

Whitehorse, Yukon**Monday, May 12, 2008 — 1:00 p.m.**

Speaker: I will now call the House to order. At this time, we will proceed with prayers.

*Prayers***Withdrawal of motions**

Speaker: The Chair wishes to inform the House of a change that has been made to the Order Paper.

Motion No. 449, standing in the name of the Leader of the Official Opposition, has been removed from the Order Paper as it was dealt with as Motion of Urgent and Pressing Necessity (No. 1) on May 8, 2008.

We will proceed with the Order Paper.

DAILY ROUTINE

Speaker: Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES**In recognition of Police Week**

Hon. Ms. Horne: I rise today to pay tribute to Police Week in Canada. This year, Canadians will honour those who serve to protect the community and ensure safety from crime by celebrating Police Week from May 11 to May 17.

Police Week is dedicated to increasing community awareness and recognition of policing services while strengthening police community ties.

Police Week encourages community involvement and initiation of activities through media awareness and community-sponsored events.

Police Week is governed by four specific objectives: to act as a vehicle in which to reinforce ties with the community; to honour police officers for the public safety and security they provide to our communities; to promote the work police do in our communities; and to inform the community about the police role in public safety and security.

I personally want to thank the police for their dedication to Yukoners. Currently, there are 172 full-time employees in Yukon M Division. These consist of 118 regular RCMP members, four special constables, 17 civilian members and 33 employees in the public sector.

The work of the RCMP is aided by close to 100 community volunteers. This is a true partnership between the police and the public, whether it is volunteering to help young people through coaching and mentoring, or whether it is assisting people involved in accidents or helping victims of crime. Yukoners know the RCMP is there to help. Our government is proud to partner with M Division in fighting crime through the street crime reduction team.

This team is dedicated to street-level drug- and alcohol-related enforcement and prevention. It consists of six police officers, a criminal analyst and a communication strategist. The Government of Yukon is committed to supporting Yukoners and the RCMP in their efforts to make our communities, neighbourhoods and homes safe and healthy.

I ask all members of this Legislature to join me in expressing our sincere appreciation to all the police officers and support staff at RCMP M Division.

Günilschish. Merci. Thank you.

In recognition of International Nurses Day and Canada Health Day

Mr. Edzerza: I rise on behalf of the Assembly to pay tribute to International Nurses Day and Canada Health Day, both celebrated on May 12. Canada Health Day is a joint event coordinated by the Canadian Healthcare Association, in partnership with the Canadian Public Health Association. It is an opportunity to recognize the contribution of public health to the everyday lives of Canadians. For over 100 years, public health care workers have been active in initiatives such as vaccine production, clear water, pasteurization and better living conditions.

May 12 is the birthday of the founder of nursing, Florence Nightingale. She would be amazed to see how her efforts have expanded to include a wide range of professionals, including registered nurses, nurse practitioners, certified nursing aides and licensed practical nurses.

Both public health and nursing professionals are at the forefront of primary health care around the world and play a central role in this country's health care system. Primary health care includes first contact services provided by physicians and nurses, and includes prevention, diagnosis and referrals to more specialized treatment or hospitals.

Primary health care is also an approach to health care services beyond the traditional health care systems and can encompass all services that play a part in health, such as income, housing, education and the environment. The International Council of Nurses believes that equity is a key to improving the health and well-being of all people. It advocates nationally and internationally, collaborating with government and non-government organizations to ensure more effective implementation of primary health care.

Worldwide, populations face a future that may adversely affect health without immediate action being taken. Rapid advancements in technology, the depletion of natural resources, environmental degradation, population growth and the impact of new health problems face growing demands on health and social services. Nurses are the main group of health professionals providing care and maintaining links between health care systems. We salute the dedication, commitment and excellence of Canadian and international nurses, whose leadership and compassion are evident everywhere.

Thank you.

In recognition of National Nursing Week

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I rise on behalf of the government members to pay tribute to National Nursing Week and recognize the important contributions made by the men and women who are on the front lines providing health care to Canadians, as well as around the world.

I am speaking, of course, of our nurses throughout the Yukon during this National Nursing Week. This year in particular is a special celebration for nurses across the north and

across the country, as this is the 100th anniversary of the Canadian Nursing Association. The national celebration provides us with an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the unique contributions of nurses throughout the Yukon, whether they are working in a hospital, a health centre, continuing care, mental health, emergency services, jail, addiction services, communicable disease units, or elsewhere in helping us administer the health care system. These are amazing men and women who, because of their contributions to their communities, impact the lives of Yukoners in many different ways.

Nurses today must mix together knowledge and technology as they work in an increasingly complex health care system. Patient needs are continuing to evolve and to change. Medical technology is expanding, and yet our nurses are continuing to demonstrate their flexibility, teamwork and willingness to learn, as well as continuing their compassion for those to whom they are providing care.

We have worked hard with our health care providers, including nurses, to build a telehealth system that will support nurses and the work they do with their patients, and this was of course put in place in all nursing stations in the Yukon in January.

We have also worked with the Yukon Registered Nurses Association to regulate nurse practitioners in the Yukon, allowing those nurse practitioners to be recognized formally for the work that they do and have involved them in the drafting of the discussion paper on the legislation that will be going out over the next few months.

We value our nurses not only for the services that they provide to patients, but for the work they undertake that is outside of their scope of practice, such as working on this legislation and working with a variety of partners on the issues of violence in the workplace, working with the government on the creation of bursary and education programs, such as the ones developed under the health and human resources strategy, and encouraging young people to move into the field of nursing, and supporting them once they are there to obtain additional education.

In 2007, the theme for National Nursing Week was "Think You Know Nursing? Take A Closer Look." That theme was so popular and spoke so clearly to what nursing is about that it is being used again this year. It is a theme that is challenging Canadians to look at their perception of the nursing profession and to recognize that it is not often what they perceive it to be, and the fact that nurses do so much more than the limited view that many have of them.

Nurses are vital in creating a health care system that is responsive and sustainable. They strengthen our system and it's a pleasure to honour them today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Mitchell: I also rise today on behalf of the Official Opposition to pay tribute to National Nursing Week. National Nursing Week runs from May 12 to 18, and always includes May 12, the anniversary of Florence Nightingale's birthday and International Nurses Day.

The Canadian Nurses Association theme for 2008 is "Think you know nursing? Take a closer look", which is a continuation of last year's theme, as they celebrate the 100th anniversary.

National Nursing Week helps us to honour our local nurses and raise awareness of the nursing profession and recognize the crucial role that nurses provide. It also acknowledges the positive contributions that nurses make every day and their commitment to improving the health system for Canadians. It allows us an opportunity to draw attention to the significant contributions that nurses play in the health and well-being of all Yukoners.

Nurses across Canada work in a wide variety of roles, including health administration, community and public health, research and ethics and the delivery of health services from rural and urban settings to northern and remote communities.

We recognize and value all our nursing professionals from all levels of health care: registered nurses, nurse practitioners, certified nursing aids, licensed practical nurses, community health nurses, flight nurses, public health nurses, long-term facility nurses and home care nurses.

Nurses fight the battle of safe staffing ratios every day, as there is a tremendous shortage of nurses throughout the world. These shortages are only going to worsen as the population grows and ages, making even more demands on our health care system.

We need a national effort to address the health provider shortage, including retaining the nurses we have in Canada in order to help compensate for the shortage of approximately 78,000 nurses that is predicted to occur by 2011.

We need the collaboration of health care professionals to redesign a system that fully utilizes the high level of education and skills of the nursing profession.

We have to increase the number of nurse practitioners as they will help ease access to the health system in the future and can function as a first point of care.

We hope by bringing attention to the nursing profession during Nursing Day and Nursing Week, that more young people will consider nursing careers. The nursing profession is a cornerstone of our health care system. It is challenging, emotionally demanding and yet one of the most rewarding.

Nurses are the backbone of every respectable health care facility, and therefore essential to the health care system. We value nurses' compassion and commitment to their profession and their continued efforts to promote health and wellness and their role in primary health care.

On behalf of all Yukoners, please accept our heartfelt appreciation for your dedication, your contribution to our health, our families and our communities. You make the difference in people's lives every day. You deserve recognition and our thanks not only during National Nursing Week but every day of the year. Thanks for being there.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Cardiff: I would ask all Members of the Legislative Assembly to join me in welcoming Colleen O'Brien and the grade 5 class from Golden Horn Elementary School. As well, we have a few parents as chaperones in the Legislature today.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further introduction of visitors?

Are there returns or documents for tabling?

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I have for tabling the draft Yukon government climate change action plan.

I also have for tabling the latest instalment of the *Yukon State of the Environment Report*.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I have for tabling an energy strategy for Yukon — draft for public consultation, May 2008.

Speaker: Are there any further documents for tabling?

Reports of committees.

Petitions.

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr. Nordick: I rise today to give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon through its programs and services to work with the Canadian Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths that is dedicated to:

(1) promoting high-quality and innovative research into the causes of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and its effects on families;

(2) conducting public education and awareness programs about issues relating to infant death; and

(3) providing current and accurate information and emotional support to families that have suffered the devastating experience of an infant death.

Mr. Edzerza: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to relay the deep concern of members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly to the federal government that, if passed without amendment, Canada's Bill C-51 will:

(1) give new powers to government agents, bypassing elected officials;

(2) fast-track new drugs that may not have been thoroughly tested for safety;

(3) reduce safety measures for drugs;

(4) make many beneficial natural health products illegal;

(5) restrict research and development of safe natural alternatives to high-risk drugs; and

(6) allow inspectors to:

(a) enter private property without a warrant;

(b) seize and detain products and equipment;

(c) dispose of private property at the expense of the owner;

(d) seize bank accounts without a warrant; and

(e) levy fines up to \$5 million.

Mr. Cardiff: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to ensure that the territory's public school system devotes more resources to increasing knowledge about our parliamentary and legislative systems so that our children are better informed about the democratic processes that govern so much of their lives.

Mr. Hardy: I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House:

(1) supports the private member's bill before the House of Commons, entitled C-474, *An Act to require the development and implementation of a National Sustainable Development Strategy, the reporting of progress against a standard set of environmental indicators and the appointment of an independent Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development accountable to Parliament, and to adopt specific goals with respect to sustainable development in Canada, and to make consequential amendments to another Act*; and

(2) urges the Yukon government to develop a Yukon sustainable development strategy.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?

Hearing none, is there a statements by a minister?

MOTION OF URGENT AND PRESSING NECESSITY (NO. 2)

(Standing Order No. 28)

Extending sitting of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Hardy: Mr. Speaker, I rise pursuant to Standing Order 28 to request unanimous consent to debate as a matter of urgent and pressing necessity, Motion No. 461, which reads as follows:

THAT this House extend the 2008 Spring Sitting of the Legislative Assembly until at least May 22, to give members more opportunity to attend to important public business, including completing their review of the 2008-09 main estimates and other outstanding matters, such as the proposed amendments to the *Liquor Act*, as well as conducting detailed scrutiny of the Yukon government's long-awaited climate change action plan.

Mr. Speaker, we have before us 11 departments left to debate. We have four days. I should expand on that — 11 departments and corporations. You know, I wish the members on the Yukon government side wouldn't laugh, because —

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Order. Sit down, please. The purpose of a motion of urgent and pressing necessity is to inform the House why there should be an urgent and pressing debate on this motion, not the rationale behind it, please.

Has the member had adequate say on why he wanted to present it to this House?

Mr. Hardy: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. If I can't present the rationale then I will have to sit down.

Speaker: Thank you. Is there unanimous consent?

Some Hon. Member: Disagree.

Speaker: Unanimous consent has not been granted. This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Whitehorse city transit, free rides

Mr. Mitchell: I have a question for the Minister of Environment.

I know the minister has finally announced his long-delayed climate change action plan, but there are some things we can take action on right now.

Probably the largest contributing factor to greenhouse gas emissions in Yukon is from cars and trucks, and a large majority is from Whitehorse.

I proposed a notice of motion on May 8 asking for the Yukon government to undertake a pilot project with the City of Whitehorse, to offer free and expanded bus service. Yukoners want to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. This initiative would be a positive and substantial move in the right direction.

Will the minister consider funding such a venture in cooperation with the city?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Actually, much of what we do in interaction with the City of Whitehorse that relates to the public transit system here is handled by the Department of Community Services. However, I will respond to the member opposite by pointing out that the action plan, as presented today to go out for public consultation, is certainly not one that's delayed. In fact, it's the first action plan on climate change in the history of this territory. Our point in going forward with the climate change action plan is to address all matters and issues of climate change, including mitigation and the issues of adaptation on the impacts we north of 60 are today experiencing because of this global phenomenon.

We're not averse to discussing options and other matters with the City of Whitehorse, but we're pleased to say that at this time the Yukon government has invested another \$466,000, with the City of Whitehorse, for the purchase of another bus to increase public transit capacity here in Whitehorse.

Mr. Mitchell: The purchase of another bus is a good start, but at that rate it will take some eight or nine years for the City of Whitehorse to be able to provide the kind of service that people are asking for. It would be great if we could talk this problem into oblivion but that, as we know, is not an option. Here in Canada's north, more than anywhere else, we are seeing the beginning of what environmental scientists have been predicting for many years, as we see the effects of global warming first-hand.

I cannot say it any more simply than that now is the time for action, not just action plans. The minister has the resources,

the Yukon has the need and Whitehorse provides the opportunity for a proactive project. This would be a win-win for all. The minister unfortunately has been lacking in any real and substantive leadership on this matter, despite his assertions to the contrary. More than anywhere else in Canada, the northern regions will bear the price of the impending changes. We must display to the rest of Canada our concern and our determination to combat this impending ecological crisis.

Will the minister use some of this government's cash reserves to take this definitive step?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, we are taking definitive steps. When it comes to the question of leadership, I must point out to the Leader of the Official Opposition that adaptation as part of climate change as a national initiative wasn't even on the radar screen. The Yukon, in demonstrating leadership, made sure that our national government and our partners — the provinces and our sister territories — moved adaptation front and centre to the climate change plans and initiatives across this country.

