

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Thursday, May 7, 2009 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Are there any tributes?

TRIBUTES

In recognition of National Hospice Palliative Care Week

Hon. Mr. Hart: Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today in honour of the National Hospice Palliative Care Week, May 3 to 9.

This week offers an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of this most personal kind of care and the kindness of personal caregivers.

Monsieur les Président, je prends la parole aujourd'hui pour souligner la Semaine nationale des soins palliatifs qui a lieu du 3 au 9 mai. Cette semaine est l'occasion de sensibiliser la population à l'importance de ces soins très particuliers et de souligner le dévouement du personnel qui offre ces soins.

The Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association has chosen for its theme this year, "Hospice Palliative Care: A Human Right", because all Canadians deserve quality care at the end of their lives.

The best attitude toward hospice palliative care I have heard comes from Dr. Jose Pereira, a palliative care physician. He said, "You are not dealing with death. You are dealing with the quality of life of someone who is living while dying."

That is what the Department of Health and Social Services palliative care program seeks to do — ease the patient's suffering and improve their quality of life and dying. This year-old, integrated, multidisciplinary team coordinates the delivery of care to Yukoners who are dying. They do so by providing clinical consultation to medical professionals, as well as offering training and support to volunteers in the communities, and they provide support directly to clients and their families.

They take into account the physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological and social needs of their clients. It's a model of care that features compassion and understanding as guiding principles.

Yukoners also have Hospice Yukon Society, a volunteer-run organization that provides comprehensive, one-on-one support to grieving families. These volunteers give tirelessly of themselves to help others through a difficult period. They understand the needs of the patients at the end of their lives, as well as the needs of the loved ones. I would like to thank them for donating their time and emotional energy so that others might die with dignity, free of pain, and surrounded by their loved ones in a setting of their choice.

Je tiens à remercier les bénévoles de Hospice Yukon, qui investissent temps et énergie pour faire en sorte que les personnes puissent mourir dans la dignité, sans douleur, entourées de leurs proches et à l'endroit de leur choix.

The work of the palliative care program team, as well as the Hospice Yukon Society workers is important, appreciated, very difficult, and I thank them for their work.

Mr. Mitchell: I rise today on behalf of the Official Opposition to pay tribute to National Hospice Palliative Care Week, May 3 to 9.

National Hospice Palliative Care Week is a one-week campaign that focuses on raising awareness about hospice and palliative care. The Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association is the national voice for hospice and palliative care in Canada, and they have chosen to build upon the World Hospice Palliative Care Day's campaign, "Hospice Palliative Care: A Human Right" — all Canadians should have access to quality end-of-life care.

The Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association was established in 1991, and its volunteer board of directors is comprised of hospice palliative care workers and volunteers from Canadian provinces and territories, as well as members at large.

Le soin palliatif d'hospice — soulagement de douleur et souffrance à la fin de la vie pour un patient et des membres de la famille — a été identifié dans une déclaration internationale en tant qu'un droit de l'homme, pourtant pas même moitié de tous les Canadiens qui ont besoin d'elle, ont accès à lui. Les Canadiens supposent souvent que si nous avons besoin de soin spécialisé à la fin de nos vies, ce sera là pour nous, malheureusement, qui n'est pas toujours le cas. Au mieux, seulement quatre sur 10 Canadiens reçoivent le soin palliatif d'hospice de qualité dont ils ont besoin. Cette semaine est un temps approprié pour encourager tous les niveaux de gouvernement à soutenir l'accès amélioré au soin palliatif d'hospice pour tous les Canadiens.

Hospice palliative care — relief from pain and suffering at end of life for a patient and family members — has been identified in an international declaration as a human right, yet not even half of all Canadians who need it have access to it. We are very thankful that we have Hospice Yukon and the palliative care unit providing this special service here in Yukon.

Canadians often assume that if we need specialized care at the end of our lives, it will be there for us. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. At best, only four out of 10 Canadians receive the quality hospice palliative care that they need. This week is an appropriate time to encourage all levels of government to support improved access to hospice palliative care for all Canadians.

Hospice palliative care is whole-person health care that aims to relieve suffering and improve the quality of living and dying. Hospice palliative care strives to help patients and their families address physical, psychological, social, spiritual and practical issues and their expectations, needs, hopes and fears. They help prepare the patient and their families for life closure and the dying process, and how to cope with loss and grief during illness and bereavement.

At some time, in some way, we must all face the end of life. Most of us share a common hope that when death comes to us or to a loved one, it will be peaceful and free of pain. We hope to face death surrounded by those we love, feeling safe, comfortable and cared for.

Hospice palliative care workers are there for us in a time of need.

Through hospice palliative care programs, you help many patients to gain more control over their lives, manage pain and symptoms more effectively and provide support to family and informal caregivers. We would like to tribute and thank the many hospice palliative care workers, health care professionals, family caregivers and volunteers who help to improve the quality of life for people living with terminal illness.

Nous voudrions à l'hommage et remercierions les nombreux ouvriers de soin d'hospice, professionnels de soins de santé, travailleurs sociaux de famille et volontaires palliatifs qui aident à améliorer la qualité de vie pour des personnes vivant avec la maladie terminale.

We celebrate your contributions and reflect on the importance of end-of-life issues across the continuum of care — in hospitals, in people's homes and in the community. Your compassion, caring and support directed to those journeying through grief, battling life-threatening illness or facing end-of-life challenges is a most precious gift. Thank you for being there. Merci, Monsieur le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the New Democratic caucus and the Independent member to pay tribute to Hospice Palliative Care Week.

The theme for the week this year is, "Hospice Palliative Care: A Human Right", promoting the idea that access to quality end-of-life care for all Canadians is a necessity. Hospice palliative care does not hasten or delay death, but offers practical, emotional and spiritual supports to the person. The patient must have a life-threatening illness or be facing end of life with a prognosis of weeks or months rather than years.

Hospice palliative care can be provided at home, in hospitals, in long-term care facilities or in residences where this type of care is the only focus. This final care gives people what is needed to support them with the best quality of life while going through a difficult time. It is a decision made by the patient with the family and the physician to move away from goals of curing an illness to comfort and care. It becomes an appropriate decision when curative methods no longer support quality of life. Any medical intervention is for symptom management and includes pain control. Social, psychological, emotional and spiritual supports are major parts of hospice palliative care.

The transition in choosing palliative care is not easy. Patients and their families have spent many months or years concentrating on curative care designed to halt the disease process. It is the final step. In the Yukon, the palliative care program in the Department of Health and Social Services offers clinical consultation and education on palliative care to the public and professionals around the Yukon. They will train volunteers to assist patients with palliative care.

The Hospice Yukon Society is a separate organization from the palliative care program. It offers counselling support for people with a life-threatening illness, for anyone anticipating the death of a loved one or for anyone in grief. They provide support for professionals and volunteers through an office that has resources and training opportunities. Some people associate hospice palliative care only with sadness; however, most hospice experiences include times of peace, joy and even laughter. It is a time of closeness and often gives people a deeper understanding of life. In a very real sense, hospice palliative care is about living.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome Daisy McIntyre, wife of the late Gordon McIntyre, who was Deputy Sergeant-at-Arms here in the House in the last sitting. Welcome, Daisy.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Reports of committees.

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr. Cardiff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to work with Yukon recreational rock climbers to prevent the destruction of an established and popular rock climbing crag by road construction planned this year by the Department of Highways and Public Works between kilometre 6 and 11.8 on the Atlin Road.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon Hospital Corporation, which has several new initiatives and responsibilities affecting the delivery of health care in the Yukon, to keep its Web site current, as the latest entry under its "What's New" tab dates from 2003.

I also give notice of the following motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to table in the Legislative Assembly the following reports, as they are in the public interest, before the current sitting of the Legislature ends on May 14:

(1) a consultants' report on the feasibility of turning the partially completed Watson Lake multi-level care facility into a 10-bed, acute care hospital;

(2) an air emissions dispersion study which tracks the impacts on nearby residential areas of toxic emissions coming from landfill sites and transfer stations where burning of solid waste occurs; and

(3) the *What We Heard* report summarizing the Yukon public's response to the Yukon health care review and survey.

Speaker: Are there any further notices of motion?
Is there a statement by a minister?
This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Asset-backed commercial paper investments

Mr. Mitchell: In August 2007, the government made some bad investments. These were investments the Premier and Deputy Premier said were guaranteed by a bank. They were not guaranteed by a bank, and the Auditor General of Canada confirmed that. Twenty months later, we have still not been able to get our hands on the \$36 million that is outstanding. The Premier assured Yukoners we would receive regular interest payments on this investment. We found out last week that is not happening either.

