary job with the dollars available and the time allotted to them. The end result was a very articulate report, explaining challenges associated with discrimination in the territory to this day. That is the key mandate of the Women's Directorate: to work toward the full equality of women in the territory, whether legal, social, economic or political.

The Human Rights Commission pointed out a number of different areas to look at in the future, to take the extra time to dialogue further. It was timely; it was just recently that the Legislative Assembly agreed unanimously, I understand, to review the human rights legislation as soon as the House adjourns. They will be able to report back on how we can strengthen and modernize the legislation.

This report is very timely; it will go a long way to inform the select committee, comprised of all political parties, to work toward advancing some of the issues identified within the report.

Obviously, it points to a number of different factors in terms of the need for law reform. Without presuming the outcome of the select committee's review of the human rights legislation, this will be part of the research the select committee will use to move forward.

The Women's Directorate has been very busy indeed. In fact, just looking over the last five and a half years, the Women's Directorate has grown very much. Its budget has more than doubled over the last five years. We were able to reinstate the Women's Directorate prior to the renewal initiative undertaken by the previous Liberal government, and we have been pleased to provide the necessary resources to address women's equality. As I spoke about earlier, we are working to enhance women's housing security, and I referred to the 30-unit affordable family housing initiative that is underway. I also referred to numerous other housing initiatives that have been undertaken by the government over the recent years.

We have also been working to eradicate violence against women and girls on a number of fronts, whether that is through training initiatives, public education, campaigns and front-line services through the good work of the Department of Justice, the Department of Health and Social Services, the Women's Directorate and many others.

We have also been working with a number of women's organizations to support and enhance their capacity to continue their work of advancing women's equality. They have played an important role in the evolution of women's equality in the territory and we are very appreciative for the grassroots work they undertake day in and day out.

We have been able to make funding available to different entities including enhanced funding to the women's advocate program administered by the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre. We have also been able to introduce two new funding programs — the aboriginal women's violence prevention initiative. That has really gone toward many different initiatives. I think there has been almost a half a million dollars over the last four years for that alone.

We've also introduced the women's equality fund, which supports direct services and programs for women, research and policy development, education and action on women's equality, working to address violence in our communities, developing the capacity of women's organizations and also supporting advocacy work, something that the recent changes to the Status of Women Canada no longer allows or enables. We have been pleased to make funding available to fit that as well.

There is a lot of work being undertaken by all departments, including the Women's Directorate, on this particular front. There is always more work to be done and there is always more to be undertaken. Over the last number of years, the Women's Directorate has played a leadership role on a number of different fronts — more recently on women and substance abuse. How can we in the Government of Yukon more effectively respond to the needs of women who are suffering and afflicted with substance abuse issues?

With regard to working toward women's economic interdependence, I take a look at women in trades and funding made available to Yukon Women in Trades and Technology. They have done exemplary work. Just recently we spoke to a motion in the Legislature that spoke to the enhanced number of women who have entered trades.

This is thanks to work being done by that particular organization to raise awareness of the importance of trades to the

development of our economy, and also breaking down those barriers to women in trades — removing those myths and making it a viable occupation for women to seek. Looking at the number of women enrolled in trades and apprenticeship programs, whether at Yukon College or elsewhere, it is heartening to see that proceeding.

I think it is important to point out that, despite all the work, discrimination does continue to exist — unfortunately, on a number of different fronts, and that was confirmed by the Yukon Human Rights Commission report.

Mr. Elias: I have another question for the minister. In early March of this year, the federal government launched Shelternet, an e-counselling service for abused women who can benefit from this on-line service across Canada.

This seems to be a very forward thinking way of addressing violence against women and abused women across the country. I'm just wondering how the Women's Directorate and the minister have maximized the benefit to Yukon women's organizations and rural Yukon. How has it maximized the benefit of the Government of Canada initiative that was released in March?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Well, Mr. Chair, we're quite pleased that the federal government is moving on this front, but more importantly I think that is one venue for being able to address women in crisis. I think that I have articulated a couple of other times in the Legislature about working with our respective shelters and transition homes here in Yukon, as well as with the Department of Health and Social Services and the Department of Justice on the business case of funding for women's shelters that do not fall on reserve land.

I think that one only has to take a look at the recent announcement — it wasn't recent, it was about a year ago and I believe it was Indian and Northern Affairs Canada that made the announcement — that there was \$55 million or \$56 million made available to enhance funding to new shelters as well — however, the criterion being “on reserve”. That pretty much makes the three territories not eligible for that particular funding. We have raised this matter with the respective federal ministers on the file.

Following the last federal-provincial-territorial ministers meeting and the recent meeting I had with the federal minister in Ottawa back in February, it was reconfirmed that the federal minister is willing to take forward the information that is provided by the three territories, to raise it with his respective colleagues.

In the meantime, I know our government, through the Department of Health and Social Services, continues to work with our existing shelters. They do an exemplary job day in and day out with programming they offer. I just refer to Watson Lake as a case in point. I was recently in Watson Lake and had the opportunity to take another tour of the facility. I was really impressed to see the growing enhanced level of programming made available to women and children in that area.

I think they're doing a great job in raising awareness about what programs they have available and about the housing available for women fleeing from abusive relationships. In fact, I know I was very pleased to see that the community develop-

ment fund was able to approve the application from the Help and Hope for Families Society in Watson Lake for an additional — I believe it's a three-unit second-stage housing for that longer term, more stable living environment for women and children.

For the first time that I can recall, a rural community outside of the City of Whitehorse will actually have second-stage housing. That's another way that the Government of Yukon has been able to support shelters. I think that's really important to keep in mind as well.

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Hardy: Once again, I would like to thank the minister. I think quite a few questions have been addressed; probably a lot more time could be spent on debating the particulars of them.

What I am going to do is, once again, list a bunch of concerns and questions — some have been touched on; some have not — and allow the minister to respond to them. I'll pace it so you can keep up. If not, don't worry, I don't need the answers immediately, but I do want them on record in order to ensure that the minister has an opportunity to send me the answers.

I think of government jobs as an example, and it's an example where people look to us to lead by example, of course, in hiring — and it's not, nor should it just be hiring. So I'll start with some questions around that and I'll just continue through. On the balance in government positions between male and female, and most specifically in management or director and DM levels, and how that is really reflected, it's interesting. I was sitting here listening to the minister's responses and reading the objectives of the directorate, and I started going through all the departments and looking at who the DMs are. I don't believe that the positions reflect the population breakdown.

That is actually reflective of the Legislative Assembly because in here we have, from my perspective, far too many men and not enough women in positions of power. I would like to know the minister's feelings about that and how it is possible for us to ensure that more women get positions of power and decision-making. I don't see it reflected necessarily in the upper management positions in government, and I definitely don't see it reflected in the Legislative Assembly.

The minister also talked about women in trades and I have worked with women in trades and have had a tremendous amount of enjoyment and respect for the work they did. My daughter was in the first program of women in trades and, even though she has a master's through university, she came out of there with a tremendous amount of self-esteem and respect for the trades and understanding around them. Since my background is trades, it was nice to be able to sit down and talk to her about that type of work and what is available for women. It is a really good program and, in the organization I am working with, we are once again working with women in trades. I really look forward to that.