We are leading, Mr. Speaker. We are leading a climate change strategy as one of the first northern jurisdictions to publicly present one. We are leading in the goals that the strategy lays out in enhancing our understanding and awareness of climate change. It is a fundamental prerequisite for us to be able to deal with climate change. We are leading in another goal of improving our ability to adapt to climate change. The Yukon has demonstrated leadership and once again is demonstrating leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

There are major investments in increasing our hydro capacity here and the connectivity of the Whitehorse-Aishihik-Faro grid system, on which, by the way, the Official Opposition demonstrated a lack of leadership when they roundly criticized and opposed this. We are leading in establishing the Yukon as a northern leader for climate change research and innovation.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, more words, but not answers.

There are other jurisdictions in North America that are making attempts at doing just the kind of thing we're talking about. Some have offered free transportation on some of their routes, others have reduced fares and some have similar plans on the drawing board. This is an opportunity for the Yukon to become a national, if not international, leader in reducing carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide emissions.

Jurisdictions across Canada and the United States are recognizing the positive impact that efficient and affordable mass transportation can have on the environment. Yukon is projecting a surplus of \$108 million. The federal government has programs that can reduce our costs if we can obtain federal contributions. As long as we continue to say that we can't do it, it won't happen.

Will the minister at least commit to looking into this proposal?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, I can say that we will look into any and all initiatives that will ensure that the Yukon can deal with the adaptation to this global phenomenon, but we will also ensure that we are reducing our contribution to global warming or climate change, and we are doing that in many ways, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite just stated the issue of the federal government's contribution. Well, those members opposed a \$5-million investment in the third wheel at Aishihik, reducing thousands of tonnes of CO₂ emission in this territory by increasing hydro capacity.

The members opposite conveniently ignore the tremendous number of initiatives coming out of Yukon Housing for building efficiencies: zero-interest loans to improve efficiencies on homes; the work that the territorial government is doing in purchasing more fuel-efficient vehicles, thereby reducing further emissions.

I just mentioned the contribution for more buses for the City of Whitehorse, enhancing and increasing their capacity to provide public transit. I would encourage all Yukoners who are riding buses in the territory and those who may consider it that it is a contribution we can all make personally by accessing public transit.

Question re: Teacher staffing, Golden Horn Elementary School

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education got a letter last week from the chair of the Golden Horn School Council. The school council is not happy with the minister, and for good reason: this minister is cutting funding to public schools and cutting a teacher from Golden Horn for next year.

The letter says that the council is "dismayed and disappointed by the minister's lack of interest and willingness to become involved in this issue and to be an advocate on behalf of Golden Horn children."

I will ask the minister to do the right thing: reinstate this unnecessary position cut at Golden Horn School. Will he do that?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I see we have a new critic for Education. I see the Liberal leader has taken over that responsibility. They've also demonstrated what their strategy would be, should they ever take power. That would be to politically interfere with the operational decisions made by the Department of Education.

Under this government's watch, we've seen a tremendous increase in the amount invested in education, from \$100 million a year to \$130 million a year. The number of teachers has increased, the number of education assistants has increased and the number of students has decreased.

We've also seen changes in populations and demographics, and the Department of Education has to respond fairly and equitably to all schools to ensure that schools are able to provide a fair and equitable level of education to all Yukon students.

We're going to continue to work with all our partners in education to ensure we have the best education system possible for all Yukoners.

Mr. Mitchell: For the minister's benefit, all Liberal caucus members are concerned about education. I happen to be asking the questions today.

Let's go back to the letter from the council. It says the minister is responsible for securing adequate funds for schools. It says the minister cannot avoid responsibility by saying this is an operational issue. I agree with the council. The minister

should be taking responsibility for the decision instead of trying to pass it off on the department.

He has the authority to ensure the teaching position is not cut. The letter concludes with this sentence and it speaks for itself: "Further failure to act will cause us to conclude that you do not have much interest in the future of our children."

I'm asking the minister to prove them wrong. All he needs to do is reinstate the one teaching position. Will he do that?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: As Minister of Education, I have a responsibility to all Yukon students to ensure that we have a fair and equitable system, one that doesn't play favourites, one that looks at the interests of all Yukon students.

One only has to take a look at the investments that this government has made in education and take a look at the student/teacher ratio. Across Canada, it's about 16:1. Here in the Yukon, it's about 11:1. When we take a look at the O&M expenditures per student, in Yukon we invest over \$15,000 a year per student. In other jurisdictions, it's not even half of that.

We have seen the increase in the Department of Education's annual budgets. We have seen changes in curriculum. We have seen changes in teaching practices. We have seen innovative and creative programs, like the Wilson Reading program, full day kindergarten and the Individual Learning Centre. We are continuing to work through the New Horizons project and through the other vehicles we have for consultation with our partners in education to ensure that we have the best education system and one that is fair to all Yukon students.

Mr. Mitchell: Another member of the school council did an interview last week. He said that the council was assured that there would be no teacher cut this year; instead, Golden Horn is slated to lose one full-time equivalent teacher for next year. The council member met with the minister last month about the possibility of cuts. The council member said that in "the meeting we had with the minister, he came across as dishonest."

Unparliamentary language

Speaker: Order please.

The member cannot do indirectly what he cannot do directly. I want you to withdraw that immediately. Stand up, please.

Withdrawal of remark

Mr. Mitchell: I will withdraw that, Mr. Speaker.

I think he already knew that they were going to cut another position out of Golden Horn school. He says that the quality of education will be greatly diminished with one less educator. He said, "If we have to go to a scenario of split classes, you know, is the quality of education improving? Our argument is that it's probably going to be going down, because there isn't going to be the time spent or the teacher is not going to have the —"

Speaker: Ask the question, please.

Mr. Mitchell: Why is the minister forcing this change on Golden Horn Elementary School?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, I have been very proud to be part of the government that has seen significant increases in the Department of Education. Yes, we've seen increases in how the money is allocated in this budget, with the

shift of the Property Management Agency. I'm very proud to see the significant investments we have on a per capita basis and the programming that goes on.

We also have to recognize that changes have happened in our schools. We've seen some schools go from populations as high as 240 down to 170 students.

We've seen other schools where there have been population increases. We're certainly not advocating going back to the "good old days" of 1997 where the student/teacher ratio at the school the member opposite should be familiar with was about 19:1. Instead, next year at that school, we'll see about a 12:1 student/teacher ratio.

Question re: Mining acts, review and consultation

Mr. Edzerza: Mr. Speaker, on April 1, 2003, the Yukon took over responsibility for managing lands and resources from the federal government. Since that time, the *Placer Mining Act* has been revised. Now the *Quartz Mining Act* is under review. In both cases, the reviews were done in a very low-key manner without much public debate.

Will the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources make a commitment to broaden the scope of the current review and extend the process so that Yukoners can have more meaningful input into the future of mining in the territory?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In answering the question from the member opposite, with our obligation to successor legislation, we have to do just that. It is public consultation and it is laid out.

Mr. Edzerza: The minister didn't answer the question. I think the main focus of the wording was the low-key manner. There's no question the Yukon's mining regime needs to be modernized. The rules have been essentially unchanged since 1922. Unfortunately, the government seems to be focused more on making the royalty regime competitive in order to attract even more mining investment to the territory.

The question that's not being asked is if Yukoners are getting what they deserve from their non-renewable resources or if the environmental and other costs outweigh the benefits.

Now that the government has signalled its intention to limit public discussion by eliminating the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment, how does the minister plan to ensure that Yukon people have an opportunity to debate the role they want mining to play?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I'm compelled to enter the debate on this line of questioning, because it's obvious the third party has forgotten about the devolution transfer agreement and the obligation of Yukon to mirror existing federal legislation, which we've done.

The second part of that obligation is to proceed with successor legislation on such things as the *Quartz Mining Act*. That's what we're doing; we've formed a joint working group with First Nations on the matter for successor legislation and, by obligation, there will be public consultation.

Furthermore, the member's question about what the Yukon intends to do about assessing mining came right out of the land claims. It's called the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, and that's the instrument that passed federal Parliament, is in place here in the Yukon today and that

assesses all mining initiatives that come forward in the territory.

It's a product of the land claim agreements; it is a product that is Yukon made and it is certainly serving Yukon well.

Mr. Edzerza: Again, review in a very low-key manner. On Saturday, the New Democratic Party's annual convention passed a unanimous resolution calling for public discussion on the true cost and benefits of mineral resource activity.

We believe that discussion needs to take place, and it needs to address a wide variety of issues, including the royalty regime and even the basic questions of free entry staking.

Yukon people need a chance to say if they want uranium mining, for example. They need a chance to debate ethical implications of allowing significant investment from countries or companies that have bad track records when it comes to the environment, labour standards or human rights.

Will the Premier agree to direct the Yukon Council on the Economy and the Environment to conduct a broad public consultation on the future of mining in the Yukon? Or will he continue to treat —

Speaker: Thank you. The member is done.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, I am astounded that a member of the third party would stand in this House and put on the record that these initiatives — which come from land claims, the final agreements here in the territory, from the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, from self-government agreements, from the devolution agreement — are "low key".

This is one of a kind in the country. Yukon stands apart from other jurisdictions in how we have been able to manage our affairs. The instrument I spoke of moments ago, the *Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act*, is the instrument that we all agreed to here, through these very high profile processes of land claims and devolution. The member has got it wrong.

We understand the NDP's view of mining. That's not the view this Yukon Party government shares.

Question re: Dawson City sewage disposal

Mr. Cardiff: I have a question for the Premier. The citizens of Dawson City are finding themselves between a rock and the permafrost. The town is under a court order to build a sewage treatment facility by 2011 and the clock is ticking. In a recent referendum, the majority of voters opposed the construction of an aerated sewage lagoon on land near the entrance to the town. Several other possible sites were previously suggested but there was no plan B in place when the matter came back to court earlier this month.

Given the likelihood the referendum would go against the government's proposed location, why wasn't an alternative site identified long before this?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The site being proposed for the sewage facility was one that was chosen in conjunction with the city council. It was one of the two sites considered as a likely prospect. We went ahead with that process following all the procedures necessary to go through the YESAA process.

Unfortunately for us, a referendum was brought up and the citizens of Dawson City voted against it.

Mr. Cardiff: In other words, the government wasn't prepared for a plan B.

The judge was quite pointed in his comments earlier this month. By the next court date, he wants to see plans for other options, including a sequencing batch reactor plant that could cost as much as \$20 million, with an annual operating cost of \$750,000. There's a good possibility that's beyond Dawson City's means, but there's no question that something has to be done to end this environmental black eye for the Yukon.

Will the Premier ensure that Dawson will have what it needs to get the job or does he simply intend to beg Ottawa to cut the town some slack for another 30 years?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I thank the member opposite for answering the question. I will indicate what I have provided previously in the House.

This government will back the citizens of Dawson regardless of the situation. We are working with the mayor and council on this particular issue. We are investigating our options as a result of the referendum. We can't just pick an item off the shelf, put it in there and make it work. It doesn't work that way. If it worked that way, the solution would have been found 10 or 15 years ago.

We are in the process. We have an obligation to meet with regard to getting the information to the court and working with the mayor and council, and we are going to go through that process.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, the government has had the responsibility since they appointed the trustee. There is no excuse for any city in Canada to be dumping raw sewage into an international waterway in this day and age. This problem can be solved and Dawson can come into compliance with the law. This government has a responsibility and needs to make it happen.

Now, the government has earmarked \$30 million to upgrade the Robert Campbell Highway over the next three years for a mine that isn't even in production yet, so we have to question the government's priorities. The court is not going to tolerate this government's endless excuses, and it shouldn't.

If a lagoon site acceptable to Dawson residents isn't found by this September, will the Premier make sure that the capital and operating funding for a mechanical plant will be set aside in the supplementary budget this fall?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I can recall probably a couple of years ago the member opposite chastising this side of the House, including this minister, for not dealing with the citizens of Dawson properly and not working with them on the solution and the process.

Mr. Speaker, democracy was allowed to take place; a referendum was called; we are abiding by the results of that referendum. That's what this government is doing. We're abiding by the results provided by the citizens of Dawson. We're not just going to run out there and pound it into the ground. We're going to work with the mayor and council and the citizens of Dawson on a solution to their problem. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, we're going to go out and deal with the situation because, despite what the member opposite said, there are several

jurisdictions in Canada that dump their sewage right out there and they're not being charged at all.

Question re: Hamilton Boulevard extension

Mr. McRobb: I'd like to follow up with the Minister of Community Services on questions asked last week regarding the blasting incident on the Hamilton Boulevard extension construction project.

Of course our main concern was the issue of public safety resulting from the shower of rocks on the Lobird Trailer Court. I'm sure we can all agree it's truly fortunate that nobody was seriously injured, but it seems Lobird residents are still getting short shrift from their own government. When they call with questions or concerns about the blasting, repairs, or related matters, they're redirected to the contractor. However, people aren't getting much satisfaction there either.

Can the minister confirm whether he's aware of this communications failure?

Hon. Mr. Hart: As I stated previously in the House on this question, we are very concerned with the situation that occurred in Lobird Trailer Park and we have been in consultation with the contractor. The contractor is working with our Occupational Health and Safety people and they are also working with members who have been directly affected. From what I've been led to believe, many of the repairs have already commenced. Anything that is incomplete is just awaiting material — for example, tin for the roof and/or siding supplies.

Mr. McRobb: This is the territorial government's own contract; therefore, the government must assume ultimate responsibility. In all fairness, the minister should be equally prepared when things go wrong as he is when cutting ribbons and eating cake.

Residents need to be assured that there's someone to hear their concerns and answer their questions. There's reason to believe that people aren't satisfied and they're looking to their own government to assume some responsibility and show some leadership.

I, too, think the government needs to step up to the plate. Is the Minister of Community Services prepared to at least offer up a contact person from within his department?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Since the blasting resulted in damage to facilities in Lobird, as a government we have ceased all action with regard to blasting on the Hamilton Boulevard extension. We have worked with Occupational Health and Safety. In fact, nothing will take place with regard to blasting until such time as a third independent party comes up to inspect the facility and provides us with recommendations on how to move forward and what processes have to be put into place to assure all the residents of Lobird that this situation will not arise in the future.

In addition, I indicated to members opposite that, once the report is complete and the recommendations are provided, we will have a public consultation with the Lobird residents on the results.

Mr. McRobb: Mr. Speaker, the minister is not quite on the same page. I am asking about communications. A smooth process should be in place to deal with the concerns and questions from residents. It should be handled by the same

department that oversees the performance of the contract; for instance, when motorists have issues with a construction zone on the Alaska Highway, they don't call the contractor. They call the Highways and Public Works department and officials deal with it. Why is this situation any different? The government should be onside with residents from Lobird and be willing to do whatever it takes to resolve outstanding concerns and issues. The government shouldn't be redirecting people to the contractor. That is what government is for — to be there for its citizens.