This week the *Globe and Mail* reported that some of the new restructured investments have finally sold on the open market; that's good news. The bad news is the seller got 35 cents on the dollar — that is all these things are worth. Is the Premier aware of this most recent development?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, the government side is very well aware of the Leader of the Official Opposition's ability to understand investments and all that goes with it. Those who chose to sell their investments on the open marketplace and accept what is being offered is their choice. The government has chosen to follow through with the restructuring process, and that is exactly what we have committed to do.

The restructuring process has provided us restructured notes of the same value as the original notes. By the way, Mr. Speaker, we have received interest payments on the notes. I know the member and I will never ever agree on the matter. The member has an agenda that is entirely up to the member, the Leader of the Official Opposition. On the government side, however, we are going to continue to make investments — earnings to date of over \$20 million on behalf of Yukoners.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, Mr. Speaker, my agenda is to keep the public informed. It should be the Premier's agenda.

Mr. Speaker, when the government bought these investments they said they were guaranteed. They were not. Last fall the government finally wrote down the value of this investment by \$6 million. We know when the government closes the books on this year in October, even more of this investment will be written down. Now comes news that other people who hold these toxic investments have sold some of them.

Everyone knows that any investment is only worth what you can sell it for. People holding the same investments as us sold them for only 35 cents on the dollar. These things have dropped 65 percent in value. Will the Premier now admit that his ABCP investments are not worth as much as they once were?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: The government side does inform the public factually on all matters; therefore, the notes in question are as the government has stated. They are worth and val-

ued at the same as the original notes under the restructuring process. To choose to sell something before its maturity date is a matter of their choice, and if they accept what's offered, that too is a matter of choice.

However, the value of these types of notes is calculated based on them being at a maturity date, and that's what the government is going to do. Now, the member says, "write down." Here again, the Leader of the Official Opposition has a very confused understanding of a principal amount and an interest amount. What the government has had to do, in accordance with guidance from the Auditor General, is adjust interest values.

Mr. Mitchell: I think the Premier is heading down a rabbit hole on this one, because the interest value adjustment is because the principal no longer reflects the same value. We wouldn't be in this mess if the government had simply followed the *Financial Administration Act*, but they didn't, and the Auditor General confirmed that.

Last May the Premier assured this House, quote: "There has not been a loss incurred to date. In fact, under the process, full value will be given under new notes through the restructuring. All that is changing is the length of time for maturity date."

The Premier can no longer make that claim. Some of these same investments sold for 35 cents on the dollar last week. They've lost 65 percent of their value. That's all they're worth on the open market today and the Premier continues to cling to the hope that the miracle will occur in another eight years. We know the Premier will be forced to write this down even more this fall. How much of a writedown on these bad investments is anticipated when we close the books on this year?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: You know, Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate the member opposite just simply doesn't understand the difference between interest-earning adjustment and the writedown of a principal.

Secondly, the member has repeated twice in the context of his questions that there were no guarantees. I challenge the member, then, to reflect on the matter of offs fees change of policy some years ago allowing for conditional guarantees on these investments. If the member chose to actually look into the matter, the member would find out that that is indeed the case. Furthermore, the member likes to always — always — reflect on what the Auditor General has said. Why does the Leader of the Official Opposition conveniently ignore that the Auditor General did say that Finance officials had been, in good faith, making these types of investments all along.

The government acted when there was an issue, and we acted with policy change to ensure that it cannot happen again. So, Mr. Speaker, I think what the member really is doing is reflecting what the Official Opposition believe is the capacity of our government employees. They have no confidence in Yukon government employees.

Question re: Yukon Housing Corporation programs

Mr. McRobb: Mr. Speaker, Yukoners deserve a government that performs effectively, especially given the current economic situation facing our territory.

Yukoners need ongoing access to funds to keep people working and to continue advancing private sector construction

projects. The minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation has admitted that his mortgage program was inadequate to meet public demand. In fact, after the program ran out in only three weeks, his glee was evident. One wonders how happy he'd be if there were only one week's funding allocated to this program.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: This is of a personal nature. The Hon. Member understands that. Please don't do that.

The Member for Kluane has the floor.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: There is no point of order. I made a point of order. Does the Leader of the Official Opposition want to stand up on a point of order?

Point of order

Mr. Mitchell: The minister said he was happy and that this was good news. The minister's own words reflected happiness and glee, and that's what the member is referring to.

Speaker: There is no point of order.

Mr. McRobb: Whatever.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: No "whatever".

The Member for Kluane has the floor.

Mr. McRobb: The minister also spoke of special warrants and supplementary budgets, but then why hasn't he done something constructive to encourage more home construction this summer? When might Yukoners expect the minister to finally get around to providing adequate funds for these important mortgage lending programs?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: We're very pleased, as the member said, that we put a very large sum of money into a variety of programs. One program happens to be oversubscribed, a program that promotes the construction of houses with the average mortgage being in the \$360,000 range.

What I hear the member opposite saying is that we should be investing more money into higher end housing and not be putting the emphasis into social and affordable housing. I'm shocked at that attitude, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McRobb: We're not saying that at all. The government can do both out of its \$150-million surplus.

Now, one just needs to look at the latest stats on building permits in the territory to realize how the lack of funds from the mortgage lending programs has already hurt Yukoners. The total value of Yukon building permits decreased 36.7 percent from February to March of this year. The year-to-date value of residential permits has decreased 21.4 percent. Building starts are one of the main indicators of how an economy is performing. This is hard evidence. This underlines the importance of providing adequate funds for Yukoners to build their homes. The government needs to act now to stop the downward trajectory of building permits.

What is the plan, Mr. Speaker? When will this government finally open the purse strings on the \$150-million surplus?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: For the member opposite who loves throwing out these statistics, of course you can always compare one month to another month or one month to the same month last year. There is always a way that you can express that statistic.

That's a point that has been made very well in the past by the Leader of the Official Opposition, the current Leader of the Liberal Party. But let's look at the reality, because in 2008-09, we put an additional \$4.4 million into mortgages. We put an additional nearly \$2.06 million into home repair programs.

Our current portfolio that we have invested in home ownership totals just shy of \$45 million. So what the member opposite is saying and what I'm hearing him saying again is that we should be investing more in the higher-end mortgages in a time when bank mortgages are at historic lows and that we shouldn't be putting the emphasis into repair of homes, older homes, social housing, affordable housing — that is where the emphasis should be.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am rather surprised that the member opposite would prefer that we spend money in this way.

Mr. McRobb: I would suggest the minister is drawing incorrect conclusions.

The minister speaks of going forward with a plan for the economic future of the territory. This great plan is supposed to stimulate the economy during this time of global economic uncertainty. The minister seems to have hit a great wall that prevents him from showing us his great plan.

In fact, the last time this government released its economic outlook was in 2008. Given the number of significant developments in the past year, that one is badly stale-dated. An economic forecast is needed now. How can you have a plan without a forecast? This government has released its budget, but without an economic forecast. It was supposed to be released last month. I see the Premier is ready to answer this one. When he was on this side of the House, he asked about the economic outlook report very frequently. So can the minister explain why he has delayed tabling this year's economic forecast?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Before the honourable member answers, the question on housing, the first supplementary on housing, the second supplementary on economic forecast — just for future reference, there should be a link between all three questions.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, we are used to the inability to concentrate of some members of the House.

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Order please. The same caution I just exercised to the Hon. Member for Kluane to you, as minister, is please do not personalize debate. That's not necessary. You have the floor.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Thank you. How does he explain almost \$45 million in investment? There's nearly \$3.5 million

in owner-build, \$8 million into home repair program, and \$2.8 million in joint venture program.

How does the member opposite refer to the 926 different loans that are out through the Yukon Housing Corporation? His response, instead, is to talk about an economic forecast. There is no set schedule for the member opposite for his information. There is no set schedule. I challenge him to produce that. The economic forecast is put on the Web site in periodic fashion when the Economic Development economists are able to put it up. There is no set time, and we have not declined or failed to do that.

I also challenge the member opposite how he explains the second highest GDP in Canada. I think it's something like 5.4 percent — the best economic development GDP increase in Canada. The member opposite seems to have missed that part.

Question re: First Nation education programs

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has been very active in establishing committees and programs in First Nations education. We have been through an education reform process, we are going through something called New Horizons, whatever that is, and the department has established a First Nations programs and partnerships unit of nearly a dozen positions. At the same time, we have several First Nations declaring their intention to draw down education, as agreed to in their self-government agreements. How are the bodies and the studies that the minister has established related to the implementation of devolution of education from the department to First Nations?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of the work the Department of Education has done in this regard. The member is correct. The Department of Education, under our previous minister, did embark on the education reform project. We have received that report. We have now worked and continue to work with Council of Yukon First Nations and Yukon First Nation governments on implementing many of the ideas, suggestions and addressing the issues brought forward in that. That process is referred to as "New Horizons: Honouring Our Commitment to the Future".