However, having said that, I go around on job sites and talk to a lot of people from my past experience and I still see, I would say, that 95 to 98 percent of people in trades are men. Our ability to have an impact in that area seems to be very limited.

I know the programs that are being offered, but I don't think they are enough because they are not having the impact that we really want or what the minister really wants as well. I'm concerned about that as well.

The wage spread has been closing and definitely in the Yukon it has closed a lot more than it has in other places in Canada, but it is still there and it still exists. That is a form of discrimination. What is being done about that and how can we strengthen that? I have already talked about the management positions and it is something that we really need to look at from the deputy minister down. Women must be given equal opportunity to be in positions of decision-making and better wage brackets as well. If the minister can respond to that, I'd really appreciate it.

Abusive relationships — a terrible thing in our society and I'll touch on that in a minute.

The questions I'm going to put before the minister, I've already supplied them to her. I thought it would be something good to give those questions —

The minister has indicated to me that she just got the questions. Well, as I said, I'm not holding the minister to account for those questions at this very moment. They were introduced into the Legislative Assembly earlier today, and I don't think that has ever been done before but I did want the minister to have some notice about areas we are concerned about or we want responses to and it gave just more of a heads-up to see if we can work a little bit better in this Legislative Assembly by doing that.

I will read the questions and allow the minister to respond and move on.

Under the objectives of the directorate, how has the directorate met its program objectives over the past year? They are listed, of course, on page 16-6. That is what we all have to keep referring to — how the directorate measures its success at meeting its program objectives. Measurements are very important in that regard, from the progress report on the northern strategy emergency shelter feasibility study to the criteria for the evaluation of a long-term public education campaign on the prevention of violence against women and children.

I said I would touch on that again. Of course, in the papers, there was another assault — again. We all know that the majority of assaults are not reported. That's just the tip of the iceberg. Of course, it's something we have to be very concerned about.

What is the process for evaluation and the results of the evaluations of the projects initiated by aboriginal women to address violence prevention in their communities in 2007-08, and process for evaluation and the results of the evaluation for the projects funded in 2007-08 under the women's equality fund? Can the minister respond to the processes and the results? If she can't on the floor today, as I said, I am very open to getting it later. Also, can I get a list of the recipients and the amounts transferred and the objectives of projects for funds transferred for the line item "Various Women's Groups" on page 16-7, which is approximately \$175,000?

A breakdown and the objectives around that — the evaluation process used for the various women's groups for measur-

ing success, justification for the difference in amounts transferred to various women's groups and the amount transferred to the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre and the guidelines for transfer payments.

The minister has touched on some of this already, but I will just read these questions in anyway and see where it goes.

The family focus housing project — I looked at the summary of consultations we received regarding women and housing in January 2008. I think it was in the last day or two — I could be wrong. As usual, it just shows a need in our community and is something that should be addressed.

Though the announcements were made a couple of months ago, I'm not sure where we're at with that, including location, size and total cost of the housing project. I do know the minister had indicated they hadn't found a location yet. I believe that's what I heard, and she can correct me if I'm wrong.

There has been mention of the size. Have we got to the point of actual design? I'm from the construction industry and have my own company — \$13 million I think was the figure that was kind of thrown out there, but it wasn't really based on a design; it wasn't based on location; it wasn't based on a lot of things. Criteria has been identified, but that figure is not based on fact, and I'm wondering if the minister has been able to narrow down that cost a little bit, so that she's getting toward a figure that is more reflective of what it might be?

There are real challenges around that and there have been challenges about city planning and development, and I am wondering if the minister has been looking at the problems in other centres, often much larger, and what problems that causes for people in their life?

I am going to stop with that. There are a lot of questions and I have added more. There are some that have already been answered.

I look forward to the minister's response and hopefully we can support some of the initiatives in this.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Chair, the Leader of the Third Party certainly raised a lot of questions. I don't know if I will get to all of them, but maybe he'll give me an extra 20 minutes after I am finished here. I know members opposite always love to hear me articulate on issues of importance to the Women's Directorate, so I am pleased to take the opportunity to provide information.

I will start with the housing initiative the member opposite asked about. I have touched upon most of the areas addressed by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin. There are a couple of other things I would like to touch upon.

In terms of the time frame that I have articulated, we are looking at a minimum of two years and, at most, three years. I think that this first year, using the dollars allocated in the budget, we are looking to use that toward planning, site selection, consultation and the design of the actual initiative itself. Then we would look at commencing construction the year after, so we're looking at next year in all likelihood.

Again, keep in mind that we're working as expeditiously as possible, but also working in a thoughtful, respectful manner is of critical importance as well.

I can't stress this enough: I think it is a grand opportunity to be really creative. You know, as I mentioned before, this is really the first initiative of its kind, ever, in the Yukon. I think that working with our stakeholders, working with those who could benefit from this particular initiative, it is really important to take some time to work with them to identify what those centrally located design features would be and where it is to be situated. As we have all seen, there may be some challenges — but maybe not — in terms of site selection. I think that the Women's Directorate and Yukon Housing Corporation, along with the City of Whitehorse, are certainly looking at all the options of possible sites to be identified for this particular initiative.

Again, if that requires a zoning change or perhaps an amendment to the official community plan — I mean, who knows in these particular circumstances? I think the target is that in this very first year we will be looking to finalize site selection, and depending on what that site selection is, that will in some way also dictate the outline or footprint of the particular initiative, as well. Again, having those further dialogues with stakeholders will also help define what that is to look like.

Once we have the site selection, once we've had more consultations taking place — and keeping in mind that this will be building on what we heard in November/December — we'll then be able to have a more refined cost estimate. At this time, as we have also stated, we're looking in the realm of \$9 to 11 million — maybe that is less.

It's also important to point out that because we are looking at families, we are probably looking at larger units; that is, we are looking at units that will be comprised of a minimum of two bedrooms and going to four bedrooms to accommodate larger families. We know that that has been an issue.

People may be on the waiting list for that particular housing because there aren't any available right now. We are taking into consideration that we need to proceed with this particular initiative keeping in mind that it needs to reflect the size of the families. We are looking at a combination of a minimum of two bedrooms, to three or four bedrooms, which certainly requires a good size, for sure. It is also important, because we know that that is the need within the particular area. It happens to be here in the City of Whitehorse.

Going back to the member's comments on hiring practices in the Government of Yukon, unfortunately I don't have those statistics in front of me. That would be housed within the Public Service Commission, which the minister was talking about probably an hour ago. I'm not sure if the member opposite had the opportunity to raise it with him but I am sure he could better elaborate than I could. At this particular time I don't have the statistics on hand.

What I do know is that, for example, the Deputy Minister of Tourism and Culture, whom I oversee and certainly the Women's Directorate — there are two women there. The new Deputy Minister of Education is also a woman. Of course, we know that in Education, the ADM, the director of finance and the director of human resources are also women. These are just cases in point. Again, without really referring to the statistics, it is difficult for me to comment on that.