Can the minister now tell us who from within his department people can call?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I thank the member opposite for the question. I think it's important that all members of the House understand that this side of the House feels that this is a very tragic situation. We are taking every action necessary to alleviate the concerns of the citizens of Lobird, and in addition those of residents adjacent to the area. We are working with the contractor.

This is, as the member opposite indicated, a government project, but it is not managed by the government. The contractor is in control of his contract. He has obligations that he must meet in terms of concerns about the actual project. We are working closely with him and, as I indicated, also with Occupational Health and Safety on the issue of the work on the Hamilton Boulevard extension. We will do our utmost to ensure that concern for the safety of the general public is provided.

Question re: Whitehorse city transit, free rides

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to return to the issue of public transportation.

Last week, a Yukoner told me that it used to cost him \$115 to fill his truck — now it costs \$160. That's a whopping 39-percent increase, and it's going higher — much higher. Predictions for Yukoners suggest that \$2 a litre is possible within a year. Mr. Speaker, very few families can afford that kind of a price hit.

Many Yukoners must take their vehicle to work. Many families require two vehicles to get to work. An efficient and free bus service in the City of Whitehorse could save many Yukon families thousands of dollars. It's not enough to sit here and say, "Isn't the price of fuel awful", and then do nothing about it. That's not leadership.

Will the Minister of Finance commence discussions with the City of Whitehorse to look further into the feasibility of a pilot project to be funded by the Yukon government to provide enhanced busing service?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, I don't know if the member listened to his own question, but it's obvious that he might have missed the point. The member is suggesting that the cost of fuel is extremely high. It's very high across the country. So if individuals in the City of Whitehorse believe that that price is beyond what they are willing to pay, I am sure that they will start riding the public transit system.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, the system has to be able to accommodate the users, and the City of Whitehorse does not have the resources to do that on their own, but this government does.

Let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. I am talking about modern, energy efficient buses, running at 15- to 20-minute intervals in the morning and late afternoon, a continuous downtown loop, running on 15-minute schedules throughout the day and more frequent service on weekends and evenings. Many Yukoners we have spoken with said they would use such a service. Just look at the Canada Winter Games a year ago if you need convincing.

Will the minister dip into the \$108-million surplus and help the hundreds of Yukon families struggling to keep the tank filled by assisting the City of Whitehorse to do this?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: The member's comments are somewhat suspect given the fact that citizens continue to need transportation, especially around our territory. When you look at the member's argument, he's specific to the City of Whitehorse, which has already a significant public transit system in place — which, by the way, the government is investing in now. It's the second time we've invested in new buses with the City of Whitehorse.

Secondly, the City of Whitehorse has not come forward with any such proposal. We're not averse to discussing matters with the City of Whitehorse, as we would with any other community regarding their issues. However, I must say categorically that the government is much more focused in other measures, reducing literally thousands of tonnes of CO₂ emissions into our atmosphere, initiatives that those members oppose.

Let's recap: the Yukon government is investing in hydro, investing in infrastructure for more efficient transportation. We unanimously passed a motion in this House regarding the GST levies. We have gone forward with energy efficiency programs and the list goes on. The only thing the Liberals come forward with is a free bus ride.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, Mr. Speaker, if the Finance minister could only think back as recently as last Wednesday, in general debate, I also asked him about methods of facilitating public transportation to and from the rural communities. Now, 70 percent of the territory's population lives in the City of Whitehorse. That's obviously where we can have the biggest effect on climate change.

Young people just getting started might not have to buy a vehicle quite so soon. Seniors would definitely benefit from improved service. There are hundreds of Yukoners who can't afford to buy a car at all who would benefit.

It's a win-win for all Yukoners. There is no single group that would be a loser here. We need a vision, Mr. Speaker, not excuses. We need action, not more rhetoric. We need this government to put its hand in its bulging pockets and do something for our environment and for Yukoners, not just publish plans; do something.

Will the minister meet with the City of Whitehorse to discuss the cost? I believe the city is willing. Will he do that?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I am going to take issue with the member's comments that the government is doing nothing. We just went over this earlier today in Question Period. I listed a plethora of initiatives that this government has undertaken to deal with climate change.

The member opposite obviously has a different approach. The member does not agree with investing in hydro. The member does not agree with buying fuel-efficient vehicles for government use. The member does not agree with zero-interest loans for home improvements to increase energy efficiency. The member does not agree with the pioneer utility grant. All this member has to offer is a free bus ride. I think Yukoners expect more than that.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve into Committee of the Whole.

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Nordick): Committee of the Whole will now come to order. Committee will consider Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Department of Environment. Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

Chair: Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Department of Environment.

Bill No. 11 — *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09* — continued

Department of Environment

Hon. Mr. Fentie: It is with great pleasure that I rise today to report on the very important work being carried out by the Yukon Department of Environment. It is to maintain and enhance the quality of Yukon's environment for present and future generations.

In this vote the department is seeking a total of \$26,232,000, of which \$24,420,000 is dedicated or profiled for operation and maintenance and \$1,812,000 is for capital. As projected, there is an increase of \$700,000 over last fiscal year.

I want to add a few other comments as I begin my opening remarks for the department. There's an additional \$505,000 that will be used for our resource management inventory work, which is critical to much of what the department is doing; \$428,000 will go to new site assessment and remediation programming, which is required; another \$353,000 will go to northern strategy projects.

I'd like now to delve into the climate change initiatives.

As I pointed out last month, Mr. Chair, the Yukon government's overall commitment to climate change is occurring in many Yukon departments and agencies and goes beyond the excellent work within the Department of Environment.

For example, the Executive Council Office is indeed a major player in its work with the International Polar Year and the northern strategy initiatives. This is to bring researchers and communities together to work on projects that may help us adapt to climate change in the years ahead.

We have also signed a new intergovernmental accord with the State of Alaska that will help us address our respective concerns for climate change adaptation, for example.

We have spoken to all the premiers and the Prime Minister about our position on climate change adaptation. We have been successful nationally to in engaging with our colleagues at the provincial, territorial and federal levels to ensure that adaptation is now very much a part of the climate change strategy in Canada.

We attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali last fall. Establishing contacts and relationships are important to us as they relate to Yukon as a member of the global community and its contributions around the world.

We know that many of the activities that may help this planet adapt to climate change will be started by individuals taking action within their local community so that they can have an impact on the global picture. Those individuals are — here in Yukon and in countries around the world — developing and fostering contacts through initiatives such as the United Nations conference, which helps everyone.

Mr. Chair, the Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, in conjunction with the Department of Environment, is going out to the public on a proposed energy strategy that will contribute to our efforts to adapt to climate change. There is great synergy between climate change action and an energy strategy.

The agriculture branch in the department is delivering programs that will help us adapt to climate change, and the forestry section is working on a number of initiatives related to this global phenomenon.

Also, the Department of Economic Development is working on a proposed cold climate innovation centre and cluster that will identify industry-based technologies and new solutions to our efforts to adapt to cold climate environments.

The Council of Yukon First Nations, Yukon College and this government, represented through officials in Environment Yukon, are working on a plan to establish a Yukon research centre of excellence that will benefit people across the north — not only Yukoners — and indeed around the world.

You will recall that we held a very successful and productive workshop in Whitehorse this past winter in which there was significant support from the academic community across the country to pursue this very initiative.

We are now moving to our next phase to bring this vision of a centre to reality at the Yukon College campus here in Whitehorse. We are in discussions with the federal government, First Nations and the academic community to address

interests and the project work necessary to support the establishment of the centre.

We are also starting a very important task of identifying research projects that could be delivered out of the Yukon research centre of excellence and we will be able to report progress on this initiative later this year. We are providing investment to the Northern Climate Exchange at Yukon College. Our contribution helps the centre to access federal contributions, deliver climate change public education programs and initiatives, and coordinate the scientific work on impacts and climate change adaptation.

The Yukon Housing Corporation programs contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to adapting to climate change effects. The Mayo-to-Dawson and Carmacks-to-Stewart transmission line projects and the construction of the third turbine at the Aishihik hydro power plant are indeed ways in which the Yukon Energy Corporation is delivering solutions to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and our overall reliance on fossil fuels, such as diesel.

The Department of Highways and Public Works is working on several fronts to improve our fleet vehicles for energy efficiency and climate change adaptation. The department is also the contract administrator overseeing the new Tombstone Territorial Park visitor reception centre on the Dempster Highway.

I will provide more information shortly, but I do want to point out that this new building meets the goals set out in the Yukon government's climate change strategy by supporting the design and implementation of energy conservation measures appropriate for construction in the north.

That is a brief overview of what is going on in conjunction with the Department of Environment within the corporate structure of the Yukon government in relation to our environment and climate change. When it comes to climate change and wildlife, I must delve into some current affairs. There was a disturbing report issued out of Washington, D.C., on April 11 that warned of the dire consequences of climate change on wildlife populations over the coming years.

The report suggests that in the United States more than 40 percent of the salmon and trout habitat could be gone by the end of the century. The Prairie Pothole Region could lose up to 90 percent of its duck-rich wetlands, and rising temperatures in forests could threaten bighorn and other mountain sheep habitat.

The study was prepared by the Wildlife Management Institute and released with the support of eight hunting and fishing organizations. The report examined the potential impact of global warming from coast to coast and concluded that waterfowl, big game, upland birds and saltwater and freshwater fish will face severe declines in multiple regions of the country.

We may want to believe that changes predicted over the Lower 48 will not happen here; but we have consistently stated that climate change is expected to have an impact on Yukon's wildlife populations.

Several of the topics at the Environmental Forum that we are hosting later this month will cover concerns about climate change and how it relates to wildlife management. This year's

forum will be held at Yukon College and we anticipate that more than 200 people from across the territory will be meeting to discuss environmental trends that all of us will have to consider in the years to come.

Proposed topics will cover the changing Yukon landscape and wildlife with discussion ranging from the community-based approach to environmental monitoring, to emerging water issues in the north, to tracking invasive species such as ticks and the spruce bark beetle. The agenda includes presentations and discussions on how climate change may affect our future — a very important forum in the days ahead.

The Yukon government's investment in Yukon's fish and wildlife inventory work is critically important to the way in which we will respond to climate change challenges that threaten our biodiversity. This investment is being spent under the fish and wildlife branch in support of the climate change program. The branch is increasing its efforts to face some of the climate change challenges by ramping up efforts to address key gaps in our knowledge of the impact that climate change may have on biodiversity and species of concern to Yukoners. We will be working with local communities and other experts to develop an ecological monitoring framework for the Yukon aimed at monitoring key indicators of climate change and other landscape changes.

We will be tracking and conducting research to predict the movements of relatively new species to the Yukon, such as mule deer and cougars. Work is also underway to assess the potential impacts of changes to the landscape on biodiversity, including work on moose and other indicator species like bats and smaller animals.

The branch is working with the community of Old Crow, for example, and other experts to understand the impact of climate change on moose and muskrats in Old Crow Flats. A continuing initiative from Environment Yukon's climate change program is the work to deliver a climate change action plan that outlines the many initiatives the Yukon government should consider and implement in the years to come.

You'll recall, Mr. Chair, that we adopted a Yukon climate change strategy in September 2006 and then made a commitment to implement that strategy. We are now taking that commitment further and we'll be announcing the details of the draft Yukon climate change action plan in the coming weeks.

Many Yukoners helped to draft the action plan through meetings and workshops over the past year. Input and contributions have come from young people, First Nations, municipal governments, non-governmental organizations and other government agencies and departments, as well as thoughts and ideas from individuals. We will be taking that draft action plan out to the public and asking everyone to review the document and provide comments. From there, we begin work on bringing in new initiatives that will help us all adapt to the climate change challenges ahead.

By now, I trust that we can see that there is more to the Yukon government's efforts to deal with the most significant environmental concern in history than a one-line item in the budget. Much is being done and much has yet to be done.

With regard to the continuing commitment to Yukon's biodiversity, I would like to go through a very important commitment this government has made to wildlife management, habitat protection and resource development. We undertook and have followed through on our commitment to develop and implement management programs that maintain our biological diversity. Our major commitment last year was to improve the department's budget so that it could undertake new resource inventory studies. We noted then — and this rings true today — that sound decisions on land use planning and development require up-to-date information on fish and wildlife populations and, of course, the availability of suitable habitat.

We are making it possible for the department to expand its inventory survey program and are allocating an additional \$500,000 to the \$1.2 million that was made available last year. The additional funding will allow for more areas and species to be assessed. Work so far has resulted in answers to community concerns and knowledge gaps in more geographical areas than had been possible in the past. During the past year, the department worked with many partners to carry out 12 different species surveys through 32 different projects.

Our partners, Mr. Chair, included Yukon First Nations and renewable resource councils, the Government of Northwest Territories, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Canadian Wildlife Service and Parks Canada.

There were six moose habitat area studies; four studies on barren ground caribou, nine woodland caribou herds were surveyed and three Dall sheep populations were looked at.

There were fish studies, while other survey work was conducted on grizzly bears, goats, bats, beaver, small mammals, elks and indeed plants.

The information can be used to support efforts to manage for sustainable populations and to set harvest levels. The information also can assist land use planning commissions, renewable resource councils, resources development companies and government agencies and decision-making bodies in their consideration of the land resource management interests.

Mr. Chair, we have been working on a new Southern Lakes initiative with six First Nations, the B.C. provincial government and the Canadian Wildlife Service, to establish the Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee in response to commitments under the Kwanlin Dun and the Carcross-Tagish First Nations final agreements.

This government has increased funding for wildlife management programs and will assist in the assessment of wildlife populations that this committee is mandated to undertake. The committee is now in place and will be dealing with a coordinated approach to the management of moose, caribou, sheep and other wildlife populations to ensure diversity and sustainable harvest.

This new committee can be considered an evolution from the work that had been undertaken by the Southern Lakes caribou recovery program steering committee over the last 16 years.

Another excellent example of how Environment Yukon works with its many partners is addressing the question of elk

ticks, and we now have 125 elk in a pen. They will be held until the ticks drop off and they are cleared to be released back into the wild.

I know there is much more to be said, but my time is drawing near. I will stand down and allow members opposite to engage in debate and endeavour, throughout the course of debate, to provide further information of which there is quite a significant amount.