The Department of Education and Council of Yukon First Nations has presented a joint briefing on this issue to the New Democrat caucus, and in my response to their questions during the pre-budget briefing there was also a request for an additional briefing. That will be honoured. We are scheduling that and the invitation to attend that is also open to the Liberal caucus.

Mr. Speaker, there have been significant steps to address many of the concerns brought forward. The member is correct. There has been the First Nations programs and partnership unit created; there have been changes in curriculum, changes in practices — both formal and informal changes. As well, the school growth plan process has been established and is now being used in Yukon schools to ensure that community voices are heard in the school plans.

Mr. Cardiff: Another action the minister has taken is to put together a Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee. Last year this committee put out a paper entitled

Helping Students Succeed. The paper outlines the committee's vision, goals and priorities. The mandate of this committee as outlined in their paper is to advise on the development and implementation of an action plan in the interest of Yukon First Nation communities.

Will the minister assure First Nations who are actively pursuing the devolution of education that this action plan is not a roadblock to their right to devolution of services?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Certainly not, Mr. Speaker. This is by no means a roadblock. The Yukon First Nation governments have established in their self-government agreements that they have the authority to draw down education should they choose to do so.

I have stated on this floor many times the intention of the government to work with all our partners in education to provide the best education system possible to all Yukoners. Some of the programs and initiatives that we have recently worked with FNEAC — the First Nation Education Advisory Committee — and the First Nations programs and partnerships unit include the bicultural program with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations in Haines Junction. Also, Mr. Speaker, the department has worked the Carcross-Tagish First Nation and greatly appreciates the curriculum materials that the Carcross-Tagish First Nation provided to use in the Ghùch Tlâ Community School in Carcross.

We'll continue to work with all orders of government, both on a minister-to-chief level, through the Yukon Forum, through the replacement for the Chiefs Committee on Education when that body is established. We've travelled to national meetings with representatives of Yukon First Nations, and we'll continue to work with all in Yukon in order to increase educational outcomes for students.

Mr. Cardiff: The guiding principles on page 4 of the committee's report state that the work of the committee shall enhance and complement the work of First Nations and the Department of Education. One of the committee's mandates is to guide and oversee a process that will more effectively align and fuse First Nations' needs and aspirations with the Department of Education's programs, projects and initiatives. Under the vision of partnership for education, the involvement of community members and parents is as members of school councils exchanging information, discussing issues and having an elder on school council.

There is nothing in this paper about shared decision making such as school boards or about First Nations-controlled schools.

Will the minister explain how this committee responds to First Nations' needs and aspirations for the devolution of education when partnership is limited to school committees?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: There are a couple of different things going on here that the member should be aware of. Should a First Nation order of government wish to devolve education, there is a process that they will go through, and that is established with the Government of Canada and the Government of Yukon. There is a set process for that.

Although that option does exist, we as a government have made a commitment to work with Yukon First Nations. We

have representation from all Yukon First Nations on that committee who are committed to making Yukon's education system even better than it is today.

The member has brought forward several different initiatives, such as the bicultural program in Haines Junction, the elders in the school program, First Nation language and training program, First Nation language teacher programs, First Nation second language programs and additional projects, such as the northern strategy's Walking Together program or the northern strategy's Revitalizing Culture Through Story and Technology.

Yes, we will work with all Yukoners on our school growth plans in order to make our schools better. We'll make our schools more reflective of our community, and we'll make our curriculum more reflective of the information that is pertinent here in the Yukon and that is related to what people need to know to have an important understanding of Yukon history and culture.

Question re: Consumer protection

Mr. Cardiff: I have a question for the minister responsible for consumer protection.

We've raised many issues in this House about this government's low priority for protecting Yukon consumers. Other jurisdictions in Canada have very strong provisions and guarantees when a person buys a new home or gets a major renovation and there are problems. New home builders in many provinces must sign on to a warranty program. Manitoba's New Home Warranty Program offers up to five years of protection on major structural defects. If a contractor doesn't fix the defect, the job is done, with the contractor on the hook for the bill. That's not the case in the Yukon, where if you have a truck and a hammer, you can be a contractor.

When a new home buyer finds a major problem in their home — say, the existence of mould — is their only recourse through the courts? Can the minister answer that?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the member opposite for the question.

The question that was put on the floor here this afternoon about liability on homebuilders — certainly, it's something we're aware of, and we're monitoring other jurisdictions to see where we can move ourselves as a jurisdiction to work with that exact issue. So it's a work-in-progress, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cardiff: You know, that's the excuse this government uses for everything. "It's a work-in-progress." If they're doing nothing, it's a work-in-progress. That's how they deal with this.

Now the Yukon lags behind the rest of Canada when it comes to protecting the homebuyer. We don't license home inspectors. We don't have mandatory energy audits that would protect people from false advertising. The new buzzwords in home construction are "green standards" and "super green standards". The consumer signs up in the belief that they are minimizing their ecological footprint. Whether their super green or green standard home actually lives up to the billing is another matter. Last fall an official from Yukon Housing Corporation said it all: "It is buyer beware."

Yukon homebuyers are getting gypped. Without measures and inspectors to ensure the criteria are being met, this is going to continue to happen. What is the minister doing to ensure that Yukoners who buy super green and green standard homes are not getting ripped off?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: There have been new-home warranty programs within the Yukon and British Columbia, and I remind the member opposite that they ceased some time ago. I believe they actually went bankrupt.

In terms of super green homes, an energy audit is certainly part of that. There are energy audits available through Yukon Housing Corporation. There are building inspection programs available here. There are many private insurance companies that will handle new home construction, and we can certainly work with any new homebuyers to look at that option.

It's a very wide-ranging issue. We have had the opportunity to discuss that in this House before and I really do hope that the member opposite recalls that motion, so that we can speak further on those issues.

Mr. Cardiff: That wasn't an answer either. When someone goes to buy a home or embark on a major renovation, they should have the right to accurate information. They need protection against costs that keep escalating. They need assurances through inspections that their home is actually what they paid for. They need easier recourse to fixing problems that the contractor should have dealt with, not lengthy court processes like the government likes to promote. They need assurances that building contractors have a level of skill certification and expertise, and should be able to offer the consumers some guarantees on their work. Yukon lacks adequate protection for consumers who buy new homes or pay for major renovations. Homebuyers continue to be frustrated with the status quo and answers like the minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation just gave. Will the minister commit to drafting home buyer protection legislation and a bill of rights for homebuyers?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Thank you. I will remind the member opposite once again that Yukon Housing Corporation has many technical personnel on staff to work with anyone building or even purchasing a home or purchasing a new build.

We have incredibly good staff. I can remember some time ago being criticized for not attending courses put on by CMHC, until I pointed out that we were in fact teaching those courses on energy efficiency.

The Yukon Housing Corporation and the Yukon government are basically North American leaders, if not world leaders, on energy efficiency. We have that technical expertise available if only people would call and utilize it. Again for the member opposite, there are private insurance firms. Some people don't want to pay the additional money that would have to be added to a new home to make things mandatory. That has been discussed in the past and is the subject of problems here and in other provinces. It's an incredibly wide-ranging problem with a wide-ranging solution that really doesn't involve the magic wand that the member opposite seems to want us to have.

I remind him that there is a discussion on the floor, and I invite them to call that motion again so that I can give even more information on that topic.

Question re: Hamilton Boulevard extension

Mr. Mitchell: This week, nine charges were laid by the occupational health and safety branch of WCB over the frightening blasting incident that occurred in the Lobird subdivision on May 6 of last year. It was a year ago yesterday that a blast from the Hamilton Boulevard construction project sprayed numerous large rocks into the neighbourhood.

Two of the charges that have been laid are against this government. The first court date for this case is now set for May 26. The Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board has refused to provide any information about the charges until that court date. This is not how it usually works. Information about the charges should be public when they are laid, as is normally done. People in Lobird should not have to wait to be informed. Does the minister support the decision to hold this information back from the public?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Certainly, we are aware of the charges and, of course, they are in court at the moment, so it's inappropriate for me to speak on the floor here today. We are certainly concerned about the safety and about the situation that arose in the Lobird Trailer Court. Of course, this government acted immediately to rectify any damage that was done.

But certainly, it's inappropriate for me to talk about anything that is in the court system at the moment.