What I can say is that through initiatives housed within the Public Service Commission, through the investment in public service, there is a lot of emphasis on leadership initiatives and gender equality. Women certainly play a very important role in those particular initiatives.

This will help with succession planning in the government. We know that there are more and more changes, because of the demographics, in our labour market. There is more and more emphasis on the need for all individuals to take an active role in the labour market. It is for that particular reason the government has looked at initiatives such as childcare subsidy. A \$1,000,000 increase to the childcare subsidy speaks volumes about the desire to have more parents enter the workforce. Childcare subsidies, depending on one's income, will make a significant difference in the lives of many families.

It is really critical to take a look at the bigger picture. Likewise, there are reforms in social assistance planned. There are incentives for more individuals to enter the workforce without being penalized for doing so. That is part of the labour market strategy. I know there are a lot of efforts being taken by the government, and by government working with First Nations, other levels of government, community stakeholders and so forth. It is really important to point that out.

I also look at leadership initiatives, and this is something we have really been able to support. I refer to the Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle, for example. They have been real leaders in terms of being able to place emphasis on training and leadership initiatives, made available to their respective membership in all communities in the Yukon.

It's something that we will be working on over the coming year, in terms of how we can enhance women in leadership. That starts at the top, and it starts with all different levels. I know that there are some really exciting projects underway right now with other Yukon First Nation governments — partnering up with different educational institutions, including Yukon College — to develop executive leadership programs and so forth.

So, again, that is also perhaps not a direct, but an indirect, way of engaging and reaching out to more citizens, which will also include many women.

Women do comprise the majority of positions in the Government of Yukon, unless that has changed over the last couple of years. I am pretty confident that is the case through different development initiatives — I just made reference to the Yukon Government Leadership Forum, the government coaching program. I don't have the correct terminology but these are all ways to provide that succession planning, which is really critical to build a capacity in government, taking advantage of what we would call perhaps underutilized areas, including women in the workforce.

The member opposite also made reference to women in trades. I don't have to go on too much more, although we were really pleased to provide for Yukon Women in Trades and Technology \$105,000 over three years through the women's equality fund. That's the first time they have ever received funding like that through the Women's Directorate.

I know they also receive substantial resources through the Department of Education, but there is the ability to leverage resources from elsewhere and the return on investment is incredible for what they have been able to do with that particular funding.

My apologies — I only received this information — these questions — just moments ago. In terms of transfer payments — I think that was referred to — we know that housed within this particular budget there is \$372,000 for initiatives such as the women's equality fund. We have \$175,000 identified and those are for projects for three-year initiatives, providing longer term, stable funding for different organizations. Yukon Human Rights Commission received \$20,000 for one year. All the others are receiving funding over the three years.

There are criteria associated with the distribution of the women's equality fund, but all decisions are made within the Women's Directorate, through the respective officials. They have done a good job in terms of coming up with the criteria for the respective funds, following up and making decisions based on information provided to them from the respective organizations.

We also know that, under transfer payments, there is \$100,000 for aboriginal women's violence prevention funding. As I mentioned earlier, I believe this will make almost \$500,000 over the last four years we've made available for numerous projects that have taken place over the years in all different communities. Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation was one recipient; Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation — a lot of different, unique, creative projects have been funded.

The innovative thing about this particular initiative is that these are projects that are driven and they are delivered by aboriginal women in the communities. That is what makes them very insightful and makes them effective as well.

There is also \$80,000 identified for Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre and that includes funding for the women's advocate. I think it was a year and a half ago that we were able to increase women's advocate funding by \$10,000. I believe it went from \$50,000 to \$60,000 for the women's advocate. So they are also recipients of the women's equality fund, so that is building on their funding for the last couple of years.

In the transfer payments there is also \$12,000 for the Yukon Status of Women Council and that has been in place for a number of years; and \$5,000 for women's community projects.

I just wanted to build upon the women's equality fund for last fiscal year, and that will be carrying forward. For 2007-08, I know that these numbers have changed for 2008-09, this fiscal year that we're looking at.

So this year, year two, we've got \$35,000 for the Liard Aboriginal Women's Society and year two, Whitehorse Aboriginal Women's Circle is receiving \$35,000; Les EssentiElles is receiving \$35,000; Yukon Women in Trades and Technology is receiving \$35,000; and, Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre is receiving \$13,500.

That comprises the initiatives for 2008-09 and then, of course, funding will also be carrying on to the next year. I think it has been a really good initiative. It has been very well re-

ceived in the community. There is also \$20,000 for the Yukon Status of Women Council.

Building on what I said earlier, we have been able to place renewed emphasis on the role that women's organizations play in the territory and certainly in support of their grassroots initiatives. In fact, that funding has grown from \$82,000 to \$367,000 this year. It has grown over the years and we are very pleased to be able to support the good work of those organizations.

There was also discussion, I believe, about a public education campaign for the prevention of violence against women and children. We are now into year three of this particular campaign. Over the years, we have seen a number of different initiatives funded, from photojournalism exhibits to information pamphlets for girls and boys in the school system. There has been information available for safety kits used by front-line workers who work with women who have unfortunately been subjected to abuse.

Later on this month we will be launching two articulate, comprehensive training videos for the purpose of public education, raising awareness, and they will be accompanied by a training manual to be used by front-line workers.

It is helping to build capacity among the front-line staff. This is a really exciting initiative, because it is a Yukon script that was developed by Yukoners, using Yukon actors. It is also responding to recommendations that were made by CORE — Circles of Respect and Equality — which is an inner agency group of about 18 different organizations, front-line agencies and stakeholders.

We really look forward to that, and it is Yukon relevant, and with a Yukon theme. We think because it is Yukon-based that it will appeal to even more individuals, and that project is jointly funded with the Department of Justice.

I am very pleased to provide those additional resources. We look forward to the final product.

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

Recess

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, Vote 11, Women's Directorate. We will now continue with general debate.

Mr. Elias: When I initially stood on my feet in the House in debate of the Women's Directorate, I neglected to mention that we were provided an opposition briefing note that was very concise and it covered a lot of valuable information. That is why I didn't ask those specific questions, because they were provided by the department in the briefing note.

If the third party actually came to this Legislature prepared and read their briefing note and was listening to my questions then they wouldn't have put the honourable minister in a position to repeat herself and waste this House's valuable time. We're in a time crunch here and it is things like this that make our House inefficient.

I would just like to thank the staff from the Women's Directorate for providing this briefing note and going through information with regard to transfer payments and the women's equality fund, aboriginal women violence prevention in the communities, changes in program delivery, public education and violence prevention. All of these topics were covered in the briefing note that was provided by the Women's Directorate staff.

I'd like to move on here. I do have a couple of more questions, but they are in line-by-line so if we can expedite this process, that would be great.

Once again, I thank the staff for their briefing note. I had neglected to mention that when I first stood.