Thank you.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that overview. I would also like to thank the department staff for providing the briefing. We've taken notes and many of our issues were answered during the briefing debate.

I'm hoping to go fairly quickly with this department. Like many other Yukoners, I feel the Yukon is one of the most beautiful places on earth. We take the time to spend much of our summer out there with our families, and I believe this happens throughout the territory. Many of our tourists also try to capture some of that experience.

I was just in my riding and I'm already seeing the tourist traffic on the highway. Most are the locally rented RVs, and it's the German tourists. I know this is not the Department of Tourism but people do want to see our beautiful environment. This is what I'm getting at.

I want the Minister of Environment to take a message back to the Minister of Highways and Public Works. Over the last couple of weeks, I've noticed a huge change in the condition of our highways. It's Mother Nature who is doing the damage to the road. There are a lot of frost heaves and so on that are really breaking up the road. It would be nice for the people who are coming into our territory to see a bit of the beauty we do have. A lot of this is north of Carmacks.

We also took note of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who brought up the topic of the salmon overfishing to the public. It immediately caught the ears of First Nations as to what could happen here. We also know that Alaska has been overfishing our Yukon River species, particular salmon. We'd like to know what effort the Yukon government is putting in to giving our messages to Alaska in regard to fishing. What information campaign is this department giving to the general public with regard to the problems that were listed down in the States about salmon overfishing and the possible effects in the Yukon?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: We are certainly part of a process that is involved in this very area; however, I must point out that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans leads the initiative, as they should. Much of what we're grappling with right now, as I understand it — and I'm certainly not a journeyman in this area — relates to peripheral fisheries involved in the open ocean and the impacts those fisheries are having on fish stocks in the open ocean. I think that the committee is undertaking work here to try to address that. We certainly are at the table, encouraging a process that will lead to an understanding and an agreement.

An example is the pollock fishery in open ocean that is having this type of an impact on salmon stocks. I can assure the member that all involved are working on the issue. It is now up to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to demonstrate the

leadership in managing the fishery appropriately when dealing with these matters.

Mr. Fairclough: This has an impact in the Yukon and that is why I am asking the minister what steps he may take to help the Yukon's voice be louder and be heard.

The Yukon Salmon Sub-Committee is probably dealing with this issue. I know some of the members who sit on that committee, and that is why I am bringing this forward. They certainly could use a lot of help from the government if, in fact, there is someone who is appointed to oversee this.

One of the questions we have come out of the briefing and was with regard to the Marwell tarpits. We were told that there are still talks with Canada and discussions are in the final phase. We would like to know when things are going to be finalized, what the costs are and when we will see this tarpit cleaned up.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Chair, with respect to the cost — and this is important because it's a contaminated site bequeathed to us — it is in the millions, of course. It's somewhere in the range of \$1 million to \$7 million. There's no final or definite number on that at this time. It's an approximation as close to that final number as we can possibly get.

The issue with Canada is simply this: the Yukon believes that this is a contamination bequeathed to us and that the federal government has a significant obligation and responsibility. However, we are willing to partner with the federal government to clean up the site and that's the process we're into now. I cannot give an end date in that process. We're prepared to move quickly. The issue right now is with the federal government and the timeline is in their hands at this time.

Mr. Fairclough: I think the public would really like to know when work can start on this end. I appreciate the discussions that are back and forth between Yukon and Canada on this matter.

What is Canada's big issue? Is it now just a matter of finalizing the costs and timelines and so on? The minister said that Yukon is willing to share in the costs of the cleanup. I suppose that issue has been taken care of. Will we soon be seeing a final direction cost and all the details to the final phase of putting together a plan? I'm just wondering, what is the holdup with the federal government?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: At this time, the government cannot put its finger explicitly on an issue with the federal government. We are awaiting a response from the department that is the lead in this matter and bears the obligation and responsibility to Yukon, and that is the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

We're hopeful the response will be coming as soon as possible so we understand where the federal government is going with this. Of course, our objective is to quickly move to remediation of the site.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that. I'd like to move on to another issue that has been raised time and time again in regard to the *North Yukon Land Use Plan*. Much work, time and effort have gone into putting this plan together. I'd like to know what the Department of Environment's plans are.

Will they adopt this *North Yukon Land Use Plan*? Where are we with that?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: To the member's point, although the Department of Environment certainly has a role to play, this would be an overall government responsibility. I believe the plan is out for public consumption now between the First Nation and the Yukon governments. The plan has been worked on extensively over the last couple of years and we're very pleased to say that, for the first time since the first four First Nations signed off on land claims, there's actually a land claim at this point of progress.

The status is encouraging. It's out in the public domain now and we look forward to proceeding with it as soon as possible so we can get on with other regional land use planning that's required.

Mr. Fairclough: I take it that, once it comes back to government, they will assess it and look at what areas in the land use plan the government can adopt.

There was a pot of money put in place for land use planning in the territory. It's federal money. I believe that it was \$7 million. Those monies that have not been used get sent back, if there is no action on land use planning.

North Yukon land use planning has been going on for quite a number of years now. I am wondering how much money so far has been spent on a north Yukon land use plan and how much is left of this federal money for other regions to put together their land use plans.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: This is actually within the purview of Energy, Mines and Resources. All I can say is that the federal investment, as required, is accounted for. We will continue to work with the federal government for further investment as we continue land use planning — as we are obligated to do here in the Yukon.

Mr. Fairclough: Obviously, the Department of Environment plays a big role in putting together this land use plan. I am hoping that any information that I have been asking for here, if it is gathered by the department, can be sent over by legislative return.

I would like to ask a question that my colleague from the Vuntut Gwitchin riding has been asking of the minister for quite some time now; that is, the tabling of the state of the environment report. When can we expect the latest one to be tabled or made public?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Actually, that was done today during the order of the business of the House and during tabling of documents and returns. The Yukon's state of the environment report was tabled — the latest and most updated version of the state of the environment report.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister is quick on that one. I thank the minister for that.

The other question my colleague has been asking is in regard to ANWR and the fight for the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd. I know the minister says he will let the First Nation take the lead role in this long fight for the protection of the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd. The Chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation has definitely taken on that challenge, along with other members of his community.

They have gone out; other MLAs have gone travelling to Washington to help bring this issue to the attention of the government there, the senators and so on.

We're just wondering when we can expect the Premier to go to Washington and voice Yukon's concerns and give a stronger voice, and help the First Nations with this issue. It does make a difference. The Yukon Premier speaking on behalf of Yukon First Nations with and in conjunction with the chief does make for a stronger voice. I'm just wondering if the minister can answer that question.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: This is not a question of the government "letting" — I repeat, "letting" — the Government of the Vuntut Gwitchin lead the initiative to protect the critical habitat of the Porcupine caribou herd — in fact, quite the contrary. It has been a request by that government of this government to allow that to evolve under their leadership and to support them, which we are doing. We support them annually, for example.

Secondly, the government has voiced its position on many occasions, including directly with the now-President of the United States. I don't recall any former Yukoner who sat down or had been in discussions with the President of the United States in relation to ANWR. We brought this up in Washington, for example, at the Canadian Embassy to make sure our national government is furthering this initiative, based on the 1987 agreement reached between Ottawa and Washington. We bring this issue up continually with our Alaskan neighbours and we voice our position consistently on an ongoing basis with respect to the protection of the critical habitat. Now we're doing more. We're working with the relative First Nations on the development of a harvest management plan, for example, for the Porcupine caribou herd. We are working with Alaska to get a modern updated count of the herd to better understand the overall impacts on the herd itself. But we stay very staunch in our position of the protection of the critical habitat for the herd.

Mr. Fairclough: Okay, I guess the minister is satisfied with how things have been going. I would have thought the minister would have been more than happy to lend a helping hand. If it means a trip to Washington with the chief and members of Vuntut Gwitchin then, it would have been — in my view anyway — a more powerful presentation, knowing that the Yukon government is onside, sitting side by side with the chief on this matter.

I will just let that one be for now.

I have a question in regard to some of what the minister's remarks were at the beginning of the department overview. The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee is doing an assessment on the population of moose. When will that be completed and in how many other places in the territory are we doing a moose assessment?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: The Southern Lakes initiative is predicated on both the Kwanlin Dun and Carcross-Tagish agreements. However, I can delve into work to date on surveys on not just on moose. There's an extensive program, as I articulated, of an increased investment by this government to modernize or update our biophysical database.

I'll run through the list. The elk survey has been done; caribou rut counts, for example, for Clear Creek, Ethel Lake, Tatchun, Logan Mountains, Ibex, Carcross, Aishihik, Kluane, Chisana — all done; the Hart River herd, fall and winter telemetry surveys have been done; the Forty Mile caribou distribution survey has been done; the Carcross/Ibex caribou herd census has been done; the Porcupine caribou body condition monitoring is done and more radio collaring is underway for the Porcupine caribou herd.

For ground-based moose surveys, using the knowledge of hunters, trappers, outfitters, First Nations, miners, loggers, and prospectors in Mayo, Selkirk, Carmacks, southeast Yukon — all done; the moose survey in the Carmacks west area is done; the moose stratification survey in the Dawson gold fields is done; the moose composition survey in Nisutlin River is done; the moose survey in Red Mountain is done.

The sheep survey in Ruby Range is done; the sheep survey on Pelly Mountain is done; and the grizzly bear census in the Kluane region has been done; collars and other communications have been completed and study design has been developed.

The Old Crow freshwater fish survey is done; the fish inventory in the Peel and Wernecke regions are done; the Braeburn whitefish status survey is done; small mesh sampling of several lakes throughout the Yukon has been done; the Aishihik index survey in support of Yukon Energy Corporation's water licence application has been done; the creel census, which I understand is a major indicator of our water systems, in Marsh Lake and Lake Laberge is done; the species-at-risk biodiversity for bats and small animals is done; bird banding and support inventory of songbirds is done; the bison census is done; and the falcon inventory in the coast mountains is done.

The Dawson land use planning, for example, and the inventory support for data gathering and ground truth verification are done. A late winter moose survey should be complete shortly and the Southern Lakes regional assessment will be done within 24 months.

That is a fairly extensive list of all the areas of inventory and data collection that is underway by the Department of Environment across the Yukon.

Mr. Fairclough: Were these surveys done this past year? There is an update being done by the department every year in different sections of the territory. I am just wondering which ones were done over this past year. Some of the communities have been asking for moose surveys, for example, to take place, and they have not.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Chair, this began with an increased investment in last year's budget. The Department of Environment has come forward. It was clear that one of the things we needed to do was modernize and update our biophysical database. The government agreed with the department's recommendations in that regard and we increased the investment last year and are continuing it this year.

Without breaking down each of these initiatives by date, I can say to the member opposite that it began last year and it continues this year, as we continue to modernize and collect data for our biophysical database.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that answer.

I would like to move on now to bison. I can remember the time when the department said that when the numbers reach 450 — and then it was 500 not too long after that — the herd would become manageable, and few permits were given out at the time.

I believe well over a thousand have been counted this year, and some people say that it could be quite a bit higher than 1089 or whatever that number is. It is close to 1089. I am just wondering what the plans are. What does the government have in mind for managing the bison to a reasonable number, and does the department also feel that it's starting to become a problem or an issue in regard to other wildlife in the area?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: The department is concerned about the numbers of the bison because, as we know, they are a transplanted to the Yukon; however, the ongoing work has shown clearly that there is a significant number of bison now in the Yukon. They have thrived very well in this environment. The government has proceeded with what we call an "adaptive management plan for bison", which will include through adaptive management — since we have got the census done and it shows around 1,000 to 1,100 animals in the herd — such things as options for opening up or increasing the hunt.

We are working with a technical committee; we are working with First Nations that are impacted, of course, and others, to nail this down, and we hope to proceed this year with some of those options, such as a more open hunt or increased harvest numbers through adaptive management of bison.

Mr. Fairclough: From the way it's going, we can only see this number rise even higher. If people out there really feel that maybe all the bison have not been accounted for, then we could be in a number quite a bit higher. Here's a number that was thrown out to me. Around 1,400 or 1,500 is the number I've been told. This is coming from people who are out there on the land and some who have been involved in the survey as well.

I would just like to know if the minister can explain what he means by "opening up hunting?"

What does that entail?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Given the healthy numbers of the herd, opening up hunting would mean, of course, as one option — increased numbers for harvest of the herd itself and how we do that. But adaptive management dictates that we also recognize we have to strike a balance so there are no negative impacts from an influx, for example, of hunters out in the wilderness, which may impact trapping and traplines. So adaptive management is intended to address these kinds of issues upfront, but it's clear we are going to need to do something. Of course one of the options in adaptive management is to increase the numbers of bison that we harvest.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, when you go into the communities, this is something that is often talked about. Those who have taken a bison always have a story to tell. It's usually with a friend or many friends when they do go out.

Those who do not hunt bison, but are out there hunting moose or enjoying the outdoors, do feel there is quite an impact. One of them is in the wintertime, particularly around the

two areas where people have the most access to bison — the one I'm most familiar with, which is around the Mount Nansen area where the bison corral is. In the wintertime, that valley is packed right down by snow machines. It's incredible just to see that people don't actually follow a trail but are all over the place and all over the buckbrush and throughout. The snow is packed down. They really do feel there is an impact there. Not only that, but it's becoming quite a familiar place to a lot of people. They are now visiting the area during the off-season of bison hunting, which again, for a lot of local people like myself, does have a negative impact.

Here's the question that is largely asked when it comes to bison hunting: why can't we hunt them during moose hunting season? If someone were to take a bison, for example, they may not take a moose or caribou, so I ask the minister to consider that. Perhaps he can have the information package about the new numbers more available to the public, because many are asking questions and a lot of times I don't have the answer.

This is the first I've heard about the adaptive management plan that looks at the negative impact. I would ask the minister if he would make that information more available. I think people are cognizant of the numbers that have been released by the department.

The other question I was asking in regard to the hunting of bison is why is it only limited to certain sections? Some people can almost see them from the highway, but they can't take them. I am talking about around the Braeburn area.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, there are a number of questions there. First of all, the information, once it is ready for the public, is on the Web. Secondly, we did open it up last year. Part of the adaptive management in our work with the technical committee, First Nations and others was to further this whole initiative in managing the bison herd.

Also, the member spoke of certain times in the season for hunting, such as in conjunction with moose hunts. The problem with that is, during that time of the year when we allow for moose hunting, hunting bison at that time would result in orphan calves. I am not sure that we want to take that kind of a severe step when we can do other things at different times of the year that will result in the same objectives in harvesting the animals.