Mr. Mitchell: Nine charges have been laid related to the blasting incident that happened last year in Lobird. Two of the charges are against the government itself. A decision has been made not to release any more information about the charges until it goes to court May 26. There is no good reason for the delay. The minister does not have to reveal anything that's before the court in revealing what the charges are. We believe this information should be made public. My constituents, the residents of Lobird, who were running from the rocks, deserve no less. Will the minister ensure that the information about what the charges are is made public today?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Certainly, Mr. Speaker. Addressing the member opposite, the charges were laid today. We certainly understand the situation at hand. This government, at the point of the accident happening, was aware and jumped into the void and made sure that Lobird Trailer Court and the citizens that were affected were made whole again, and we certainly do not condone an unsafe situation. But as far as me standing on the floor here today discussing something that's in a court — it's inappropriate.

Question re: Dawson City sewage project

Mr. Inverarity: Mr. Speaker, the government must make every effort to ensure that the public tendering process is open and fair. Further, it must be equally diligent in its effort to ensure that it is being perceived as being open and fair.

I've spoken about the increased tendency of this government to sole-source contracts, and recently I addressed the public regarding the tendering process of the Dawson City wastewater treatment facility. This morning, a spokesman from the

department said on CBC that this isn't a typical construction contract.

I am wondering if the minister would explain to the House what is so untypical about this particular contract.

Hon. Mr. Lang: This is a very complicated process that we're going through in partnership with the City of Dawson. It is one of the largest contracts that we as a government have let and there is a high profile of expertise going into the process. I look forward to the process being completed. This government is not going to interfere in the process and is going to work in confidence with the City of Dawson to resolve their issue.

Mr. Inverarity: The suggestion has been made by the contractor that this process be reviewed by a third party — a party agreeable to both the contractor and the government. That seems like a reasonable solution for this ongoing saga.

This morning on CBC the spokesperson said that the department — when the question was put to her — said "Absolutely," and that it was something that is part of their contracting regulations and that they are entitled to do that. In keeping with that — in the best interest of all — will the minister agree to have this go before a third party?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We will follow the process. The contractor has all the rights in the world to request a third party hearing on any contract that we issue in the territory.

So the answer to the member opposite is that the individual — the contractor or the individuals — who feel that it was improper, or that something was done that was improper in the process, have that option.

Mr. Inverarity: It's indeed refreshing to hear that the minister will agree to that. It may go a long way to repairing some of the damage that has been done to the public tendering process. This process is important, not only to this particular contractor, but to all who are involved in the public tendering process. It is therefore important that whatever comes out of this process should be made public. There is no value in keeping any of these matters secret and particularly with this government that likes to see things that are open and transparent. Will the minister agree that the findings of an independent review will be made public and that he will offer to pay all the costs incurred by the contractor?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Once again we have heard a very astounding comment by the Official Opposition. First off, there is a process for all who bid on government work and it's called a bid appeal process, and I encourage anyone who feels that through the tendering process there are issues they think need to be addressed to avail themselves of the bid appeal process.

But the Member for Porter Creek South has just stated on the floor of this House that there has been damage done to the contracting process. The member has just put in question the professional integrity of engineers, the professional integrity of those who are held responsible to follow contracting law, regulation, guidelines and policy. Mr. Speaker, how often are we going to experience this from the Official Opposition? The Liberals in this House who continually — continually — express their disdain and lack of confidence in the professional community of the Yukon Territory —

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Mr. Elias: I would request the unanimous consent of the House to call at this time Motion No. 783, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

Unanimous consent re Motion No. 783

Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to call Motion No. 783, standing in the name of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: There is unanimous consent.

OPPOSITION PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 783

Deputy Clerk: Motion No. 783, standing in the name of Mr. Elias.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to maintain the federal food mail subsidy program that provides nutritious perishable food and other essential items to the isolated northern community of Old Crow at reduced postal rates and to specifically ensure that:

- (1) personal orders are not eliminated as an option for the residents of Old Crow; and
- (2) the City of Whitehorse is maintained as a food entry point.

Mr. Elias: It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to my motion. Firstly, I appreciate the effort of all of the members of this House and their recognition of how important the federal food mail program is to my constituents in Old Crow by giving unanimous consent, and I thank you all.

The federal food mail program pays for part of the cost of shipping nutritious perishable food and other essential items by air to isolated northern communities that are not accessible year-round by road, rail or marine service.

I say with an open heart that I care for each and every one of my constituents, and I am privileged to represent such a wonderful riding. I am glad to have this opportunity to address the House and ask for all of the elected members to urge the Government of Canada to maintain the federal food mail subsidy program that provides nutritious perishable food and other essential items to the isolated northern community of Old Crow at reduced postal rates.

We have a unique community in our territory in Old Crow, and has been recognized by several electoral district boundary commissions. Since 1977, every electoral boundary commission has recommended that the riding of Vuntut Gwitchin remain the same for the following reasons: one, it is geographically distinct from all the other electoral districts in the Yukon in that it is the most remote community and has no road access; two, the community of Old Crow is almost exclusively Vuntut

Gwitchin First Nation with a common language, traditional lifestyle and culture; and three, the strong common interests of the residents may be adversely affected if the community is included in another electoral district.

Last month the federal government released an interim report on the northern food mail review. That is why I am standing here as the MLA for the Vuntut Gwitchin riding to speak about the community of Old Crow's access to nutritious, perishable food. The unique challenges that my constituents in Old Crow face on a daily basis to raise their families require a unique investment, Mr. Speaker, and the solution is to ensure the federal food mail program continues to operate and that personal orders are not eliminated as an option for my constituents and that the City of Whitehorse is maintained as food entry point.

The cost of living in Old Crow is very high, Mr. Speaker. It is approximately 275 percent more than it is in Whitehorse for goods and services. We are in the midst of tough economic times and it hard enough for people to raise their families in Old Crow — especially for single parents trying to make a living.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I just sent two 10-pound bags of flour to Old Crow, and it cost about \$75. I sent it to an elder in Old Crow the other day — and that's using the federal food mail subsidy. That's one example. A jug of milk that has landed in the only retail outlet in Old Crow costs about 10 bucks, and that's with the federal food mail subsidy.

Old Crow is the only beneficiary of this program in the Yukon, and having affordable fresh fruits and vegetables and other essential items available to my constituents is so very important to maintaining a healthy community. It's important to recognize that the citizens of Old Crow must have the right to purchase their groceries wherever they want, just like anybody else. We have one retail outlet in Old Crow that provides food products, like I said earlier, so access to the variety of foods that come from our capital city is the only realistic option for the residents of Old Crow. It is important to mention that my constituents are very grateful for the federal food mail subsidy program, and they use it on a continuous basis.

It is my hope that all members of this Assembly will honour my constituents by agreeing with my motion today. It is so important for us to send a united message from all the major political players of the territory to Ottawa — to the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada — and it begins in this Legislature.

I'd like to close by quoting an e-mail from one of my constituents that was sent to Ottawa: "Here are my views on the program: this food mail program for Old Crow is very important to my family and for many other families in Old Crow. We rely heavily on it to raise our families. In Old Crow, the high cost of food, I cannot live that way. It is too expensive. I think three oranges cost me one time about eight bucks. The food we have at Old Crow, at the Northern Store, there's no variety in the community. Everything is so high priced. Having access to nutritious, cheap, healthy food is a must for my family, to eat healthy for my community to be healthy and to be able to live healthy lives without being obese and contracting diabetes and

this is all related to diet. Old Crow is the only community in the Yukon without road access to larger city centres. That is why we suffer with high costs of living.

“Please do not withdraw or make drastic changes to the federal food mail program, because it will be the Old Crow people who will be one of the northern communities who will have to suffer the effects of decision making by bureaucrats in Ottawa. We need this program to continue far into the future.”

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that my motion will receive unanimous consent today in the House and will send a message to the federal minister about how important we feel, as members of this Legislative Assembly, the continuation of the federal food mail service is to the community of Old Crow.

I will close by saying something in Gwitchin.

K’agwaadhat jidii tthak geenjit Hai’ noojiidinu.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, the first point that the government side will make is that we are going to fully support the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin on his motion, but I would like to just briefly add a few more things that the government side will do.

We couldn’t agree more with the member’s assertions regarding the need for nutritional food products being accessible in isolated communities. I think we all understand that fully and how the food mail program contributes to that very important facet of daily life.

It also means that we have to engage, as a government, with other governments. I can assure the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin that this government will immediately be in contact with our sister territories — both Premier Roland and Premier Okalik on the matter — as this food mail program will affect approximately 135 communities in the north.

We will also ensure that these discussions will take place at the national level, and I want to commit that to the Member of Vuntut Gwitchin here today on the floor of this Assembly. I thank the member for bringing forward the motion. We will fully support it, and we will also commit ourselves to do further work on this issue with our sister territories, with the member, with the chief and council and government of the Vuntut Gwitchin and all others related to this issue, so important to northern communities and people living in isolation.