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Seeing none, we will now proceed line by line in Vote 11.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

On Policy and Program Development

On Program Delivery

Program Delivery in the amount of \$842,000 agreed to

On Public Education

Mr. Elias: Can I get a breakdown of that?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: The main estimate is for \$157,000. This is an increase of \$33,000 and these funds are allocated for the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues annual women's forum.

I am really pleased to be able to say that we were able to make monies available for the annual women's forum. Previously there was not any funding available for that. We were able to announce, I think it was about three years ago, \$15,000 for the first forum. Since that time, we have been able to bump that funding up to \$40,000. That has really enabled a substantive contribution on an annual basis to support issues of importance as identified by the Yukon Advisory Council on Women's Issues.

Whether that be a priority housing policy — which Yukon Housing Corporation has since implemented and moved on — or whether it's working on issues pertaining to violence, what that funding has really made possible is for a number of women from all over the Yukon to participate in that particular venue.

So, it's been very well-received. I know that, last year alone, monies were made available for the two aboriginal women's summits that were held in Watson Lake and Whitehorse. That was really a worthwhile initiative.

Public Education in the amount of \$157,000 agreed to

On Violence Prevention

Violence Prevention in the amount of \$126,000 agreed to

Policy and Program Development in the amount of \$1,125,000 agreed to

On Transfer Payments

Mr. Elias: Under this line item, is this where the aboriginal women's violence prevention initiative \$100,000 — it's a proposal-driven initiative that has a deadline of May 2008 — is this the line item involving that?

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Chair, as outlined in the next page, under "Other Transfer Payments", the member opposite can see \$372,000. That contains monies identified for Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, for both "Operations" and

"Women's Advocate" programs. The women's advocate, as I think I articulated to the Leader of the Third Party just moments ago, we were able to enhance funding by \$10,000, I believe a year and a half ago. Yukon Status of Women Council is at \$12,000. Keep in mind that both of these organizations also receive funding through the women's equality fund. "Various Women's Groups" is in the amount of \$175,000, which is for the women's equality fund.

I outlined before who is receiving the dollar amount over the three-year period before — I think it is \$520,000. There is also \$5,000 identified for women's community projects, and that makes up the total.

Chair: Are there any general questions on transfer payments?

Transfer Payments in the amount of \$372,000 agreed to
Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$1,125,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

On Policy and Program Development

On Office Furniture, Equipment, Systems and Space

Office Furniture, Equipment, Systems and Space in the amount of \$5,000 agreed to

Policy and Program Development in the amount of \$5,000 agreed to

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$5,000 agreed to

Women's Directorate agreed to

Department of Energy, Mines and Resources

Hon. Mr. Lang: I am very pleased today to present the budget for Energy, Mines and Resources. I would like to take a few minutes, while we wait to get into the budget itself, to thank all the employees and individuals who work in this very dynamic department. I have had the good luck, I guess, and growing experience of working with these dynamic people for the last six years. The department has grown and the individuals in it are hard-working and show the product at the end of the day.

Whether you go into the lands department, oil and gas, mineral resources branch, the Yukon Geological Survey, forest management branch, Energy Solutions Centre — all of these departments are all being run very tightly within the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

And I'd like to say a big thanks to everybody who works in the department from me, as the minister. They certainly are not hard to represent here in the House. Certainly, in the eyes of the Yukon, when you go from community to community, we are certainly received very highly because of the hard work the department does on the ground.

In saying that and moving on, I'd like to present the 2008-09 main budget for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. The mandate of Energy, Mines and Resources is to responsibly manage and support the sustainable development of Yukon's energy and natural resources.

Our budget for 2008-09 focuses on continuing to fulfill this mandate. The department's efforts support the government's commitment to develop a prosperous and diversified

economy. Over the coming year, the key initiatives for this department will be: implement the new placer regime, in partnership with industry, First Nations and the federal government; complete the claims administration and royalty amendments to the *Quartz Mining Act*; approve the *North Yukon Land Use Plan* and commence regional land use planning in Dawson City; recommend a preferred final closure plan for the Faro mine site; complete an agreement with Canada to advance Yukon's offshore interests as identified in the Oil and Gas Accord; finalize Yukon's first comprehensive energy strategy and new forest legislation; advance the Alaska pipeline project by working with Canada, British Columbia, Alberta, First Nations, the State of Alaska and of course, industry; implement the agricultural multi-year plan with industry; continue to make agricultural, residential and commercial land available; and initiate bio-mass energy pilot projects.

The overall budget for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources for the year 2008-09 is a total of \$40.6 million. The operation and maintenance budget comes out at \$36.9 million and the department's capital budget is \$3.7 million. Revenues this year are estimated to be \$11.1 million. This includes \$9.2 million recoverable from Canada.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to take a moment to share with the Legislative Assembly some of the highlights of EMR's 2008-09 main budget.

In oil and gas and mineral resources, Yukon continues to be one of Canada's mining hot spots. With the opening of Sherwood Copper's Minto mine in October and our improved ranking of mineral potential and policy best practices in the Fraser Institute's annual survey of mining companies, it is clear that all the hard work that this government has done to provide a positive climate for mining industry in the territory has paid off for the benefit of all Yukoners. However, there is more to do to maintain and improve our investment climate.

This year, we are working toward modernizing the mineral claim administration and royalty provisions of the *Quartz Mining Act* and continue to provide project coordinators to assist major mining projects as needed.

We are supporting the permitting of other projects, including Yukon Zinc at Wolverine Lake, Western Copper at Williams Creek near Carmacks, and Tagish Lake Gold at Skukum Creek, south of Whitehorse. The government has allocated \$125,000 for regulatory competitiveness to continue the implementation of the recommendations from the Yukon Mineral Advisory Board. The department manages nearly 90,000 mineral claims and leases through four district offices. This winter was the 125th anniversary of the mining recorder's office as a public institution in Yukon.

The placer mining industry makes a significant contribution to the Yukon's economy and the new placer regime will provide certainty for that industry. The new regime will come into effect this spring and we have committed a total of \$329,000 to support the ongoing operation of the Yukon Placer Secretariat. The Yukon Placer Secretariat will continue its role as a coordinating body that troubleshoots the implementation process, guides the adaptive process and provides a mechanism

for third party involvement in habitat management decisions related to Yukon placer mining.

The new placer regime is a major success story that would not have been possible without the excellent collaboration and support from First Nations and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. I should point out that Fisheries and Oceans Canada is committed to this new regime and will provide \$100,000 to help offset the cost of the secretariat, and will also staff a new position in the regional office to support the regime.

The government has allocated \$700,000 for the continued support of the Yukon mining incentive program. This program helps to promote and enhance mineral prospecting and exploration and development activities. It also provides a portion of the risk capital required to locate and explore mineral deposits.

The Yukon Geological Survey has an outstanding geoscience database and we will continue to contribute to its growth and maintenance. The database supports industry investment and development, land use decision-making and contributes to the overall wise stewardship of our resources.

In response to First Nations and the petroleum industry's recommendations, we have developed a more streamlined and efficient process to grant oil and gas rights. Results thus far of the disposition process have been record-setting, both in terms of land area and bid amounts. In the year 2007, fourteen new permits for oil and gas rights were issued in northern Yukon. Work bids totalled \$22.8 million. The successful bidders were Northern Cross (Yukon) Ltd. and AustroCan Petroleum Corporation.