I hope that clears it up for the member opposite. Information is always made available on the Web. As soon as it is in their hands, the department will post it.

Mr. Fairclough: Thank you. Just one more question before I leave this issue.

We are well over 1,000 — close to 1,100 have been counted by the department. At one time, 500 was a manageable number for government. Has that number now moved? Is the department going to work to try to bring the numbers down to something that is more manageable, and what is that number — is it 500? Is it higher than that now?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Yes, that's exactly what the initiative we have undertaken is all about: reduce the numbers and bring it back down to what is deemed to be a manageable number for the herd, in the 500 range.

Mr. Fairclough: Then, I have to say to the department that you have quite a challenge on your hands, because the numbers are growing; the wolves are not finding a way to take down the bison yet at the numbers that we expected, or the government expected at the beginning.

I have to say it's quite a challenge, and I'd like to see this new open hunt come up soon. I think the public may be quite interested in that.

Now, moving on to elk and ticks, and this has been quite an issue throughout the year. I know the minister says he leaves it in the hands of the professionals to try to get rid of the ticks off the elk. Unfortunately, I think we have missed the boat this year. The time to do it was definitely in the month of March, and we will possibly be faced with the same issue again next year.

There is a bit of a scare out there in the public that this is going to get into the wildlife population. I know the department is doing what they can by putting the elk in a corral, and I believe what is going to take place next is the calving — if it is not already taking place.

Hopefully the next step is to burn the surrounding areas to try to get rid of the ticks that have fallen on to the ground.

What can we expect from the department throughout the summer and in the fall in trying to manage this? I think we have another window of opportunity in the fall to do this again. What can we expect from the department and what messages are there out there? I will ask the next question after.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: We are very concerned about this issue. It was deemed, however, in the past under former governments that the climate here and the cold weather in the winter would address the issue. Obviously, that wasn't the case, considering the number of other factors that impact this particular situation. On a first step of trying to deal with this issue, 125 elk have been penned. The ticks do drop off. Because of the confined area and controlled situation, we can then deal with that matter after release of the elk that are now free from the ticks. This is in the Takhini herd. We will move on next to the Braeburn herd.

We are also going to be holding a risk assessment and planning workshop for the long-term strategy for this infestation, given the fact that cold winters appear not to be a matter of fact any more. Without that environmental element, our long-term strategy is to deal with this particular issue.

This process is slated for May 21 and 22. It will include First Nations, other working group members, tick experts and entomologists, who are the experts we require to further advance our ability to manage tick infestation and do everything we can to the extent possible to ensure that we can mitigate the possibility of further spread. That is what is happening now. We are very concerned, as I said. A tremendous amount of emphasis has been placed on this by the department and those responsible within the department. We are also soliciting input from other experts to assist the Yukon in this matter.

Mr. Fairclough: None of these ticks have been medicated, so we went to the next plan, to keep the elk corralled until such time as all the ticks do fall off, and at least the Takhini herd can move on. Some of the concerns raised in the

public were these elk are held in a bison corral, which is obviously used for bison. I see a discussion on that. I may be wrong, but I thought I had read that somewhere in a government document. Other animals such as bison are hosts to ticks. That is a bit of a concern.

The Braeburn herd was not medicated at all; they were fed hay, or left hay to feed on. I don't think the elk even came around. I have a friend who walked through the Braeburn area just looking for antlers and came upon the hay but didn't see any corn for the medication there. They were fed hay but they didn't even come to the hay.

I think what the department wanted to do was, for example, to see if they could bring them in and, if so, maybe keep better track of exactly where the elk are. It's a bit of a concern to the public out there.

If there was any medicated food out for the elk, it would be a concern to local hunters simply because we don't know what the medication can do to humans, if this medication were to be consumed by moose, and so on. A lot of issues have been raised to me on the Braeburn herd because they weren't taken care of at this point.

I hear from the minister that the next challenge is to work on the Braeburn herd. Is it to corral them in the same manner as the Takhini herd and try the medication at the proper time in different ways?

If not that way, is there something new that the department can do on this? Or are they going to work with the committee to try to address this?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, we're working with experts and others, of course, on an ongoing basis. First off, the pen that's being used: the reason it is being used for this particular issue is because it wasn't being used for anything else. Therefore, it was a logical choice.

Secondly, the ticks do fall off and, without a host to transport them any distance, they're not capable of travelling any distance and they will die. Then we will essentially incinerate the area that was confined to make sure that there is no danger of spread.

With the Braeburn herd, they put out medicated feed. It was monitored 24 hours a day to ensure nothing else got into it. It was taken back in but, unfortunately, sometimes animals decide what they want to eat and what they don't want to eat. I don't think the elk really wanted to eat medicated corn, so we'll have to address that going forward.

One of the options is — given the fact that the Takhini herd was dealt with to a level of success in penning them — that we can always herd up or round up the Braeburn herd and apply the same strategy to that herd. But this is not something we approach singularly. Given the concern here, we will look at options on an ongoing basis and certainly, as I said, solicit the advice of experts on how we can deal with this, given the fact that the weather conditions are no longer a contributing factor in terms of getting rid of ticks, as was the case in the past. The long, cold winters certainly addressed the spread. That's not the case today, so we're looking at all other possible measures, including what we did with the Takhini herd: penning them, allowing the ticks to drop off and then, in an iso-

lated fashion, once the elk herd is released, we can deal with the site appropriately.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for the answers to my questions. I didn't realize the feed left for the Braeburn herd was medicated feed. I thought it was just hay. I had a friend walk through on this ridge. It wasn't monitored; there was nobody around for him to even talk to, whether on the highway or not. I'm just wondering what kind of monitoring did take place with the department.

I'd like to move on. The ticks on elk are a continuing issue in the Yukon.

In regard to the spruce bark beetle, the spread is tremendous. It's being felt in Carmacks, Pelly Crossing, right in the community, and so on, although it's not as hard hit as the southern part of Yukon, around the Aishihik area. We did have a pretty cool winter, particularly in the Carmacks area where we experienced minus 60 degrees Celsius for a good couple of weeks. Does the department see a slowdown in the spread of the spruce bark beetle? Has the weather taken care of a lot of what needed to be done? What action plan can we expect from the department on this issue?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I have to go back to the tick issue. There was hay provided for elk; it was not medicated — only corn, which was brought in on a sleigh and, because the elk didn't like it or didn't want to eat it, it was taken back on the sleigh. The monitoring took place when the medicated corn was on-site. There was no medication in the hay; therefore, we just left them to eat at their will.

As far as the spruce bark beetle, unfortunately, when there was time available for the federal government — which was responsible for forests at that time — to come up with some management plans to impede and/or alleviate the spread of the spruce bark beetle many years ago, nothing was done. We are now dealing with the end result of a combination of climate change, the age of the forest, the lack of any sort of management initiatives — which probably 15 years ago would have made some positive impact on the spread — but none of that type of management took place; therefore, the combination of factors resulted in probably one of the biggest infestations of the spruce bark beetle in the country.

That said, work has been done collectively with Canada to see if there's a way we can deal with it and put it to some use, for example. If there's some economic use for it, maybe we can deal with it on that basis; however, that's a big challenge. Secondly, of course, Mother Nature could resolve this problem really quick and set it on fire. One lightning strike in that dead forest and it could very well turn into quite an inferno. If it does, it will certainly deal with the beetle to the greatest extent.

That's not a preferred choice by the way, because it would be a very difficult challenge to fight that fire, given the volume of fuel and the condition the forest is in.

However, the good news is the fact that recently it appears that the spread has slowed down. That's a good sign, because there is a lot of white spruce out there that is not yet infested. I want to remind the member that the insects are always present; that's just part of our biological makeup. When the conditions

come together in a manner that allows for such a spread, that's exactly what happens.

We'll have to continue to work on it and try to manage it as best we can. There is some activity in that forest, as we speak, albeit it is limited in terms of its scope or magnitude. We'll just have to continue on here, doing what we can and hope that winter weather continues on the pattern it has over the last couple of years, because that appears to have contributed to at least a slowdown of the spread. Overall the unfortunate part here is the time for management initiatives that would have probably contributed very positively and resulted in a dramatic decrease in the spread, were nonexistent at the time they were needed. We now are dealing with the residual of those decisions from back then, and we'll just have to continue to do what we can as I said today in going forward.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, it is devastating, Mr. Chair. I guess we are going to have to rely a lot on nature to take care of that issue for us. It's also what I heard the minister say.

The biggest issues the renewable resource councils have is that their workload seems to continue to grow; there does not seem to be an end to it. They are expected to be involved in quite a lot from the government's point of view and the point of view of local governments and First Nations. They do feel the pinch of having expertise come in and help them out on different issues, because not all of them can go out and do the work that is asked of them.

I know that they work governments to government with departments and so on. I am wondering whether or not the funding to them is going to be addressed soon, so we can see an increase to their funding.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Overall, as mandated, RRCs were to undertake a certain area of work. Hopefully, that is what they are disciplined to do, making sure they stay within that mandate. That will certainly address workload. Of course, the issue of fiscal resources provided is one that rests with Canada. It flowed out of the agreements. We are in the nine-year review right now. I am quite sure that part of the review includes this type of fiscal requirement for such things as renewable resource councils. We will have to get to the conclusion of that process to see how Canada will respond.

Mr. Fairclough: I only have a couple more questions. One is in regard to our campgrounds and the permits being down, which is something that was brought up again in our briefing. Largely, I think people feel that it is the price of the permits. Can the minister explain that and whether or not we will see a decrease in campground permits?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Actually, as things happen from time to time, there was a statistical error. The fact is that permits are increasing. The indicators again for this year are that they will continue to increase.

Mr. Fairclough: All right, I thank the minister for that.

I have one last question about busing in Whitehorse, which was brought up in Question Period. The issue was brought up in terms of reducing greenhouse gases in the territory. I think that if government worked closely with the City of Whitehorse

on this, even as a government initiative more than a city initiative, things could work out.

Part of the thought behind this is that the bus fares collected by the city could be 100 percent offset by the government, and that money would be given to the city, and then that would have no negative impact at all. If we came up with a plan to increase the busing in the City of Whitehorse on a more frequent schedule, then I believe a lot more people would take the bus. If we could get them closer to their place of work and so on, they would leave their vehicles at home.

This has been brought to our attention by quite a few people because they felt that during the Canada Winter Games this was quite successful. A lot of people took their vehicles. Of course, there was increased traffic in Whitehorse. It was best at the time to leave your vehicle at home. But a lot of people experienced what it's like to ride the bus and the fact that they could get around the city. I think people really feel that it wouldn't be that friendly for them if they were to get up in the morning and have to wait for an extended period of time to catch a bus to their place of work or take a long route through the city to get to work.

If there was some work done with the City of Whitehorse to make those improvements, I think this could very much be a win-win situation for everyone, including the territorial government and our environment.

I would ask the minister to consider that, maybe sit down and talk with the city officials — elected members — to see if in fact this could work. It would not cost the city anything. It would cost the government some, but it is a step toward reduction in greenhouse gases here in the city.

At some time, we could also address the whole busing issue around the territory as well, but this is one we wanted to focus on and have some seriousness put to it. I ask the minister if he can do that with the City of Whitehorse.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: As stated during Question Period, we're not averse to working on initiatives related to emission reduction. We have brought out our climate change action plan. Part of that action plan focuses on emission reduction, and much is being done already today in the Yukon for that very initiative, in terms of reducing our emissions overall.

What's strange here is, on the one hand, the Official Opposition has suddenly aspired to come up with something that would contribute positively to climate change action; on the other hand, they oppose all other initiatives. Determining what the Official Opposition is actually attempting to do is a little bit confusing.

However, we are investing in public transit with the city. We have in the past and, most recently, contributed another \$466,000 toward another bus. Obviously the requirement for more buses is there with the city. We'll leave this particular public transit initiative within the city's hands, as it is their public transit system overall. We'll continue to do our work in what is required to reduce thousands and thousands of tonnes of carbon emissions, for example, which is opposed by the Official Opposition — and that is hydro. There's a tremendous amount of investment in hydro that has been roundly criticized by the Official Opposition.

The Official Opposition can't have it both ways. Nobody is suggesting that increased ridership on public transit is not a good thing. Of course it's a good thing, but that's also an area where individual choice comes into effect. We would encourage Whitehorse residents to recognize that we all have a role to play; we all have a contribution to make; and in doing so one of the choices citizens of Whitehorse can make is to ride public transit.

In fairness to the city, they also need a public transit system that is manageable, workable and affordable — all these factors come into effect.

If the city approaches us, of course we will talk to them, but at this point in time, our climate change action plan is out for public input and we will continue on with that plan. It sets out four major goals. One of them, of course, is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. So far, we've targeted thousands of tonnes of carbon emission reduction by our investment in hydro. We continue to do more, whether it be energy efficiency programs, construction methods, more energy efficient vehicles, reducing consumption of fuel thereby reducing emissions — and the list goes on. We will continue to do our work when it comes to climate change action in this territory and demonstrate leadership in the country on behalf of northerners and in this case, Yukoners.

Mr. Fairclough: I think that the government is missing an opportunity. We are not raising this issue as something small but as something that could benefit a lot of people in the territory. It is unfortunate. I suppose that we can expect the government will not do anything and allow the City of Whitehorse to approach them. I think that showing some initiative and leadership on this issue, even though it was brought forward by the Official Opposition and by the third party in a motion — these are good ideas and should be worked on and not just left alone.

I don't have any further questions, Mr. Chair, but I do want to correct the minister opposite. We in the Official Opposition are not opposed to clean energy. We are not opposed to hydro. We ask questions and we have issues. They are brought out directly from the public and that is why we raise them. Just because we do that, it does not mean that we are opposed to any of it.

With that, I will turn this over to the third party for further questions.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I can assure the member opposite that we have in the past worked with the city; we are working the city today, and we'll continue to work with the City of Whitehorse, as we do with every community in the Yukon.

But I want to make the point about action speaking louder than words. The member is saying that they are not opposed to clean energy initiatives, but their actions don't substantiate those words, given their voting record in this House. I close my case on that.

Mr. Fairclough: On that point, Mr. Chair, I think if the Premier really believes that, then he should go back a number of years and look at the voting record of the Yukon Party, and then maybe he'll get a clearer picture. Thank you.