Mr. Cardiff: I would like to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for bringing this motion forward today, and I was pleased to be part of granting unanimous consent to debate it today. My comments, as well, will be brief and very supportive.

We recognize the isolated nature of the community of Old Crow and also recognize the importance of a nutritious diet and the fact that it needs to be affordable for people who live in the community of Old Crow. Nutrition is very important to the health of a community and especially to young members of the community. We have talked before in this Legislature about things like the Food for Learning program and how important it is for children to be able to go to school not hungry and with nutritious food in their bellies so they can learn and be part of the school system and part of their community.

I think, for that reason and for many other reasons as well that have been stated here, that this is obviously a very important issue for the community of Old Crow and the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin and for all Yukoners as this is really one big community. So we will be supporting the motion.

Mr. Edzerza: I, too, will stand and speak in favour of this motion. Our traditional belief really does fit in with a lot of these kinds of issues where we strongly believe that everyone belongs and everybody is equal.

I had the opportunity to go to Old Crow on a number of occasions. I remember my first trip into Old Crow when my very thought was, “How can anyone afford to buy food up here?” I had never experienced that anywhere in the Yukon where you could fly for hours and hours to a community with no road access.

A lot of other things entered my mind besides food, because I noticed the scarcity of dry timber. I thought about heating issues and how expensive it must be if you had to buy oil for an oil furnace. So when we look at all of these different factors, we begin to believe that the community of Old Crow and the people who live there live in a very unique situation.

My first experience with just how expensive it is was when I was contacted by a friend from Old Crow, and asked if I would send some merchandise to Old Crow for a potlatch. I was sent a list of goods that were requested and I went out and did the shopping. Lo and behold, when I went to send it to Old Crow, the bill for the freight was higher than what the merchandise cost. That was my first experience and I was thinking, man, it must be pretty expensive to live in Old Crow. In fact, I still, right to this day, wonder how people can afford it.

Certainly, I sincerely believe that governments do have a responsibility to subsidize especially food, because it is essential to sustain life. I fully support this motion as brought to the floor.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question? If the member speaks, he will close debate.

Mr. Elias: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank each and every member of this Legislative Assembly today.

In closing, I would just like to say that in healthy communities when we look at our Arctic community in Old Crow, when our country and the world looks north and we talk about Arctic sovereignty and when we talk about the aboriginal people that live and have lived for thousands of years, our community of Old Crow represents one of those northern Arctic communities. Having food security and having the world look at healthy communities in the Arctic, they see communities like Old Crow and they see strength. That bodes well for our territory. So, Mr. Speaker, I thank every member of this Legislative Assembly. My constituents thank you. There is still more work to do, and we will do that work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Madam Deputy Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Horne: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Hart: Agree.

Mr. Nordick: Agree.

Mr. Mitchell: Agree.

Mr. McRobb: Agree.

Mr. Elias: Agree.

Mr. Fairclough: Agree.

Mr. Inverarity: Agree.

Mr. Cardiff: Agree.

Mr. Edzerza: Agree.

Deputy Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 16 yeas, nil nays.

Speaker: The yeas have it. I declare the motion carried.

Motion No. 783 agreed to

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Nordick): Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 15, *First Appropriation Act, 2009-10*, Department of Public Service Commission. Do members wish a brief recess?

Some Hon. Member: Agreed.

Chair: We will recess for 15 minutes.

Recess

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

Bill No. 15 — First Appropriation Act, 2009-10 — continued**Public Service Commission — continued**

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 15, *First Appropriation Act, 2009-10*. We will now continue with general debate on the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, as members will recall, when we left off yesterday I had been asked a question regarding the employee engagement survey.

Last year, we completed the second annual employment engagement survey. This is a process that the government has embarked upon in order to really hear the issues of concern from Yukon government employees; to identify attitudes, opinions and experiences in order to make changes in the workplace; to make the Government of Yukon an even more attractive employer; and to make working for the Government of Yukon an even more satisfying experience. I know that members of the Public Service Commission and indeed all public servants are committed to providing the best possible service that they can to Yukoners. Indeed that is one of the key roles of being an employee within the Government of Yukon.

The survey was started as an annual tool in order to assess levels of satisfaction and identify issues of concern, thoughts and opinions of employees and it is expected to become an annual process year after year, using it as a tool to measure satisfaction levels, to look at areas of improvement, to look at best practices from department to department in order that that information can be shared. The first survey was done in 2007.

There was a bit of a challenge in compiling all of the data, providing the reports, getting that information back to managers, who would then — it was a very short timeline there in order to make meaningful changes before the next survey came out. So we do realize that surveys like this are a longitudinal type of instrument. They will show trends over time. With only having two years of data, we're still compiling additional years of data in order that we can make better conclusions and see additional trends. But as I was saying, after the first year the survey was done, the information was received, and the second survey was then undertaken. We have to realize that, within government systems, it often does take awhile to get information, to identify solutions, to identify different programs, and then to make the appropriate reallocation of resources — or allocation of resources — through the budgeting process in order to address it. So sometimes, through a government, as I'm sure we've all recognized, changes take a bit longer than one would like. But that is in part due to the nature of our budgeting process.

These surveys give us valuable information directly from our employees on how to continually improve as an employer, which in turn helps us to better serve the Yukon.

All departments, regardless of overall results in 2008, showed areas of exceptional achievement, and departments will build on these successes as they address areas that need improvement.

Our research in this area has shown that change will take time and that we should not expect survey results to change dramatically from one year to the next. I should add, Mr. Speaker, that this is an area that is being looked at by many jurisdictions across Canada. So we're going to continue to collect this information and share it within our industry of government, so to speak, so that we can then look at ways to indeed become a better employer, which will ultimately better serve the Yukon public.

Last year, upon receipt of the responses from the second survey, department human resource directors sat down with Public Service Commission employees to talk about the action steps. Indeed, all of the information was shared with the deputy ministers. I made members aware of information and provided information to members opposite about the results.

The HR directors and the Public Service Commission made a commitment to build on our strengths and to share our best practices so that we can — one person at a time; one branch at a time; one department at a time — show that we are part of a professional public service with a foundation of leadership, respect, commitment, competence and appreciation. Every deputy minister undertook to make improvements in their department and, indeed, all took action.

There was a recent *Sluice II* newsletter — that is the Public Service Commission internal government newsletter — that provided an update on the many different initiatives that were being undertaken. There were over 138 different initiatives from department to department in order to address the concerns that were identified through the Employee Engagement Survey. I won't identify all 138 for the member opposite, but some of the initiatives and action items that departments committed to included these: maintaining an approachable management team; promoting flexible work arrangements; making sure that employees have the tools they need to get their work done in the most effective way; creating in-depth sessions with all employees about department survey results; brainstorming sessions held by groups of interested employees to develop ideas and recommendations; strategic planning information sessions with several presenters for all employees; an employee engagement committee; completing performance evaluations and professional development plans; expanding management meetings; creating a department health and safety newsletter; creating all-staff meetings; and, as well, senior management team community tours.

Additionally, deputy ministers have established regular meetings with staff which include opportunities for staff in the area to showcase what they are doing and to discuss issues of the day. Also, leadership development programs have been offered through the public — well, in this case it is an education-specific program that highlights the leadership development program.

Other initiatives undertaken by other departments include the following: a review of the department wellness and recognition program; all-staff division and branch meetings; supporting training and development opportunities; department recognition programs; more comprehensive and useful department orientation sessions; pan-territorial systems to look at best practices in other jurisdictions; enhanced deputy minister involvement or engagement with employees; bringing employee performance evaluations up to date and, as well, additional piloting of a professional development process for additional staff. Those are just some of the highlights.

As I mentioned, there were 138 different action items that were put forward and shared with all employees.

The government takes this survey very seriously. It's a very useful tool that we can use to ensure that we have a happy

and engaged public service. In fact, currently, the survey firm of Ipsos-Reid is conducting this year's employee engagement survey, and I would encourage all employees to participate in the survey. It's a very quick process. I think it only takes about 20 minutes or so to fill out the form to provide the information. This information is useful to managers, directors and department heads in order to make changes in their departments.

It has been said before that we can't make a change unless we know what and how to change, and we really do appreciate the input from our employees.

The survey period is from April 20 to May 22, so people do have a few days left in which to participate in this year's survey. It is also very important that we have a high participation rate. In the past, some of the challenges with the data have been that there has been, well, not the highest response rate. As we all know, the greater the response rate the greater the statistical validity of the information that we receive.