The Mackenzie gas project offers many benefits and opportunities to Yukon and Yukoners, and that is why we continue to support this project. We intervened in both the joint review panel and the National Energy Board hearings to advance Yukon's interests. The joint review panel hearings are now completed and we are pleased with the results of our intervention. Among other accomplishments, we received a letter of commitment from the proponent, Imperial Oil, with respect to priority hiring and procurement for Yukoners.

The National Energy Board hearings are underway and we want to ensure that the appropriate terms and tolling designs are used by the project to allow north Yukon's natural gas to be connected to the main pipeline in an economically feasible way.

Hearings are expected to conclude in late 2008 and final reports submitted in 2009. The department is working with Alberta and British Columbia to implement the strategic action plan for the proposed Alaska Highway pipeline project. This plan will help us achieve regulatory certainty for the Canadian portion of the Alaska Highway pipeline.

We continue to work with, and to provide funding to, the Alaska Highway Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition. For this fiscal year, the government has allocated \$200,000 to the coalition. The coalition plays an important role in ensuring that we are prepared for the Alaska Highway pipeline project. First Nation engagement and participation are essential in the development and implementation of an efficient pipeline regulatory process.

The government has committed \$175,000 to further develop Yukon's oil and gas potential. We are upgrading the hy-

drocarbon resource assessment for oil and gas in the Liard Plateau and are continuing to work with the hydrocarbon resource assessment in the Whitehorse Trough and Peel Plateau.

The government will continue the responsible closure, reclamation, care and maintenance of abandoned and orphaned mines in Yukon. The department will receive \$8.5 million from Canada for reclamation and closure activities for the four type 2 mine sites. This includes \$950,000 for the Mount Nansen site, \$120,000 for Clinton Creek, \$3.94 million for United Keno Hill, and \$3.5 million for Faro. We continue to work with affected First Nations, the Town of Faro, Canada and other interested stakeholders to develop a closure plan for the Faro mine site that will meet the needs and expectations of Yukoners. It must be cost-effective and environmentally sound.

We are working toward a target of late spring, early summer, for determination of the preferred alternatives for the closure and remediation plan for the Faro mine site. This should allow us to have detailed closure plans for submission to a Yukon regulatory process by no later than February 2009. Funding continues to be provided for community-based offices and/or community coordinators to support community involvement and meaningful input into the closure planning process.

A preferred closure alternative for Mount Nansen will be selected and we will work with the owner, First Nations and Canada to develop a closure plan for the historical liabilities at United Keno Hill. The department has also received \$500,000 from the northern strategy funding for the Yukon Mine Training Association. The Yukon Mine Training Association is working to address existing and upcoming labour shortages in the Yukon mining sector.

In sustainable resources, the department will allocate \$300,000 to implement forest management plans in partnership with First Nations and renewable resource councils. Forest management plans have been completed in Teslin and Champagne and Aishihik, and the Kaska forest resource stewardship council is finalizing the southeast Yukon regional forest management plan based upon the consultation.

The department is working on a number of initiatives to address the spruce beetle infestation: actively participating in the new national forest pest strategy working group; developing a workplan to access funding through a national forest pest strategy to develop a pest monitoring and risk assessment model for Yukon; and implementing the *Champagne and Aishihik Strategic Forest Management Plan*, which considers the condition of the forest as a result of the spruce beetle infestation. Planning is underway to initiate harvest operations in communities threatened by high fire hazards. Yukon is providing \$300,000 in the year 2008-09 for engineering and construction of main line forestry roads within the Champagne and Aishihik traditional territory. The northern strategy trust will be providing \$200,000 for a total of \$500,000.

The government has allocated \$200,000 for forest silviculture. This program ensures that Yukon lands are satisfactorily regenerated and also provides research information on the health of our Yukon forests. The department is developing a multi-pronged approach to reinvigorate the forest industry,

including completing and implementing the new forest resource act; strategic planning for the managing of a vibrant forest industry; setting up a forest industry taskforce and developing an action plan; providing road access; and raising the profile of the department's forestry research group.

The new forestry legislation will centre on forest planning, forest resources, harvesting dispositions, compliance and enforcement, and will recommit to the sustainable management and sound stewardship of the Yukon forest resources.

Public consultation on the concept of the proposed forest resource act is currently underway and it is anticipated the act will be finalized in the fall of 2008.

We will continue to work with the successor resource legislation working group, as well as the new Yukon Forest Industry Association and the forest value focus group to develop the forest resource act.

Energy, Mines and Resources is working with our colleagues in Community Services to identify ways to improve and streamline the land application process.

We are working in partnership with the Teslin Tlingit Council toward the development of recreational and rural residential land in the Tlingit traditional territory, as well as a knowledge transfer project. Yukon will provide \$250,000 for this project, which is supported by the northern strategy trust.

This government continues to support the growth of the agricultural industry in Yukon. An interim agreement has been signed with the federal government for one year for the extension of the agricultural policy framework programs, and negotiations are continuing with Canada for the new Growing Forward policy framework.

The department is also working with the Agriculture Industry Advisory Committee to implement the Yukon agricultural multi-year development plan. This plan focuses on investing resources in strategic development.

The 2006 Yukon agriculture policy maintains the emphasis on planning, agriculture development and strengthening the program's commitment to commercial agriculture. \$100,000 has been allocated for agriculture land development.

The agricultural branch concluded a lottery for four agricultural parcels near Haines Junction in October 2007, and more will come out in 2008.

On the energy and corporate policy, the department is developing an energy strategy for the Yukon that will guide policy development to support sustainable energy projects.

A workshop was held in November to scope the key issues, principles and priorities for the energy strategy. The Yukon government is preparing a draft energy strategy for broader public consultation this spring. It is expected the strategy will address the issues of energy management, supply, demand, security, affordability, efficiency, conservation and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The government is already actively working on many of these issues.

This government supports an environmentally and economically responsible approach to energy use and continues to deliver a range of energy efficiency and renewable energy programs through the Energy Solutions Centre. For 2008-09, the Energy Solutions Centre will encourage demand-side manage-

ment initiatives, such as rebates on purchases of clean technology, developing biomass energy opportunities, and developing options for better transportation efficiency.

Energy, Mines and Resources is also working in partnership with the Department of Environment to develop the climate change implementation plan. The climate change implementation plan and the energy framework strategy are both key initiatives of this government. We are working with Environment to ensure that the two initiatives remain coordinated.

This should be a milestone year for land use planning in Yukon. The first recommended regional land use plan being prepared by North Yukon Planning Commission has been submitted to the Yukon and Vuntut Gwitchin governments for review and approval. We will also continue to support and facilitate regional land use planning in the Peel region and establish a new planning process in the Dawson area. The department will also contribute resource information for the completion and approval of special management area management plans.