Mr. Edzerza: I would like to start by asking the Premier some questions with regard to some of the discussion today in Question Period.

I do find it rather suspect that the Yukon state of the Environment report comes out a half an hour before the environment department is up for debate. I believe if one had time to go through this document, there would probably be numerous questions to be asked. I just opened the book and it so happens that it opened right on Dawson sewage, which is of interest.

For the record, it states in this document, on page 19, "In August 2000, the City of Dawson was charged under section 36(3) of the federal *Fisheries Act*, for depositing deleterious substance into the Yukon River. Since the turn of the century, the community has pumped raw sewage into the Yukon River."

I find that unbelievable in this day and age. I believe that those kinds of practices would have gone by the wayside a long time ago, especially since probably billions of dollars' worth of gold have come out of that country.

No one can even think about protecting the most prestigious river probably in the Yukon Territory — the very well-known Yukon River. I can't help but wonder what a tourist not only from Canada, but also from the United States and Europe, would think if they found out — if this ended up in some of the tourist information — that the Yukon River is used for the disposal of raw sewage.

This is something that I think has been on a lot of people's minds. I think that the judge should have imposed something in the last court case, rather than extend it again. It's almost going down the road that this is the only way that something will happen, if there is a court order imposed for a solution to this issue.

For the Environment minister, one would believe that this should be the highest priority the government has on its list, even before jobs. This issue should be number one, but it's not. The widening of a road is more important than stopping raw sewage being pumped into the Yukon River, which is really a sad thing to try to imagine. I can't imagine how some people must feel when they depend on the salmon in that river for food. I can tell you without a doubt that I would never eat fish out of the Yukon River for that reason.

We don't really know what happens to the fish. I would like to ask the Premier if there is any way or if he intends to try to expedite this issue and get something happening there very quickly?

I listened to some news broadcasts on the radio, and from the tone of the Environment minister's voice, I was led to believe that it would be more important to try to get an extension of 30 years like other people across the country may have. Even that being the case, I find it unbelievable that such an exception could even be made any place in Canada, let alone the Yukon.

I just want to ask the minister if there were any plans for expediting this issue and stopping the polluting of the Yukon River?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: You know, Mr. Chair, first of all, this was supposed to be dealt with years ago. Unfortunately, this particular issue Dawson found itself in never got dealt with

due to the mismanagement of its fiscal affairs. We are dealing with what has transpired since then.

There was a significant fund established in the late 1990s to deal with the Dawson sewage issue. To date, nothing has transpired, other than the fact that this government came forward with a project designed and ready to go, but the democratic process took place in Dawson City. Under the *Municipal Act* a referendum is allowed, and under the *Municipal Act* in this territory, it has standing. The project to deal with the treatment of Dawson sewage was adamantly opposed by the citizens, the taxpayers of Dawson.

Now we're dealing with that. I don't know what tone the member speaks of. All we've done is say we need some clarity around this. The referendum has standing in its results but so too is there an issue around what is happening with national standards.

The member of the third party, the Member for McIntyre-Takhini, is suggesting that Dawson would be a community that is depositing deleterious material into a river. It's happening all over the country and that's why there are new standards for effluent discharge coming into effect. Those standards will ensure that all communities are in compliance.

Another matter of clarity is, if that's the case, then why would Dawson as a community be treated any differently from any other community? That's not saying we're not going to proceed with a treatment facility and/or initiative for Dawson sewage. It's simply asking for clarity. I think it's logical that we do so.

Furthermore, the issue of discharge into the river relates to the act of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Unfortunately, there were other options for the City of Dawson at the time, which they did not choose to exercise, and that would be to get an authorization to work with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in this regard to come up with a plan for Dawson. That didn't happen. So we're at the juncture we are at.

In preparation for the fall court proceeding, we will now pursue what we need to do to be ready to go back to court, to make presentation to the courts. We're not going to react in a knee-jerk fashion. We will do what is the responsible and appropriate in dealing with this matter, as every other community in the country should.

The member says he doesn't eat fish out of the Yukon River. Well, I then question, does the member eat fish out of the ocean? Cities like Victoria are depositing the same deleterious material into the oceans, only considerably more in terms of volume than what Dawson is depositing.

I'm not a scientist and I don't purport to be; however, I do understand certain logical and fundamental elements. I know the test at the pipe in Dawson produced results; however, there are fish thriving in the river; there is significant fish habitat unaffected. What we're doing is ensuring we will come forward with a facility and/or program for Dawson that is workable, will address the issue, get Dawson in compliance with national standards, and we'll take it from there.

This is not a refusal to do the work; it is a matter of clarity dealing with recent developments. I would hope that the member does not diminish the significance of a referendum by the

citizens of Dawson with regard to the project that was available and ready to proceed to deal with the treatment issue. It was turned down and now we have to do deal with it from that basis. The referendum and its results have legal standing under the *Municipal Act*.

Mr. Edzerza: I know that this debate can go on for a lifetime, just like the dumping of raw sewage into the river. One can make up a million excuses around this issue as to why we should bother with this river. Well, it happens to be the Yukon River. It belongs to all of us, not only the people of Dawson. I think the people of Dawson have a responsibility to all the citizens of this territory to start working on this issue and get serious about it.

I know that the government has championed on many occasions — or considered themselves champions on many issues — and on many fronts. Maybe this is one for which they can really be heroes by doing something immediately.

I really don't care too much about what happens across the country, because we have no control over that, but in the Yukon, we certainly do. I believe that there are a lot of regulations in place that would shut most prospectors down for something of this nature. It just so happens that I know of different miners who were threatened that their licences would be taken away from them if they ever had another spill like they did. We are talking about dirt in the water — that's not acceptable; yet, it seems to me that one can make a thousand excuses for the dumping of raw sewage into the Yukon River.

Like I said, that's a debate that can go on forever, and I don't intend to stick to this issue. I think I have made my point with regard to how important it is to do something about it instead of playing the blame game. We could blame everybody in Canada for this issue. I don't care; I am not interested in that.

All I am asking the minister — and what I did ask the minister — is there any way that the government can expedite this issue? If it's money, then put the money into it. If it's negotiating with First Nations for land that's available, do it.

I am sure that it's not impossible to put a line across the river, if need be. I have known of proposals in the Arctic where they want to put a gas pipeline under the ocean for many miles.

It just appears that — to me and to a lot of other people with whom I have had discussions around this issue — the government is not really serious about this issue. That's all I am relaying and I certainly hope that the government will make this a priority.

I have not heard the Premier say that it's a priority. Therefore, we can probably expect something for the next few years to deal with this issue. They'll be throwing a little bit of money at it — nothing serious — because it's going to take serious money to deal with this issue. All I can say is that every day that raw sewage is left to be pumped into the river, the worse it gets. Just because people did it for the last 50 years, that's no excuse.

I have just a few questions; I'm not going to spend a whole lot of time. The Official Opposition asked many of the questions I was looking at. Last year, the three northern territories produced a report, entitled *A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Canada*.

It spelled out the main themes for the north; namely, building self-reliance, individuals who live in healthy, viable communities, protecting aboriginal cultures, respect for the land and environment, and so forth.

What happened with that document? What steps has the Yukon government taken to engage First Nations to see if this vision is also their vision?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I'm not even going to respond to the member's dissertations around the Dawson sewage issue for fear I would dignify the comments.

Furthermore, the northern vision has produced a pan-northern initiative with all three territories and is about the future of the north in Canada. It is to connect ourselves to the federal government's initiative of Arctic sovereignty and their vision for the north, so it's not a process that's unilateral but includes the three territories in an ongoing evolution of northern development, protection of our environment, and ensuring we protect our culture and traditional ways. Much of what flows from the Yukon's input into the northern vision includes our obligations and the outcomes of our land claims process here.

The member's question has certainly been dealt with in the initiatives we undertake with First Nations, as we're obligated to do. The list goes beyond that with things like the Yukon Forum, with mechanisms like YESAA, like land use planning, habitat protection areas and other work we do with special management areas. There is a significant number of measures underway and ongoing that ensure that overall connection.

So *A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Canada* is a living document. It is something that is not static in terms of its timeline. It will be evolving as we have evolved since the very beginning. I'm sure, going forward in each thing we do today and the impacts on tomorrow, we will be careful in our deliberations on making the decisions of today. That's why the government has — on balance — done what we've done. We've placed a great emphasis on our environment and the member opposite — no matter what he may think — cannot provide substantive evidence to the contrary.

We've also — on balance — placed an emphasis on economic development for jobs and a better future for Yukoners. Now, we know what the member thinks of jobs and his aversion to them, especially in areas of development. That is that member's business, but it makes for good *Hansard* clips as we go about the territory, demonstrating the Member for McIntyre-Takhini's view of the Yukon. It's not a good one, not a positive one and it's certainly not holding the member in good stead. But again, that's the member's business.

We will continue to do our work as a government. We were elected to do this work. We ran on it. We demonstrated that to the Yukon public. They believe in this vision and plan and that's why we're here. We'll continue to live up to those commitments and be measured by the outcomes and the results.

Today the Yukon is a better place when it comes to protection of our environment overall — we know that — given the work done to this point in time. It is a better place for quality of life; it's a better place economically; and it's a better place regarding health care and education overall. So we see that, Yuk-

oners see that and we'll continue to do our good work, regardless of what the Member for McIntyre-Takhini may think. He will be held accountable for a number of statements on the public record.

Mr. Edzerza: I will stand up and be accountable, unlike the Premier. I will take it and deal with it directly. I know that the Premier doesn't like to be challenged on anything. The moment he is, it becomes a personal attack on the opposition and on the members opposite who ask questions. However, that is something he has to deal with. It is his personality. I would suggest that he talk to one of his ministers to see if there is some kind of program he can take that might help him overcome some of those issues.

Chair's statement

Chair: Order please. The Chair has given a lot of leeway with regard to personalizing the debate, but I do believe and feel quite strongly that Mr. Edzerza has been over-personalizing the debate with these comments. I would ask him not to follow down that path.

Mr. Edzerza: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for getting me back on track; however, some of the comments that the Premier made, I believe, were very personal.

I want to say that the Premier said that he knows my position on everything, such as, for example, on jobs. My position on jobs is very simple. Everyone has to earn a living. Everyone has to have the opportunity to put food on their table. It so happens that jobs do support that. The beliefs of the NDP have been stated inaccurately several times with regard to mining and job creation. Well, Mr. Chair, the only difference probably between the two parties — and I've now had the opportunity to be in both, just like the Premier — is that the Yukon Party's vision is, I believe, jobs at any cost. It doesn't matter what it is. Just as long as there is a job, we can destroy as much land as we want and do whatever we please. With the NDP, we feel that there is a real responsibility to respect the environment and respect the land and, at the same time, produce jobs.

I believe that the NDP was in government when new mines started, but they were also in government when such facilities as the hospital and extended care facilities were constructed.

It's a needless debate to go down this road with the Premier. We can rebut comments made all day about how other people are and what their views are, but I would sooner just continue with some of the questions I have.

In the last part of the government's plan to reduce carbon emissions, the government implemented some financial incentives so consumers can make better choices when buying, for example, kitchen appliances — and there are lots of others.

The question I have for the minister: can the minister provide any numbers on how well these programs are being used and, if public uptake has been poor, would he consider upping the incentives and, if the response has been good, will the minister also consider expanding the incentives to other products and services, such as triple-glazed windows or energy efficient furnaces?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: There are so many areas. Just in one area, Yukon Housing Corporation's energy efficient programs, there is an overwhelming response and uptake.

Mr. Edzerza: Mr. Chair, I would just go on to something else that's of great importance: having the climate change centre of excellence located at Yukon College. It's a good idea. I would like to compliment the minister for including the Council of Yukon First Nations and Yukon College in the discussions to date on what such a centre would look like and how it might operate and the things it might do.

Can the minister give the House an update on these initiatives?

Other places, namely Yellowknife, are also aggressively pursuing this idea, so it is important that the Yukon do everything it can to engage Yukon First Nations in this initiative. I believe the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has gone on the record as saying that only a climate change centre of excellence with a strong First Nation component would be likely to get federal funding.

When can Yukoners expect to see some kind of feasibility report on this? Also, is the cold climate technology centre part of the plan?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Yes, the Cold Climate Innovation Centre is part of the plan, and that's ongoing work; but a lot of that is housed in Economic Development, for obvious reasons, because of its connectivity to the private sector in regard to their involvement as a cluster — similar to what the International Polar Year is all about with a cluster of scientists and the critical mass that comes out of that.

As far as the progress report overall goes, we are progressing. We have gone from the climate change strategy to the work we're doing on an overall climate change action plan, which includes the development of a northern climate change centre of excellence. We have partnerships with universities such as the University of Alberta, Laval, UBC and other institutions in this work. Of course, what we are doing by modernizing our biophysical database is as important to the climate change centre of excellence as bricks and mortar, because that information is a prerequisite to having any sort of climate change centre of excellence.

We are working on accessing federal contributions. We are delivering climate change public education programs and initiatives, coordinating the scientific work on impacts and climate change adaptation. I would remind all members of the House that a couple of years ago adaptation was not even a discussion point. It was all about mitigation. Today the Yukon, through leadership, has managed to ensure that adaptation is front and centre on the national agenda in dealing with climate change.

We have to look at not just bricks and mortar, once again, and other ongoing initiatives. Also there are Yukon Housing Corporation's programs, as we just talked about, for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation. There is overwhelming uptake on those programs. Of course, there is the investment in hydro to increase the hydro capacity. There is work that the Department of Highways and Public Works is doing in

energy efficiency and adaptation, especially around fleet vehicle purchases.

There is very keen emphasis on green construction — and that's in partnership with Canada, by the way. Canada sees that as a very important measure. Energy conservation initiatives are ongoing, the work we do with wildlife management and biodiversity work are all part of the climate change centre of excellence.

Of course, the member is correct: the college precincts are an appropriate location for all this, such as housing a database. I believe there were over 100 research projects last summer in Yukon, and the gathering of that data is as important for the climate change research centre of excellence, and the housing of that data, as bricks and mortar.

I can assure the member that the work is ongoing. I can also categorically state to the member that the ongoing part of this is long term. This whole initiative cannot stop. Competition for where a physical address may be is not something the Yukon government is all that concerned about. We will proceed with this centre of excellence and do our work, as we continue on the path of a climate change action plan for the Yukon Territory.