So I would encourage all employees throughout the Government of Yukon to participate in this process, to share their ideas and really take a step in making the Government of Yukon an even better place to work. If the member would like me to read the other 135 action items, I can do that too, but I trust that I've answered his question.

Mr. Cardiff: No, the minister doesn't need to read the other 135 action items.

I do have some more questions and I do hope he doesn't get up and read all 135 of them, because time is of the essence at this point. We see, too, the value of the Employee Engagement Survey.

Some problem areas were pointed out that came to light in the 2007 survey, and we don't need to talk about them. We hope that they've been addressed. The minister talked about a couple of things. I'm not sure — is it "Salute II?" The newsletter?

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Mr. Cardiff: Sluice. Sluice, like goldpanning. Okay.

So, what I would be wondering is whether or not that's available to members of the opposition. Could we get a copy of that? I wasn't clear whether the 138 items were action items or recommendations or suggestions. Are they actions that are being undertaken? How are they being monitored?

The minister was reading from the document with the 138 actions items or recommendations. It's customary in the Legislature that when the minister or a member reads from a document, it is made available to all Members of the Legislative Assembly. We'd like to see a copy of that as well.

I'd like to ask the minister if he would be amenable to providing us with a copy of this year's survey results. I recognize that the survey is underway right now to May 22, I believe he said. Would he be amenable to making a copy of those results available to us as well?

We hope that will guide the government, and they will lead us as well in our questioning of the government in the areas that we believe the government needs to make improvements. I think it's beneficial to see where the improvements are being made and I think it's important that we are able to see that — hence, the request for the survey results from this year.

I hope I was clear with the minister about what I'm asking for and if not, I'll get up and repeat it.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to share the information with the member opposite. He will recall that last year, when the information was asked for, it was provided. He will also recall that last year a technical briefing on this information was provided by the Public Service Commission. It is unfortunate that at that time there appeared to be some confusion in the New Democratic caucus about which meeting they were supposed to attend. For some reason the NDP members arrived at a media briefing instead of making arrangements, as was expected, for the briefing with the Public Service Commission. Again, once the information has been compiled, we will provide that information to members opposite.

I do just want to caution a bit of an area here. We as legislators in this Assembly have a responsibility to pass legislation and to pass the budgets, and the Cabinet ministers also have roles. The role of the opposition is to hold the government accountable for decisions; however, the role of managing employees is entrusted to professionals within the Public Service Commission and also our professional managers within the Government of Yukon.

This Assembly's role is to look at policy decisions, legislative decisions and allocation of resources. We have other vehicles at our disposal, such as the Public Accounts Committee, to look at whether there is the efficient or efficacious delivery of those policy objectives, but there indeed has to be a separation between our role as elected people and the role of people employed in government to manage staff. There is a very large separation between my role as a minister and the operations of government. For example, members know that we are not to be involved in hiring decisions or managerial decisions. These are indeed things entrusted to the operations of government officials.

I've identified some of the ways that the Public Service Commission and department managers, directors and department heads are providing. They have identified specific action items that they are taking in their department to engage staff, to increase the level of satisfaction, to increase the levels of communication, to increase levels of involvement, to increase levels of professional involvement — really to increase the capacity of the organization to do the work that we entrust them with. So we do have to provide a certain freedom — a responsibility — to our professional managers in our government to do the work that they are trusted to do and not interfere at an operational or personnel level.

The Government of Yukon believes this is an important initiative. That's why there has been an allocation of resources. It is something that has been looked at in other jurisdictions and now we'll leave it up to the small "g" government to undertake the good work that they are entrusted to do in order to make the changes in order to make the Government of Yukon a very engaging place to work in order to better serve the needs of Yukon people. I think the other question was this: would I provide additional information when it becomes available? The answer to that is yes.

As I did previously, I will provide additional information when it becomes available.

Mr. Cardiff: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I understand what the minister is saying. We're not, as politicians or as ministers, to be involved in the day-to-day operations of the government, to be interfering in the day-to-day operations or to be directing what it is that happens on the front lines. I can understand that. But we do debate policy, which does affect that. In order to do that, I think there is a lot that can be learned from analyzing — and from what I understand — I apologize for the confusion last time around the release of the information of the employee engagement survey. I guess there was some confusion. I appreciate the minister's offer of a briefing in making that information available.

The other part of the question was the 138 action items and whether or not the minister could make that document available. He was reading from it, so I'd be interested in looking at what the 138 action items are.

I don't need him to read them. He is prepared to read them, but he's not prepared to share them on a piece of paper. I would like to know what those action items are. How is the government monitoring the effectiveness of those action items in improving morale and participation of government employees in their workplaces, so that we have better morale in government workplaces, so people feel their jobs are fulfilling and that they are contributing in their workplace and enjoy it?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Yes, Mr. Chair, I will send the member opposite the list. Just for his information, the deputy ministers are the ones who are responsible for ensuring that the action items are being undertaken. The step that we will continue to do to ensure that we have an engaged workforce is the ongoing survey tool. So each year we do expect to continue this survey to get the results and then make changes.

I will reiterate that research shows that changes do take time, and that we should not expect survey results to change dramatically from one year to the next. We only have two years of data already to take a look at. There have been some questions about the response rate of that, so we want to see that increase, to increase the statistical validity of the results. As well, it does take a bit of time — the member is aware of the time it takes to conduct a survey, get the results, understand the results, create a solution, identify the resources necessary to achieve the solution, implement it into our budgeting process, have it come through the Assembly, and then get back in. So there is some time that it does take to address these things.

The overall objectives, if I can just briefly put those on the record, from the Public Service Commission, are as follows: to make the appropriate investments in the public service to sustain the organization as a desirable place to work; to ensure the delivery of the best possible programs and services to Yukon people; to provide leadership in planning and implementing initiatives to address corporate human resource responsibilities; and to work in partnership with departments to support organizational excellence by developing human resource expertise.

So those are the broad department objectives that have been established, and then we do have the internal departmental

plans and individual workplans that are carried out in order to accomplish those objectives.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for agreeing to provide that information. We will anticipate its arrival. I thank the minister for his comments as well. I would like to ask the minister a couple more questions and then we'll move on.

I'd be interested to know whether there are any plans within government — I know that previous governments have done this and then it has been reversed. But government is the largest employer in the Yukon. It has the ability to make strategic investments in communities through the distribution of human resources. It's also known, I guess, as decentralization.

I've heard in the past from communities that, in fact, the Minister of Community Services attempted to field this question in Watson Lake and didn't have the expertise or the information by his side that the minister has today, Mr. Chair. But a few government jobs located in a small community can have a big impact. This has been done in the past, but what we have seen is we've seen government jobs — territorial government jobs — leave communities and move to Whitehorse. I'm just wondering if there are any plans to do some redistribution of jobs and look at where services are needed in communities that are provided out of Whitehorse, and whether or not it's feasible even on a regional basis to have more jobs located in rural Yukon.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the member's questions and the Government of Yukon certainly recognizes the significant role it plays in the territory. And being the territory's single largest employer, we certainly appreciate, recognize and are aware of the impact that our employees have in all Yukon communities. We are also keenly aware of the services that are required in Yukon communities. Those services are often very wide-ranging, whether they be health, education, nursing, community services, highways and public works or environment officials.

I think virtually every department in the Yukon — EMR also — plays a role in Yukon communities. Where it's appropriate, where it makes sense and where it's sustainable, we do endeavour to provide local people to provide those local services.

There have been initiatives in the past that unfortunately were not successful, but we continue to look at the responsibilities the government has to Yukon communities for the provision of local services. The government will continue to endeavour to provide the best services to Yukoners as appropriately as we can and as efficiently as we can, also recognizing the constraints through staffing that we have.

It is very interesting to recognize, too, when there is a small population throughout the territory that, in certain positions, we might only have one or maybe even two people providing that service. But they have a responsibility to provide it throughout the territory.

It is a challenge of how we best meet the needs of communities, how we meet the needs of our employees, and how we create environments where employees can collaborate, how we share best practices and do that efficiently. At this time, there is no plan to change from current policies and practices.

We will continue to provide local people to provide local services where it makes sense to do so. We will continue to look at ways we can improve the quality of service that we provide to all Yukoners, and ways that we can provide the best impact locally for government that we can.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for his answer. I have a few more questions I'd like to ask the minister. Last year, we were told that 14 percent of Yukon government employees are First Nations and that a smaller percentage than that were Yukon First Nations.

We recognize that there is a balance that needs to be maintained here, that there are capacity issues with First Nations governments and we shouldn't be raiding, I guess would be one word, the ranks of other governments for their employees, because they need their employees too. But there is a promise that has been made to make the Yukon government representative of Yukon society and to have more First Nation employees. So there are a couple of issues there. I'm just wondering how the minister reconciles that issue, and what plans there are to make the Yukon government more representative of Yukon's demographics.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, as of December 31, 2008, 14 percent of employees responding to the workforce census stated that they were of aboriginal ancestry. According to the 2006 census, aboriginal people represented about 21 percent of the population aged 25 to 64, which is the typical working-aged population.