In all resource areas, the department will pursue ways to ensure that First Nations are full partners in resource management and development in the Yukon. This year, the department will continue to ensure full participation and consultation throughout the assessment and regulatory phases of major mine development, support the Alaska Highway Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition, work with First Nations in Teslin, Watson Lake, Ross River, Dawson and Haines Junction to complete and implement strategic forest management plans, and identify the training needs of First Nations to assist them in maximizing business and employment opportunities for First Nation members and corporations in relation to the care and maintenance activities at our abandoned type 2 mines. The department will also work in partnership on northern strategic projects, such as developing the Little Teslin Lake cottage lots and building forestry roads in southwest Yukon.

Energy, Mines and Resources continues to contribute to the Yukon government's goal of building a strong and diversified economy that will benefit all Yukoners. We are doing this by improving our investment climate, encouraging private sector investment, encouraging growth in the resource sector, providing regulatory certainty and partnering with our First Nation governments.

This concludes the introductory comments for the main estimates for the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources.

Mr. McRobb: I would like to start off by agreeing with the minister about the expertise and great competence of the officials in the department. I always enjoy the briefings we have with them once a year. That one hour allotted for the briefing just ticks by too quickly. There are a number of exciting initiatives in this department and certainly this team of officials is right on top of matters. I would go so far as to say that the minister is very fortunate that they are as on top of it as they are.

It makes me wonder, though, why we don't hear from the minister more often about some of these initiatives. He does have the ability to bring in ministerial statements with respect to any of these initiatives, yet he is silent on them. There are so

many that could be done that I think it would benefit all Yukoners if he would do more ministerial statements, which are put on the record before Question Period each day, Mr. Chair.

I have a number of areas I want to ask him about, so I would invite him to return the cooperation. The first one is with respect to the Alaska natural gas pipeline proposal. We understand there are two proposals on the table now. Does the minister favour any one of these over the other?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I guess the direct answer would be no. We'll work with whatever component is finally decided on.

Mr. McRobb: I thank the minister for that concise answer.

I would like to ask him about the aboriginal pipeline group. Has there been any progress lately? It has been a couple of years since I heard about anything. That was funded through the department. Can he give us an update on that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The Alaska Highway Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition was started a couple of years ago when the Alaska Highway pipeline was — in essence — warming up. We understood that some form of coalition should be formed to address the issues that would resolve around a pipeline.

A training and business opportunity was held November 20 and 21, 2007.

The Liard First Nation has indicated they would like to become more involved in the Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition.

We are all waiting for some decisions to come out of Alaska. You know, the State of Alaska is very busy on this file and the governor is working on bringing some things to the House here in a special sitting in June. We wait for the producers themselves to make some decisions.

It looks very positive and I think, if we were to look back in my tenure here for the last six years, we're looking more favourably at some kind of decisions coming out of Alaska that would trigger a pipeline. It looks like the governor is looking very seriously or has actually decided on the trans-Canada process, so we're waiting for those decisions to come out of Alaska.

I feel very positive about that; the governor is very positive or bullish on the decision coming out here in June. We have producers and other issues to resolve. We're all waiting to have those decisions and then, at that point, all of our organizations will be gearing up for those kinds of decisions.

There are decisions we would have to make, having the pipeline come through our jurisdiction in the way it does. So we are waiting for decisions in Alaska, waiting for the producers to make some decisions, and at that point it certainly will kick up what the Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition is doing. It will get more active and, of course, all Yukoners will have to be addressed.

So we're looking forward to some finale there in Alaska and working with our own communities and Yukoners as a whole, along with the aboriginal pipeline group, to address some of the issues that are out there.

Mr. McRobb: All right. The last I heard there were still some First Nations that weren't a part of the Alaska Highway Aboriginal Pipeline Group or Coalition — the name seems

to keep changing. Can the minister indicate which First Nations along the route are still not participants in this group?

Hon. Mr. Lang: When it was originally started, seven First Nations were directly affected by the pipeline. If, in fact, it came through, it would be going through their traditional territories. That was how the organization was set up. After that, of course, the organization was going to put together a process on how all other First Nations would participate. But originally it was the seven First Nations that were going to be directly affected if and when they built the pipeline.

Mr. McRobb: Okay, so I assume that all seven First Nations are still part of the group. If that's not the case, I would ask the minister to correct the record.

I would like to ask the minister about the corrosion on the pipeline in Alaska. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System, or TAPS, has experienced some extreme erosion in recent years. According to my knowledge, this corrosion is something that could be prevented with the inclusion of some anti-corrosive elements in the fabrication of the steel.

Is the minister doing anything about this? Is it entirely left up to the producer or the pipeline company, or does it fall within the hands of a regulator? Or, is it something that the Yukon government could insist on, in order to avoid future leaks and corrosion in the pipeline? I would imagine that it's probably a bit of all three of those.

Let me redefine the question: is this something that the government has some ability to have control over, to require a very high quality of steel in the pipeline?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I think we would look at the environmental assessment program that would have to be in place before a pipeline could be built. All those issues would be brought forward and hopefully addressed at that level.

Mr. McRobb: All right, Mr. Chair, that didn't really answer the question. The minister is saying that what might be good enough to pass at the environmental level is okay with him. I am suggesting that perhaps the government look at higher standards than basically what is allowed and assure Yukoners that if a pipeline is built, it is constructed with high quality material.

I want to ask the minister about a concern expressed by the White River First Nation. It is something I mentioned a few weeks ago. They have some culturally significant areas that border the pipeline right-of-way. It is thought that the Little John site north of Beaver Creek that has uncovered artifacts 14,000 years old extends into this right-of-way. Obviously, the minister must be familiar with this matter. Is he prepared to do anything to avoid damage to these areas by the pipelines, such as ensuring that the pipeline would be rerouted into a new corridor that doesn't affect these areas?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In answering the member's last question, when he was talking about the environmental assessment — we are going to get into the size of the pipe this afternoon — permitting would certainly take care of a lot of that.

Of course, the First Nation issues have to be addressed. Through the environmental assessment and through the Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition, all these things will be brought out and be addressed in a timely fashion. When the pipeline is trig-

gered, it doesn't mean that the pipeline is coming through the next morning. This is a 10-year process. There is going to be lots of time and there will be lots of permits to get and assessments. Of course, we will be active with the Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition as a government and we will certainly be active with all the First Nations that will be impacted. This would be an operational question in the territory and would have to be addressed as we move forward.

It is certainly not going to be the only issue that the Government of Yukon and the aboriginal coalition group will have to address as it comes through our territory.

Mr. McRobb: All right, Mr. Chair, I'll be sure to pass that information on.

Let's switch now to the Kotaneelee gas fields. It has been winding down in recent years. I believe the revenue from that field peaked out around the \$9-million mark or something to that effect. The revenue this year is estimated to be very low. When does the minister expect this field production to come to a conclusion?

Hon. Mr. Lang: If you want a little history lesson, the Kotaneelee has had the most productive and profitable gas wells in North America. They have been actively producing resources for the last 20-some years and certainly produced great resources for the territory.

In addressing the members opposite on when is it going to be completely closed down, we're looking at the next couple of years. I'm told that the revenues are down to roughly half a million dollars a year for the territory, so it is certainly coming to an end — the field itself.