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, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Department of Environment.

Mr. Edzerza: I only have a few more questions. The next one I would like to ask is about the Yukon government getting \$5 million from the federal ecotrust fund not so long ago to install a third generator at the Aishihik hydroelectric plant. This decision was made with little or no public consultation and this includes Yukon First Nations, municipalities, conservation groups, industry and the general public.

Did the Environment department have any input to this initiative and, if so, what was the extent? Are there any plans to apply to this fund in the future? If so, what are they? Will there be a consultation process?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: This was a federal initiative. It was a one-time-only initiative. We had to comply with what the federal government envisioned as an appropriate investment to sign on to this agreement. Across the country, jurisdictions were already signed on. We came up with a plan that met the requirements and conditions.

By the way, this investment is certainly one that is in keeping with our climate change strategy and our overall action plan. I would remind the member that the third wheel at Aishihik is timely. It increases our hydro capacity. It reduces our dependence on diesel fuel and, in doing so, will reduce thousands of tonnes of emissions of carbon into the Yukon atmosphere. It met the litmus test and it is a worthy investment, but the consultations are ongoing. It is our climate change action plan overall — extensive consultations have taken place, work-

shops, symposiums — and now we are out there with the next phase, which is public and First Nation input on the overall action plan. This will be a continuing initiative where consultations in future will take place.

As we continue to implement and address action items in the territory, there will be further need, in some instances I would assume, for further consultations.

Mr. Edzerza: I would just like to put on record I was up the Aishihik road many times and remember seeing Otter Falls — I guess it was known as Otter Falls; it was even pictured on the back of the \$5 bill — but those falls are no longer in existence. There is just a small amount of water barely running there, just a trickle. However, that's the price a person pays sometimes for electricity, I guess, which is something that has become very essential in all parts of Canada.

On page 97, under "allotments", there has been a 37-percent increase in other costs. Can you tell us what that is for?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Chair, I have to address the member's comment about Otter Falls. The third wheel that we are putting in place will allow us to use less water. That's one of the positives that come out of this type of investment. It allows us manage better our water use and, at the same time, increase our hydro capacity.

I would hope the member recognizes that the investment is more than just simply producing electricity from the use of water; it helps us reduce overall use of water in the Aishihik system.

As far as the member's comment about "Other": the increase is due to collective agreement and management group pay increases. I think there are some training, health and safety and travel as part of that.

Mr. Edzerza: Continuing on page 9-14, under environmental sustainability — special waste collection is down 50 percent. How does the minister account for this?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Yes, last year we recovered a significant amount, so what we're doing is reinstating this back to the normal amount that historically has proven to be the case.

Mr. Edzerza: When we go over to page 9-16, the Yukon Fish and Game Association got a 129-percent increase in funds. Meanwhile, the funding to the Yukon Conservation Society and the Wildlife Management Advisory Board did not change at all.

Could I have an explanation for that?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: This is nothing more than an accounting procedure. The full amount they normally get each and every year was not booked according to what we've done this year, but it's no change. It's actually the same amount they receive each and every year.

Mr. Edzerza: I just have probably one last question. It has to do with staffing. We are kind of interested in knowing how many department employees are five years from retirement and if there will be a shortage of staff in this area.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, I'm very pleased to be able to express to the Member for McIntyre-Takhini that, although it is the case that we will see, over the course of the next number of years, retirements taking place all across the government — but specifically in the Department of Environment — I am pleased

to say that the department has one of the best succession plans in place to deal with that issue. Some of this will be in the middle management area. We do have a full complement when it comes to other areas of employment, especially in the area of expertise that we require in the department. I am sure our recruiting practices will continue to ensure that we have that full complement.

Overall, a succession plan is in place, and I can assure the member that it's a good one.

Mr. Edzerza: This will be my last question for the minister and Premier. It has to do with Parks Canada. Can the minister provide an update on the labour negotiations between Parks Canada and the Public Service Alliance of Canada? Has he spoken to his federal counterparts urging that a fair and equitable deal come out of the negotiations?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, as always, we support the collective bargaining process. In that process, the expectation is to ensure a fair and equitable deal. This is not, however, within the purview of the Yukon government. It is in the hands of the federal government. We would encourage at every opportunity that the collective bargaining process be allowed to conclude to its inevitable outcome.

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Seeing none, we will proceed line by line in Vote 52.

Mr. Edzerza: Mr. Chair, I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried, as required.

Unanimous consent re deeming all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, cleared or carried

Chair: Mr. Edzerza has requested the unanimous consent of the Committee to deem all lines in Vote 52, Department of Environment, 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 \$24,420,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$1,812,000 agreed to

Department of Environment agreed to

Chair: Community of the Whole will now proceed to Community Services. Do members wish to take a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Committee of the Whole will recess for 10 minutes.

Recess

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 11, *First Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, Department of Community Services.

Department of Community Services — *continued*

Hon. Mr. Hart: I will carry on where I left off.

Also in Yellowknife, I had the great pleasure of signing a new bilateral sport agreement with Canada for funding to support increased aboriginal sport participation. I'm excited about this opportunity to combine the aboriginal bilateral with our existing sport funding agreement. Our collaborative effort with the past bilateral produced positive results, and we are looking forward to continued success with our renewed agreement.

The Yukon Aboriginal Sport Circle, the Recreation and Parks Association of Yukon, Sport Yukon, and our territorial sport organizations and special recreation groups are working hard within all communities to build capacity and develop our sport system, which will in turn ensure healthy people and healthy communities and lots of pride and accomplishment of all Yukon people involved in sport.

Library services are equally important, as a healthy body is a healthy mind, and the Yukon's library system is in place to encourage people of all ages to keep learning new things. Reading for knowledge or entertainment is a reward in itself. Many Yukoners and their families are frequent visitors to their local library, where programs are in place to stimulate their enjoyment of reading.

It begins at the preschool level. Most parents are familiar with the enjoyment of reading to their children before bedtime. It becomes a routine in many homes and is something that grandparents and parents, and especially the children, look forward to. This begins the culture of learning for most people's lives and develops our listening skills and stimulates our ability to imagine.

While it may be a giant step between the bedtime stories of Dr. Seuss and the latest Grisham novel, many of us still read before bedtime each night.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll have to sit and wait for questions to come in order to finish my speech.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for his opening remarks. I would also like to thank his staff for providing the briefing and answering a lot of the questions that we did have.

Unfortunately, given the time of this sitting, it's not like we have many days that we can spend on issues in detail with the minister. I do have some questions for the minister and hopefully we can move along fairly quickly.

This department is one that does affect our communities a lot. I know the minister makes trips to communities and is hearing first-hand many of the issues that have been raised there.

Recently, the minister was in the community of Carmacks and the Tantalus School before the opening date to cut the ribbon for the opening of the school library, and those types of things are very important for the community. It's good to see the minister show up for these events, so I thank the minister for that. It's also obviously recognized by the community.

I have asked the minister a number of questions in this department in the past, particularly about my own riding, and I notice in the budget there are also line items that are directly related to projects in my riding, and I have some questions on those too.

I would like to get into that.

First of all, with regard to the MRIF dollars, I would like to know when the municipal rural infrastructure fund will expire? Can the minister also tell us when the Yukon can see the next allotment of projects?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I will respond to the member's question, but I would like to finish my speech, if I could.

First of all, we want our library facilities to be warm, welcoming and inviting. To this purpose, we will be investing \$30,000 in renovation work to make them even more appealing than they are today. In order to keep track of the many thousands of books and other materials loaned to the currently 13,240 Yukoners who have active library cards, another \$30,000 is being invested in a new database that will account for the books, which library they are currently in and when they will be returned, so that others may enjoy reading them. There is \$10,000 identified for a public awareness campaign to inform Yukoners on the many valuable activities, learning and entertainment resources to be discovered at their local library.

Members will recall an announcement made last August whereby funding was increased to communities by 32 percent through the comprehensive municipal grants, which is the first significant increase since the fund was created in 1991, recognizing the challenges we all share in delivering our mandates with ever-increasing costs. This government committed to significantly increase the comprehensive municipal grant funding over the next five years. Effective April 1 this year, the comprehensive municipal grant is increasing by \$807,500 and will continue to increase by this amount per year until 2012. With the increase, Yukon's total contribution to municipalities, through the 2008 CMG funding, amounts to \$13.35 million.

For many years, the community mayors and councils have had to do more with less and stretch their creativity and management skills to address the needs of their communities. I am glad that we could assist and take some of the pressure off by increasing their annual grants. This will be a great benefit in the communities. They may now factor this into their future budgets and their overall planning.

This is also a very important aspect in relationship to their gas tax which has just been announced to carry on to 2014 — again, another very important planning element in improving infrastructure.

We have identified some additional funding at the community level planning, including \$25,000 for local area planning in Carcross, \$25,000 for local area planning in the Klondike Valley, and the Tagish local area planning will be funded to the same amount.

To capture the new reference data, which is extremely important in the planning process, we are currently looking to invest \$75,000 in new mapping and aerial photography.

Mr. Chair, within this budget term, we intend to focus greater attention on the improvements of our solid-waste facilities. We used to call them "dumps" but the more popular, up-to-date term is "solid-waste facilities". What we plan to do is keep them operating and as environmentally friendly as possible.

In either case, they will benefit from a \$150,000 investment to ensure their continued compliance to the regulatory

standards. The department is preparing a YESA application for the renewal of the solid-waste permit for all 20 sites the department is responsible for.

We will also review and assess the solid-waste operations in conjunction with the YESA process. \$50,000 has been identified for improvements to the Quigley solid-waste facility outside of Dawson. Plans for capital improvements include the provision of power to enhance operations.

\$100,000 has been allocated for riverfront dike project on the Stewart River for the community of Mayo. In Carcross, \$50,000 will advance work on the downtown core road upgrade. This work, in conjunction with the CSIF project, will assist the community to become more appealing for its developing tourism sector, which in turn should create new enterprise and ultimately, more jobs for the vibrant local community.

The work includes a second access road to the community, new signage and some landscaping. These improvements will also address pedestrian and vehicle safety and traffic flow concerns during the community consultation.

There are other various roadways throughout the territory that could benefit from some upgrade work and, to make sure the work is completed, we have identified \$100,000 for that purpose.

Under protective services, we'll be making a number of investments toward maintaining the safety of our emergency responders in Yukon communities and the people who live in them. For example, we'll be stepping up the training for the community volunteer firefighters to ensure they remain safe and effective when attending fire calls. \$880,000 is identified in the capital budget to be spent toward construction of a new fire hall in Golden Horn, with a total project cost of \$1.45 million over three years.

We'll spend \$45,000 to perform larger maintenance projects in a number of fire halls throughout the Yukon. We'll be investing \$700,000 in protective services emergency responding equipment. For example, a new water tank truck will be replacing an aging unit in the tank fleet and additional fire-fighting equipment to be replaced includes breathing apparatus, pumps, protective clothing and similar equipment needed to protect our firefighters.

We have also budgeted \$50,000 to upgrade our fire lookout towers. These towers and monitoring staff provide early detection of fires and increase our ability to manage and control wildland fires before they become a size that may create a serious threat to our communities.

I would also like to acknowledge the valued assistance we receive each summer from the public, who report signs of smoke when observed. Oftentimes, the public reports make all the difference in dealing with small fires that start up close to communities and, in many cases, pose the greatest opportunity for catastrophe if they're not discovered in time.

Thanks to all Yukoners who keep a watchful eye on the forest surrounding our communities. You are making a positive contribution to community safety.

At the beginning, I noted the transfer of EMS to protective services. This budget has some funds identified for them as

well. \$250,000 has been identified for replacing two or more ambulances in the fleet. Carmacks and Haines Junction will be getting these new vehicles. Members may recall Dawson City and Watson Lake each had one of their ambulances replaced in last year's budget.

On the prevention side of the protective services mandate, I am very happy to report that \$1 million will be invested in this year's FireSmart program. This valuable program continues to deliver improved safety and numerous other benefits to areas treated to FireSmart standards. Since its inception in 1998, FireSmart has been an effective fire prevention program to assist and reduce the opportunity for fires in and near communities.

Mr. Speaker, that covers the high points of the Community Services 2008-09 budget and, as always, I would like to acknowledge the staff and management of the department for their dedication and their work in delivering the programs and services that Yukoners rely upon.

I'd also like to acknowledge the positive working relationship we enjoy with the Association of Yukon Communities, the individual governments, our First Nation governments and the many agencies and NGOs that Community Services has had the pleasure of working with on a daily basis.

With regard to a few of the member opposite's questions on the MRIF, the expiration of the MRIF is 2012 and the results of the upcoming review of projects will determine the next opening date for MRIF.

Mr. Fairclough: I think the minister took less than 30 seconds to answer that question. I'd suggest that perhaps, next time, the minister could go back and write his opening remarks to fit into that 20-minute allotment that he's given at the beginning. We could make more progress if we could have these questions answered in a timely manner.

The minister didn't say when the next allotment of MRIF projects was going to take place; rather, they would look at the results of the ones that had been approved. So, when is this going to take place, and when can we see an announcement of the next allotment of projects?

Hon. Mr. Hart: For the member opposite, I apologize for the delay and the slowness of my speech, and I will try to speed it up next sitting when it comes to Community Services, but I felt it was very important information to be on record and also, Mr. Chair, it provided additional information for the member's riding.

With regard to MRIF, we are in the process of the review. We anticipate within the next month — there are several large projects in this review process and they will have a very significant impact on just what will be available for the next opening.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Chair, the minister did go through fairly quickly some of those numbers, and definitely too quickly to write them down, so it's difficult even for us to take that information from the minister. I know he wants to provide it to us, so maybe he could have sent that over ahead of time.

There is one project that's awaiting approval through MRIF. It was an application that was there before and was

submitted again, I believe, and it is from the community of Mayo, the Na Cho Nyäk Dun. It's their project for geothermal heating in the administration building and several buildings around.

They are still waiting for approval of that project through MRIF. There is no word; they have written letters to the minister; nothing has come back.

In the meantime, our building season is going by and, if there is no approval on this, of course it affects the project. If there is no word on it, it also affects the project. I believe there is a letter written and there is no response back from government on this. They have people lined up and they want to complete this project, but it's highly dependent on the monies coming through MRIF.

Hon. Mr. Hart: I can't provide him with a complete update, but I assure him that I will provide him with a written response.