Of the respondents who identified themselves as being of aboriginal ancestry, approximately 56 percent say they were from a Yukon First Nation. The Government of Yukon has taken strong steps to create a more representative public service — one that is representative of the people in the community. There are several different ways that we are going about doing this. One is continued education of all Yukoners, provision of post-secondary education for all Yukoners, and there are a tremendous number of programs that we have available. We are really trying to prepare Yukoners for Yukon opportunities, if I can put my Education cap on for a moment. That of course means preparing Yukoners of First Nation ancestry for Yukon opportunities too. There have been different initiatives such as the Yukon native teacher education program or some of the other specific programs — I'm thinking of the bachelor of social work program at Yukon College where there are recognized needs for people with particular skill sets in our community and where we are trying to prepare Yukoners for those opportunities.

Really, it starts with education. Within the government there is the First Nation Training Corps. There is the workplace diversity office. We are taking steps — things like temporary assignments where people working for a First Nation would come and work with the Government of Yukon or where Government of Yukon employees would go and work with a First Nation. We do make efforts to develop more people for positions within the Government of Yukon.

The member is right when he says that it would be inappropriate to see raiding or high-grading of really good people away from another organization. We recognize the role that

First Nation orders of government play in our territory and the tremendous responsibilities that they have. They also have a significant need to have very highly trained, competent and capable staff at all levels — entry level, managerial, senior managerial and executive levels — so we realize that there are significant needs in our community for people of First Nation ancestry, especially among their citizenry. There are those needs.

We do have programs in place; I've identified several of them. I've identified the First Nations Training Corps, the Aboriginal Employees Forum. I provided additional information in my introductory speech, but does that address the member's question?

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for that answer, Mr. Chair. It's not only First Nations and municipal governments that end up sometimes getting raided or high-graded for the best employees or whatever. There are a number of reasons why it happens.

Non-governmental organizations end up losing good employees and dedicated employees to the government because of the job security that, in some instances, the government can offer. There is not much the Public Service Commission can do about that. That's something that another branch of the government can assist in, I believe.

I'd like to ask the minister — I'm going to make this question general, without trying to make it applicable to any particular department. There are a number of areas in government where the government uses auxiliary, casual or term employees. Again, it's an issue of job security. It's an issue of some of these categories of employees receiving certain benefits, some receiving certain other benefits, and some receiving next to no benefits.

What policy is there on the government's part to ensure that we don't overuse these categories of employment when it's necessary, because there are instances where we've had people who have had term positions that have been rolled over and rolled over and rolled over, where they've been in casual positions, and they get laid off and then they get rehired. This goes on and on and on. This is about treating our employees fairly and equitably across the board. The argument that I would make is that if that need is there, we should make these positions permanent so that these employees receive all the benefits and rights that other employees are afforded.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I thank the Member for Mount Lorne for his question. I believe he did start by recognizing the value and benefit of being an employee of the Government of Yukon, and I appreciate that he appreciates that. We do strive to be a very engaging employer, recognizing our responsibilities, not only to our employers, but also to the taxpayers in our territory. The member is correct that there are occasions where it is necessary to have people in term or casual or emergency types of working situations.

These situations arise out of times when people are either on temporary assignment, medical leave or other personal leaves where we have a need to have someone fill in for a position, either on an immediate, emergency basis or longer term type of position. During a term position, those employees are

paid the same benefits. Where there is not a term position, we do provide a strong level of remuneration. We discussed this the other day where people who might not be in a long-term employment relationship with the Government of Yukon are treated very fairly and provided with appropriate remuneration.

I am not sure if the member is aware, but there was an auxiliary committee that was established with the union. This is a new committee that looks at the uses of auxiliaries to ensure that we are not overusing those types of situations. I would also like to draw attention to the *Public Service Commission Act*, which has prohibitions in there regarding overusing casuals.

So it's something that the Government of Yukon takes very seriously. Not only is it addressed specifically within the departments to ensure that appropriate staffing levels and staffing decisions are made, but there is also work that is done with the Public Service Commission to review the use of these types of replacement or fill-in positions. We also work with the appropriate union to ensure that we are not overusing our auxiliaries. So there are some significant steps that have been taken to address this. There will always be situations where government will need to have people in temporary types of positions, but all departments are taking steps to ensure that this is done as appropriately as possible.

Mr. Cardiff: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I only have, I think, probably two more questions for the minister, and then we can move on.

I'd like to ask the minister — I don't have the figures in front of me, but I'm curious — the minister responsible for the Public Service Commission is also the minister responsible for Education, and we've had many good discussions in this Legislature about skilled trades, about apprenticeships and getting young people engaged. As part of a strategy to get young people engaged and working for government, I would think it might even be part of a question that I had that I wasn't going to ask about succession planning. It's about engaging young people and providing opportunities for youth through apprenticeships.

My recollection is that the government has four apprentice positions in government through a variety of departments where services are provided, specifically Highways and Public Works or Community Services.

I would think, to some extent, there may even be opportunities where building maintenance or vehicle maintenance is being done, and there would be more opportunities for the government to provide apprenticeship opportunities for young people in the Yukon.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I appreciate the question coming from the member opposite. Yes, I do wear at least two hats — actually, three hats, as the MLA responsible for the beautiful Southern Lakes, as well as the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for the Public Service Commission.

I'm finding there is a significant overlap between Education and the Public Service Commission. This was evident very recently with the graduation of human resource professionals through a program at Royal Roads.

This was a post-graduate human resource development certificate program that Royal Roads offered and I was asked to

speak at their graduation. I spoke there as minister responsible for the Public Service Commission. Recognizing that these individuals had just made a significant contribution to their professional education, I spoke as the Minister of Education and was glad to see that so many of these individuals were continuing their post-secondary education. In that case, I was also speaking as a very happy alumnus, who was congratulating fellow students who were graduating from Royal Roads.

So there are many parallels between the Public Service Commission and the Department of Education. Also now, in being responsible for both portfolios, there are opportunities to bring the groups together so that we can look at those training opportunities that we have in the Public Service Commission. How do we then apply them to broader education? For example, how can we use Yukon College to better prepare employees in the Government of Yukon? How can we use that tool?

And how can we also look at the issue of working with the Department of Education to prepare people for employment opportunities within the Public Service Commission? In this area there is some overlap. The Member for Mount Lorne has referenced the Yukon government apprentice program. That program is offered under the Department of Education. That is the department that has the responsibility for that. I would be pleased to discuss that program in greater detail when we discuss the Department of Education, as I will be able to provide more information on it then.

The Public Service Commission also realizes that it has a role to play in attracting people to work in the Government of Yukon. I will back up a moment too. There is a program that I am sure we'll get into in more detail in the Education debate, but that is the student training employment program that provides students an opportunity to have employment situations within the Government of Yukon. I am sure members are very well aware of this program. It is an excellent program. We have also expanded that program. It is now open to graduates. Those students who have recently graduated from a post-secondary institution can now apply for those STEP positions, and there is a sliding scale of wages based on the number of years of education.

Those students who have recently graduated can apply for STEP positions so that they can provide services to Yukon government through employment situations and also learn more about working for government. Also, it's a great program, in that it encourages or allows students who have recently graduated to return to Yukon to at least start a summertime job and, while doing that, they can then seek full-time, permanent employment. But it gives them an opportunity to at least have a "foot in the door", shall we say, of employment in the Yukon to bring those people who recently graduated back to the territory, rather than losing them to Outside jurisdictions.

The program that the Public Service Commission has in place to also address this similar type of issue of helping recently graduated individuals achieve employment opportunities in the Government of Yukon and to provide Yukon opportunities for Yukoners is the GradCorps. The GradCorps is an internship program that provides recent Yukon post-secondary

graduates with work experience to help them improve their employment prospects.

Successful applicants are offered a one-year placement in challenging, career-related assignments within the Yukon. GradCorps encourages the transfer of knowledge from experienced employees to new employees. This is also helping with the transition phase that, really, all employers are going through. Since 2005, there have been four intakes, and a total of 25 GradCorps internships have been filled. Seventeen of the GradCorps graduates were offered continued employment, and 10 are still in the Yukon public service. The cost of the program for 2008-09 was \$175,000.