Devon, the last owner — the owner before the company that has it now — did some enhancement to the wells but, in turn, that was not successful. They are filling up with water and that is sort of the finale of the Kotaneelee field as it exists today. There is huge potential in that area for other exploration and we are working with the affected First Nations to see if there is any opportunity for our governments to work together to open up that part of the Yukon to more development and more exploration in the gas fields.

It is coming to an end. I can't give you a date. I am told that it could happen in the next couple of years. The revenues have certainly dropped. I'm told that they have dropped to half a million dollars, approximately. It does have an effect on all governments in Yukon, of course.

Through YOGA, we share in all those resources. All settled First Nations share in the royalties from the Kotaneelee fields. It impacts all of the governments in the Yukon. We're looking forward to some kind of positive results out of the Liard First Nation and the other affected First Nations in that part of the Yukon so that we can move forward with more exploration.

Mr. McRobb: All right. I would like to ask him about oil and gas dispositions. The departmental officials informed me there was a call for nominations that was happening at the time of the briefing, which was back on April 3.

Can he just give us an update on what has happened as a result of that process and how many other calls for nomination

he expects this year? Maybe he could give us an idea of how much interest was expressed in this recent call.

Hon. Mr. Lang: To address the member opposite, all I have in front of me from a success point is what happened last year at the disposition. Of course, we had the work commitment of \$22,800,000. We have just put out the work bids for May and June of 2008 and we're in the process of doing the next disposition now. There is a process that we follow and, at the end of the process, we will have the successful bidders. But for me to tell the member opposite today who they are, how much they bid — it's not possible because we're just halfway through the process.

Mr. McRobb: I'd like to follow up with him on that \$22.8 million from the past year and ask him exactly how much was spent in the Yukon and, as well, how many jobs were produced.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Last year's bid was very successful, as I pointed out in my introduction. The two bidders who were successful were Northern Cross and AustroCan Petroleum Corporation. Northern Cross has moved a drill rig into its dispositions on Eagle Plains and is in the process of permitting. They are very gung-ho to have something in the ground this summer. They propose to have their oil or gas well — the work that's going to be done there would be year-round. They will be employing people not only to work on the drilling rig, but they also have to put together plans on access roads, pads and things like that. We're looking at a workforce — I can't give him the exact figure but I think it will be extensive this coming season for their exploration program in that part of northern Yukon.

The other program is AustroCan Petroleum Corporation and they are doing an aerial program this summer. It will include participation of local entrepreneurs in the flying industry and that kind of technology. It is certainly a commitment to go forward and explore north Yukon for resources.

I would remind the member opposite that the interest we get now in north Yukon is based on what we are seeing today in the Mackenzie Valley pipeline. As it gets closer and closer to reality, we certainly are getting more interest in our potential, because at the end of the day these investors have to realize a return on their investment. That would be through a Mackenzie Valley pipeline, which is looking more and more optimistic.

Mr. McRobb: I asked the minister about the dollars invested and the jobs produced in the past year because in his previous answer he couldn't tell me what is going to happen in the coming year. Yet, his answer to my past year question seemed to all relate to what is going to happen in the coming year. I am a bit confused. I'll give the minister a chance. Well, the Member for Lake Laberge likes to make jokes here, Mr. Chair, but we're trying to demonstrate a cooperative approach this afternoon and I would suggest that he stay out of the debate.

I'll give the minister an opportunity to explain, once again, how many jobs were produced in the past year and how much was actually invested in the past year. Sure, there was a \$22.8 million work bid but how much was actually spent?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I think the member opposite wasn't listening when I explained to him that the disposition process

today is halfway through the process, so I can't give him the information he asks for. As far as last year's dispositions, started 2007, they would certainly be starting in their commitments in 2008. They have a period of time to fulfill this work commitment and it is over a period of years — the maximum, I think, is 10 years. They have committed to spend \$22.8 million in that work bid.

As far as telling the member how many people are actually on the ground or how many people would be working at the drill itself, I could get the information but it certainly isn't available today for me to tell the member opposite the number of men, the amount of dollars they spend. We know that the work bid is just that: it is a commitment to spend that money. We look forward to the resources being spent and the majority of the money will be spent in Yukon on a workforce.

Of course, the commitment for drilling and airplane exploration and all the stuff they do with the geoscience — the majority of the money would be spent in the territory employing and working with suppliers of goods and equipment that it would take to do that kind of exploration.

Mr. McRobb: Mr. Chair, I certainly don't expect the minister to have all the details on hand. This is budget debate, and I will repeat an offer that I have made several times in the past, and that is, if he does not have the information, if he will undertake to provide it to us in written form, then that would suffice.

Would he be willing to do that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Chair, the department would not have the names of the individuals of these people hired. They would not have the numbers of them that it would take to run a drill rig.

All we do is put the disposition out there on a work bid, so they are committed to spend that money. Because of its location and access to the Yukon workforce, hopefully the majority of the money would be spent by the corporation on Yukoners and equipment and supplies.

I am very confident that Northern Cross has been a good corporate citizen of the territory for many years. They have made a commitment. They moved a drilling rig into Eagle Plains and it's sitting on the ground there today. That's an investment.

Now, how many trucks it took to get up there, and how many flat tires they had while they got there, is not something I manage, and the department does not manage it. That's not how our department works, Mr. Chair.

Our department works with dispositions and with work bids and with the corporation. We leave the drilling, the managing of individuals, the buying of groceries, the hiring of the rental vehicles — all of that is left in the hands of the capable company that was the successful bidder on the disposition.

Mr. McRobb: Mr. Chair, I'm not asking for the number of flat tires, nor am I asking for the names of the people who are employed.

A minute ago, the minister said he can get the information I requested, which again was how many dollars were spent in the past year and how many jobs were produced. He said he can get that information. I asked for it in writing. I feel he does

not understand the question. I don't want flat tires and I don't want names; I want the dollars and the number of jobs. Can he provide that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to leave that up to the company — Northern Cross and the other corporation — to manage the workforce and maximize Yukon benefits. I certainly look forward to dealing with them in the future. Northern Cross has been an investor in the territory for 30 years, I would say. I'll leave the hiring and the number of people they need in their capable hands. They have a work bid; they're committed to spend the money.

Well, not only are they committed to do it, they're doing it as we speak. They have a rig sitting in Eagle Plains. It went through Whitehorse here a month ago. They're looking at a summer program, and they're looking at a winter program. Their plans are to have a 12-month drilling program put together in Eagle Plains to enhance their exploration and their resources in that area.

I look forward to working with them in the future. But as far as the number of people working, or the number of pickups they have — all of these things that are corporate decisions and corporately managed, this government is going to stay out of that. We're going to look at this on a higher level than that. We're going to work with the work bid. We're going to work with the corporation as they address some of the environmental issues out there. And certainly we're going to work with the affected First Nations to maximize their opportunities.

Mr. McRobb: Well, I wish the minister would keep the debate at a higher level. I asked for cooperation earlier, and it seems the debate has already taken a turn for the worse. It's becoming quite acrimonious, and we should try to stay on a high level here, so we can be seen to be conducting the public's business in a responsible manner.