Mr. Fairclough: I have been getting calls on this project for quite some time from Mayo, so I would ask the minister to pay some attention to this — or more attention, rather — to see if we can have this project approved through MRIF. It is one that the Yukon can really look at as an example for other buildings around the territory. They have been working on this for quite some time. They have spent a lot of money on their building. They are very appreciative of the money from MRIF that went into the building of the road to that subdivision. The community is definitely appreciative of it, so I would ask the minister to look into that project a bit more carefully.

I did say that to the person who has been calling me and had asked this question and I await the minister's response.

Hon. Mr. Hart: As he indicated, we provided assistance for the initial stage of this facility. I will advise him that I have had a similar situation with regard to an add-on under MRIF. It's the federal government that is not, shall we say, providing a conducive response to the project. In this particular case, the federal government has indicated to us that they are not looking at any extensions of monies. That is coming directly from the Treasury department, so that is what we are dealing with. They ensure that all projects are complete by 2012, because all future funding is to go through the Building Canada Plan.

As I stated previously, I will undertake to provide the member opposite an update as soon as possible, via letter, with regard to this extension. In addition, I will provide him with an update on the Pelly situation, which I have signed off. We have not had any success with the federal government on this issue, other than what I stated before, which is that no future additional funding will be coming.

I anticipate the next question the member will ask and I will provide him with a written letter on both those issues.

Mr. Fairclough: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I did have a question to add. I didn't quite hear the minister but he did say the Pelly project, which is the small-diameter piped water system that's being put in place. I await that letter; I'm sure the community members are anxious to hear from the minister as well.

In regard to Pelly Crossing and this small-diameter piped water system that's being put in place, the minister said they're dealing with this particular project as well.

I would like to know whether or not at this point this project is on budget, on time and when we can see this project completed.

Hon. Mr. Hart: We have had a submission for the addition of this project to assist the First Nation in the completion of its project. As I stated earlier, this project was approved by me, but unfortunately I can't say the same for the federal government.

Under MRIF, there are two approving bodies in the process — that being us and the federal government. Unfortunately, the federal government has the final say if they choose not to sign and vice versa.

We have submitted two letters to the federal minister and, to date, the response back has been, well, non-existent on one case and the other one just acknowledged they received our letter. As I stated, I will provide the member opposite with a written update on this project and the Na Cho Nyäk Dun project.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that, and I look forward to that letter also. Can he say what the state of the project in Pelly Crossing is now? Is it in limbo? Is work actually being done? What's happening with that?

Hon. Mr. Hart: For this particular project, as I said, we are working with the First Nation on dealing with it. A lot of it depends upon getting some positive response back from the federal government, which would alleviate a lot of the situation with this particular project.

In essence, once we can clarify where we are with the federal government, then we can provide the member opposite with the status of the project and where we're going to go from there.

Mr. Fairclough: I'd appreciate if the original cost of the project was included and what the new number is on that project. I'd like to move on.

Before I move on, on the Carmacks sewage project — dollars are committed to this project. I see that — I was there this morning — some clearing work has begun. This is the second year that a fairly large amount of money is dedicated to this project.

The mechanical plant or — I actually don't know what the system is now. It was a membrane system, and I thought that is perhaps still the case. But a large amount of money has been dedicated to this project — over \$5 million.

Do we expect this to be completed this summer? Or are there further issues that have to be resolved before things happen?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Yes, on this particular project we work very closely with the mayor and council. We provided them with assistance to seek consultation on what type of system they are going to have in the town. We went through a process, the type of plant was selected and, as the member indicated, there has been some clearing done on the location. There is a contract out for the building design and we are doing some field work, as well as some work with regard to the lift-

ing station. As I previously indicated, we are working on the design of the building and the facility.

We intend to put out the contract and we anticipate — I have been advised — to be between 75- and 80-percent done this year.

Mr. Fairclough: I am sure that the community will be very appreciative of this project going ahead, even though it only services 40 percent of the community. It is an expensive system for only 40 percent of the community — possibly even less.

Once it is done, the municipality can do some upgrading that has been waiting for this project to be completed. One of these is the River Drive Road, which has taken quite a beating over the years. It is really rough. They want this project to go ahead so they can lay a sewage pipe and have it done properly once and for all.

One of the issues that has come out of this community is with regard to the bypass road. There was money spent on it already. It was surveyed and part of it was built at the request of the municipality, so that they could develop it into some industrial lots. The road is built — it's a gravel road — right down to the Nordenskiöld River.

I asked the question in this House, and it awaits the approval or the nod from the mining community to go ahead before monies are expended on the bypass road.

The road through town is the route that has been picked so far. It's not the one the community wants, and it's going to require them to do a lot of upgrading, if they ever have a truck route through town. Part of the problem here — and this is about community safety — is that the Department of Highways and Public Works owns and does maintenance on the little single-lane Bailey bridge that connects to the rest of the community. That will become a bit of a problem once the trucks start rolling through there with the heavier loads and more frequently.

We've already seen it sloughing down, and they constantly fill in these gaps every year, but it becomes a safety issue. I know this is not Community Services, but the roads and supporting municipalities and First Nations and upgrading the roads are. I'm wondering if the minister had any discussion with the mayor and council and whether or not there is an interest in this department to help out that municipality when it comes to improving the road that might have to handle these heavy trucks.

Hon. Mr. Hart: With regard to the response on the earlier part about the sewage facility, I'm very happy that the sewage treatment is well underway. As the member indicated, we've done the grubbing and anticipate having it 75- to 80-percent done by the end of this year.

The facility is built to accommodate further growth of the town, including whatever is provided by the First Nation across the way. It does have the capacity to take on much more than what it currently can handle. One of the requirements of the facility was to ensure that it could do so.

With regard to the road, Community Services is not in the business of building roads. We leave it to the Department of

Highways and Public Works to deal with that particular situation.

I will advise the member opposite that this situation was brought up at the Association of Yukon Communities meeting a couple of weeks ago in Haines Junction. The mayor brought out quite strongly her objection to the trucks running through her town, and it was very clear. For the member opposite, it just so happened that the chair of YESAB happened to be there, so he was able to respond to some of her questions at the same time.

The Mayor of Carmacks has also indicated to me she wants to have on record that they're opposed to having the traffic run through the town. I just remind the member opposite — as we reminded the mayor — this is really just a draft report by YESAB and it is definitely not the final report. Her comments will be taken into consideration, as well as those of the community.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that, Mr. Chair. This is about community safety and I thought perhaps the minister could play a role here. I've asked these questions on highways in the past on a number of communities and this work doesn't get done.

While we're at it, at the recent Association of Yukon Communities meeting, in the budget it has been announced that municipalities will be getting an increase in municipal grants this year.

I'd like to ask whether or not every municipality got an increase. From what I understand, the Village of Carmacks did not get an increase to the municipal grant, and maybe the minister could explain that one.

Hon. Mr. Hart: All the increases were submitted and provided for, as per the formula of the *Municipal Act*. For example, there is one anomaly with regard to Carmacks. They didn't get a full increase like the other jurisdictions, but they got a substantial increase in grant-in-lieu of taxes. It was substantial, so in the end, when we take into account the grant-in-lieu of taxes and the CMG, Carmacks came out on the plus side of just under \$40,000.

Mr. Fairclough: Maybe the minister could explain why there is a big increase in the grants-in-lieu to the municipality and the reasons why they were not given the same increase initially to the base grant that other municipalities got.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Obviously, the big difference is the reduction in taxes for Carmacks. It was because of the brand new school. So the value of grant-in-lieu of taxes is way up and that is the difference for the Village of Carmacks. That is where the big difference is. In net difference, they still ended up on the plus side. It is just that it came through in the form of grant-in-lieu of taxes versus other villages. For example, the grant-in-lieu of taxes was very small — somewhere between \$4,800 and \$9,800.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister is saying that all of these are taken into consideration when looking at the increase to municipal grants. It's not an across-the-board basic increase, but these grants-in-lieu of taxes are taken into consideration. Did all of the communities have to go through the same process?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The formula that was provided is identified in the *Municipal Act*. It has been there for many years, including when the member opposite was on this side. It hasn't changed. We made the allocation through this but, if the member wishes, I will provide him with a specific breakdown on the CMG, as well as the grants-in-lieu of taxes, for all of the communities, not just his own.

Mr. Fairclough: That would be useful, if the minister can do that.

There have been questions in this House with respect to garbage dumps around the communities. The one in Pelly Crossing is a territory-run community solid-waste dump. The problem with it in the past — it has been identified — is that it was built on some wetlands — some marshy area — and the runoff basically flows right down that valley and right into Mica Creek, which flows into the Pelly River. Mica Creek is right in the community of Pelly Crossing.

It's a concern that has been raised by that community in the past, and I thought perhaps the department was looking at an alternative location. If so, what is happening with that? Are we going to see some improvements there?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Actually, when we were previously in the community, we had some discussion with regard to this particular facility outside of Pelly.

They were also looking at an alternative site elsewhere, and I believe there was a public meeting with regard to this alternative site. I can't provide the member opposite with specifics on that site, but that alternative site would have to go through a YESAA review, as well as many other environmental aspects in order for that facility to be utilized.

But, in addition, as I stated, we are doing an overall review of our solid-waste facilities throughout the Yukon, and hopefully we can cover this particular aspect off when it goes through.

Mr. Fairclough: I would like to move to Stewart Crossing. I am wondering if the department is putting any money into that small community in regard to recreation. I'll let the minister answer that first.

Hon. Mr. Hart: I am not aware of anything specific that we are putting into Stewart Crossing with regard to recreation.

Mr. Fairclough: Mr. Chair, the community has been asking the government in the past to perhaps look at opening the small recreation centre that they had there. There was a building dedicated to that in the past few years, but no movement has been made, and there are kids in that community. I think the numbers in that community are growing and a lot of those kids are bused to the community of Mayo. I would like to ask the minister to look into that.

I did have another issue in regard to Pelly Crossing. I have been there a few times over the last month, and they brought it up during the Northern Tutchone bonspiel. They brought up the issue of recreation dollars going into that community. I know it's listed here, as there are dollars going into Pelly Crossing, but they would like to see more monies going in to that community in regard to recreation, particularly for a recreation director.

Can the minister look into that?

Hon. Mr. Hart: Yes, I will undertake to look into the situation. As he well knows, it is very difficult at times to look at recreation directors. We have great difficulty hiring these people on a part-time basis. With regard to that, we will have our officials look into it and give us some feedback.

Mr. Fairclough: There is \$243 million from the Building Canada Plan for community infrastructure projects. The issue that has been raised with me is that people don't know where it will go or how municipalities can access this money. It's not like MRIF where people have some understanding about how to put together projects, proposals and so on.

I would like to ask the minister to explain that. The communities basically don't know what they will get from this money that is coming from the federal government to the territorial government. Maybe the minister could explain that a bit.

Hon. Mr. Hart: The Building Canada Plan — right now, Community Services is involved in the process. The lead department is the Department of Finance. That department will be identifying the guidelines with the Government of Canada. First of all, we have to get an infrastructure plan out. How that gets out to the communities is being worked on right now. We will be going out to all those affected. We will be working with the Association of Yukon Communities, First Nations and unincorporated communities to deal with the plan and what it will incorporate, with the priority obviously on the infrastructure being water, solid-waste facilities and so on.

In that process, as I stated, we will be working with the Government of Canada on the guidelines. The department will be going out to our communities and getting feedback on that process. Once that plan is identified, we will have information on just how the fund will be aspired to.

Mr. Fairclough: When can we expect this plan to be completed?

Hon. Mr. Hart: We anticipate it's probably going to take six to eight months or a little bit longer, depending upon when we get the final okay from Ottawa to move ahead with the consultation.

Mr. Fairclough: So we're not really expecting any projects to go ahead until sometime next year, unless they're winter projects — is that correct?

Hon. Mr. Hart: I would say, yes, that's a pretty good guess.

Mr. Fairclough: I'd like to ask about the *Landlord and Tenant Act*. The government said they're doing an internal review or I think they said that, or that's what has taken place.

I would like to know what timelines the department has for bringing forward amendments to this.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Mr. Chair, we've done an internal review as the member opposite has indicated. We feel the act itself is very balanced. However, we will continue to work with the stakeholders to ascertain their issues and work with them on this particular issue.

But in relation to other jurisdictions, we feel our act is well-balanced and doesn't need to change. Any changes in the act will swing the pendulum one way or the other too much. Currently we feel the act itself is covering the issues with re-

gard to landlords and tenants. As I said, Community Services is currently working with stakeholders on the issues and we've had meetings with them, compiling their issues and concerns and working with them on it.

Mr. Fairclough: That's nice, Mr. Chair. The minister said that the results of the internal review — basically what has been said — is that the *Landlord and Tenant Act* is well-balanced. Although he is working with people, is the minister saying that there will not be any amendments coming forward soon on this?

Hon. Mr. Hart: As I stated previously, we are working with the landlords and the tenants on their particular issues. We are providing educational items for the tenants and the landlords. We have worked hard on that particular component of the act — providing education — which is out there through our department. We are working with them on issues that they have identified. In a lot of cases just education is required, but that is the full substance of where we are at.

We have several inquiries per year with regard to the act, but we are administering them through the normal process through our department.

Mr. Fairclough: Is the department working toward amendment or are we just educating people out there? What's happening?

We had an internal review, and we're talking with people out there. Is there not enough that has been identified now to do any amendments to the act? What can we expect with respect to amendments to this act over, say, in the fall sitting?

Hon. Mr. Hart: With respect to this issue, as I stated earlier, our internal review has indicated that the act is reasonably well balanced for both. We can change any parts of the act, but for what? You know, it has to have a reason to change and it has to be balanced. We've indicated in the past that we just can't make changes for the sake of making the change.

I indicated we were talking with the stakeholders, and we are in discussions with Health and Social Services on this issue. We are looking at ways and means that are within our regulations to deal with the landlord and tenant situation, but we feel that it's very much in there.

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

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

Motion agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 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: I declare the report carried.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I move that the House do now adjourn.

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker: This House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:26 p.m.

The following Sessional Paper was tabled May 12, 2008:

08-1-76

Yukon State of the Environment Report 2005 (Fentie)

The following documents were filed May 12, 2008:

08-1-59

Climate Change Action Plan, Yukon Government: Draft for Public Consultation (Fentie)

08-1-60

Energy Strategy for Yukon, An: Draft for Public Consultation (dated May 2008) (Lang)