Now, I would like to ask the minister about the Carmacks-Stewart power line. Is it on budget and is it on time?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I would like to echo what the member opposite said. My job is to keep this at a high level and I'm working with the Member for Kluane to do just that. We're trying to raise his level so we can have this debate.

As far as the extension to the Carmacks-Pelly transmission line — up to my last briefing — it's on time and on budget. But of course things can change and I keep abreast of it on a fairly regular basis. Yukon Energy Corporation will be in here next fall and hopefully, at that point, the line will have been done and we'll have Minto mine on and Pelly. Of course, we're looking forward to extending the line from Pelly to Stewart Crossing. This is all being done so we can maximize our hydro and put another customer base on hydro and get them off diesel. As far as the line itself is concerned, it's on time and on budget as of my last briefing.

Mr. McRobb: I'd like to ask him about a step-down line to Minto Landing. There are several residences and businesses located at Minto Landing. From what I understand, there's a great desire to be connected to this grid expansion.

Is the minister willing to include that in the project description?

I see he's being briefed by the Premier, so I expect a top-level response.

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the member opposite, we're going to concentrate on getting the line to Minto mine because we have a commitment there and we also have a commitment in Pelly. Certainly we will be working with the First Nation on the step-down line and also Yukon Energy Corporation will be working with them to come to some kind of resolution on how the corporation and the First Nation can partner to get those kinds of things addressed.

Mr. McRobb: All right, that doesn't really provide a definitive answer to the question but I don't expect asking the question again would produce any better results, so I'll move on.

Let's talk about mining for a little bit here. The minister indicated there were amendments coming forward on the *Quartz Mining Act* and I believe there is also the *Miners Lien Act*. Will those pieces of legislation be tabled in the upcoming fall sitting?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The *Miners Lien Act* is not within my jurisdiction. It is Community Services but I have been told by the individuals that we're looking forward to having something in front of us this coming fall. As far as the *Quartz Mining Act*, it will be coming forward here in the fall sitting.

Mr. McRobb: Let's move now to the new placer regime. It was indicated earlier that this would be ready by this spring. Well, we're already well into the spring. When can the minister tell us when it will be available?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Chair, it has been implemented — I think as of the first of April.

Mr. McRobb: All right, there is another example, Mr. Chair, of a bit of a breakdown in communications from the minister; another example of what he could deliver by way of ministerial statement. There are all kinds of potential ministerial statements within this department, as I mentioned earlier. I think the minister could have easily done a ministerial statement on the new placer regime.

Let's go now to forestry. It was a few years ago when he made a grand prediction that forestry would thrive in 2005. Well, it is now three years later and I think it is fair to say that forestry still hasn't thrived.

Can the minister give us any idea about what quantity of commercial lumber was actually cut in the Yukon last year and how much he expects to be cut this year?

Hon. Mr. Lang: If the member actually took a look at the forest industry in western Canada, he'd understand exactly what was going on in the forest industry in Yukon and British Columbia. There are huge issues with — if the member opposite understands the housing in the United States. It's mostly American housing that drives our forest industry. And certainly, B.C.'s management of the pine beetle has put a bit of a downward spiral on the forest industry in western Canada. Certainly, the amount of timber that was cut — I don't have the figures at my fingertips here. Again, it's operational, and I could send a note — I could find that out for the member opposite and get it to him as quickly as I can after this sitting.

Mr. McRobb: All right. I want to thank the minister for that. Indeed, we welcome any undertakings to provide information by way of written response.

I would like to ask him about — apparently, there is a cogeneration study being undertaken in Watson Lake. What can he tell us about that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: The cogeneration study has already been done, I think. The plan was to expand the existing cogeneration that we have in partnership with Yukon Electrical Company Limited, looking at the new hospital and the public buildings we have, aside from the ones that we heat now. We heat the community complex and the high school and I think there are plans to heat the First Nation offices.

We certainly have been working in partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to assess feasibility of expanding the current cogeneration system to use waste heat from the generating plant to heat more building space. That is certainly in the works. We're looking at expanding it to the new hospital facility and of course the seniors complex to utilize as much of that waste heat as we can in the community.

Mr. McRobb: Well, the minister mentioned a few things that I'm going to explore a little bit here. He mentioned the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. I had the opportunity on the weekend to talk to a representative from that organization at the Association of Yukon Communities annual general meeting held in Haines Junction. The representative also gave a presentation to all the delegates at the conference in beautiful Kluane, I might add.

Certainly it was a beautiful weekend — blue skies, sunshine, snow on the mountains and everyone was very impressed with the scenery and the local people in the community. Once again, the Haines Junction St. Elias Convention Centre is very well-suited for conventions in the territory. I want to thank the Association of Yukon Communities for once again selecting Haines Junction.

Anyway, there was a presentation that focused on the energy efficiency of ice plants and their ability to use waste heat and so on for nearby buildings. The minister alluded to this when referring to the Watson Lake cogeneration study, especially with respect to the new hospital and public buildings. He also said that the cogeneration study was already completed.

You know, Mr. Chair, I've got to wonder why these studies aren't provided to all members of this Legislature? I recall that in years past, studies would be tabled and certainly were appreciated by all members of the House.

I'm wondering why the government doesn't do that. I think the cogeneration study would be very interesting, as would any study or analysis with respect to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. This also relates to something I heard in his opening statements, when he said the Premier received a letter of commitment from Imperial Oil with respect to hiring Yukoners. What occurs to me, Mr. Chair, was why that letter wasn't tabled in this House?

That is information that we should all be aware of in here — not just members on the government side. That is information that should be tabled in the House, just like the cogeneration study and all these other studies that we heard about last

week too — but I won't get into that, Mr. Chair, because I'm afraid it would turn our discussion here this afternoon toward the argumentative side, and we wouldn't want that to happen now, would we?

Given the time, Mr Chair, I move that we report progress.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. McRobb that Committee of the Whole report progress.

Motion negatived

Mr. McRobb: I would like to thank the Government House Leader for disagreeing with that motion. Obviously, he would like to hear more of what I have to say before breaking for the day. I would be more than willing to delight him in that expectation.

We were talking about the cogeneration study in Watson Lake. Let's just stick with that for another minute, until the time does officially elapse. I believe it would be worthwhile for us to be more aware of the energy situation in that community. It's something that would benefit all members.

We know that the hospital situation down there is drastically overbudget. It was originally budgeted for \$5.2 million, and the latest number the government sort of agrees to is in the neighbourhood of \$11 million or \$12 million, and the project isn't completed yet. Obviously, there are plans to possibly connect it to the district heating system in Watson Lake, and that would be very interesting. I think all members in the House would be interested in getting an update on that matter.

Perhaps the minister can put together a ministerial statement and bring it to the House as early as tomorrow, so that all members can be informed.

Chair: Order please.

Seeing the time, the Chair will rise and report progress.

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. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, and directed me to report progress on it.

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

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

The House adjourned at 5:32 p.m.