So those are a couple of the programs that the Government of Yukon has in place to assist those recently graduated students with achieving employment opportunities in the government. It's a great opportunity to gain skill, to gain new knowledge, and to gain an appreciation of the workings of government. It's a responsibility that is shared both between the Public Service Commission and the Department of Education, and it's a successful program that I wish more people were aware of. I think we do have room for additional applicants in some of the intakes.

It's a great opportunity, and if members are aware of people who would be interested in this, they should contact the Public Service Commission to get more information about it.

Mr. Cardiff: I only have one more question. I'd just like the minister to briefly bring us up to date on any policies, regulations or legislation that is currently being developed by the Public Service Commission, and if there are any program reviews going on, as well, in the Public Service Commission.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, the member has asked a very wide-ranging question. Some of the issues I have already discussed in the Assembly. For example, in my opening remarks I discussed the corporate health and safety programs. The member is aware of the work that the government is doing in order to create a comprehensive government-wide health and safety strategy and plan. So that is certainly work that is underway.

The member is aware of the legislation that was recently addressed in this Assembly regarding reservists. That's an issue that we've currently been working on. The member and I already have had the discussion regarding the issue of the union representation for substitute teachers and others. Those are issues.

Also, Mr. Chair, the disability and accommodation policies — we've had discussions about that, specifically about the work that the workplace diversity office does. As well, the member asked me some questions about our disabilities and accommodations policies. I shared some information with him about the work that we have been doing in that area, including the handbook that has been created. But additionally, that's an issue that we're continuing to address.

Also, the HR directors meet on a fairly regular basis to discuss emerging issues and the issues that they feel should be addressed, so there is always a process of taking a look at some of the different issues before us. I'm sure the member opposite will appreciate we do have situations where we are looking at

issues that are emerging, issues that we are looking into, issues that we are currently making changes in, and testing to see if they're having the desired results and then issues where we're looking at changing legislation. So there is an ongoing process involved in this. It's a pretty broad-ranging question, but I think I have addressed many of the key areas that are being examined.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Chair, I'd like to thank the minister and the officials for their answers. The purpose of the last question was to see if there was anything else that I might have missed earlier so I thank the minister for that answer.

Mr. Edzerza: I have a couple of questions for the minister. I'd like to start by thanking the officials for all the work they do in this department, because I know it's quite extensive and covers a large range of issues.

I'd like to start by following up just a little bit on something the Member for Mount Lorne had touched on briefly, and that's to do with auxiliary employees. I heard the minister say that there has to be fairness to employees by not overusing such things as auxiliary positions. How long can an employee stay employed in an auxiliary position, say like as a heavy-equipment operator?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The member opposite has asked an interesting question that really is a little bit more complicated than just offering a straightforward, simple answer. There are certain situations where we have seasonal auxiliary positions and there really is no time frame as to how long a person could be working with the government on one of those arrangements. There are other auxiliary positions where people could continue to have a relationship, because there will always be a need for auxiliary people and if people are willing to come in on an auxiliary basis, then that type of situation could last indefinitely as long as the person wants to be part of the auxiliary pool.

We do, as we discussed earlier, have situations where people are away from their position and those positions need to be filled on a temporary basis. That's where we use auxiliary employees. So the choice really is up to the individual person as to how long they want to be part of the auxiliary pool.

I'm not sure if the member heard the comment about the auxiliary committee that was formed between the Public Service Commission and the union that was taking a look to make sure that the use of auxiliaries was not done inappropriately. There are other situations as well in our government where people are hired on a seasonal basis. I mean, there is no limit to the number of times that they can apply to be part of that process.

I think that answers the member's question.

basically the minister just confirmed that you can be an auxiliary.

Mr. Edzerza: Well, it does in a way, Mr. Chair, because basically, the minister just confirmed that you can be an auxiliary forever. In this day and age, I believe that's very inappropriate. It could even be looked at as the government taking advantage of a professional operator, for example, and never giving him a permanent position.

I brought this question up today because I was phoned today by an individual. In fact, it was about 10:00 this morning.

He was telling me that he has been an auxiliary equipment operator for the government since 1990 — 19 years. He has been through 23 interviews for a permanent position and was refused every time — every time. Yet, he was taken back as an auxiliary operator every time.

So that tells me there is a real problem here — a serious problem — because that is taking advantage of a person who needs to feed his family and who wants to stay here and who wants to live here.

Now, one question he did ask me if I would ask today, and I'll do that right now. Will the minister consider putting a time limit, right today, on how long someone can be employed as an auxiliary? I think the minister knows very well that he has stood up on several occasions here today and said that he represents fairness for all Yukon citizens in this territory, and I want to believe that. Will the minister look into putting some kind of a time limit on how long a very well-qualified person can stay on as an auxiliary?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, the Government of Yukon will work to ensure that we have appropriate policies and practices in place that meet not only the needs of the citizens of the territory, but also our employees. Mr. Chair, I do know many people who prefer to work in an auxiliary position, because it offers them the flexibility they are looking for in their life and in choices that they make. There is, of course, the opportunity to apply for a permanent position should people choose to go down that route.

I really can't speak to the specific example that the member has just cited, other than to remind him to encourage his constituent to avail himself of the appropriate steps when he feels that he should have been awarded a job competition and was denied for reasons that I'm not aware of. If anyone, for that matter, is involved in an employment competition within the Government of Yukon and they are the unsuccessful candidate for that position, they certainly have a right of appeal. I would encourage them not to appeal to the politicians, because we are all aware of the distance that politicians must keep between themselves and the operations of government. That is one of the significant reasons why we have the Public Service Commission and the Public Service Commissioner. If there is a person who feels that they want to appeal an unsuccessful job competition, they have the opportunity to go to the Public Service Commission and to appeal that job competition. That is the process that we have.

I appreciate the member's questions. If he has additional specifics on this one, I would encourage his constituent to raise them with the Public Service Commission as that is the appropriate process to go through for these kinds of staffing or operational issues.

Mr. Edzerza: Mr. Chair, I don't agree with the minister when he made the statement that being an auxiliary could be an advantage. It's not. I mean these people have faithfully stayed on with the government. Can the minister appreciate and imagine even if everyone he is talking about right now today decided, "Well, you know what? I'm going to move on." Does the minister not realize that there would be no operators left in government? I mean, it's a serious thing; it's a very serious

issue. It's also very mentally stressful, emotionally stressful for those who have to renew their auxiliary position every year.

All I wanted to raise today was how important it is to really cut to the chase on this one and start looking at job security for these people. I can't imagine going from year to year to year wondering about whether or not I'm going to have a job tomorrow morning.

The other question I wanted to ask around this issue: does being an auxiliary for 19 years have any kind of negative implications for, say, the benefits such as health care and what-not?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I think it's important that we recognize some of the situations that we have here in the territory. There are some needs that we have in the territory that are of a seasonal nature, and these are not permanent positions. These are things like staffing the visitor reception centres, which is not done year-round. These are things like the BST crew, which is not done year-round. These are seasonal-type positions.

There are also situations with auxiliaries, which are different situations altogether. There are some people who appreciate the flexibility of auxiliary positions, and there are others who appreciate the flexibility of seasonal positions, and there are others that want to pursue other positions.

The member has asked about benefits. These benefits for seasonal employees are discussed and negotiated as part of the collective agreements. There are different benefits for auxiliaries-on-call. Again, these are formed as part of the collective agreement.

Mr. Chair, I appreciate the member's concern and his thoughts on this issue. The reality of our situation here is that there are those situations that are not needed as year-round positions, but in order to best provide services for Yukoners, we will continue to use all the methods that we have to provide satisfactory services to Yukoners and to provide and fulfill our responsibilities as an employer. The member is correct — we have a significant need for seasonal people, and I believe there is a first right of recall for people that have been in these situations in the past.

I think I've answered the member's questions and if he has other ones on this issue, I'll try to answer them.

Mr. Edzerza: Well, Mr. Chair, the minister is wrong. He didn't answer the question that I asked. I'm not referring to seasonal positions. I'm talking about those who are laid off for a day or more so they don't have to become recognized as full-time employees. This has been ongoing for many, many years from what I've been told about the Government of the Yukon Territory. I understand seasonal positions. In most places in the Yukon, it's common knowledge that you don't lay asphalt or chip seal when it's minus 40. We know that, but what I'm talking about is those people who live in communities who work up on the Dempster Highway, for example, and other camps, that have been there for years and years. They are laid off every year for a day or two just so that they can't become permanent employees and then they are hired right back in the same job, same location, repeatedly year after year.

Those are the ones I'm talking about. Like the question that was asked of me today to ask the minister: could you please check into setting a time limit for those employees who are consistent on the job year after year after year? Could you please consider putting a time limit to the number of years that you could be considered as an auxiliary? So I did ask that, but the one question that was asked previously that wasn't answered: does being an auxiliary have any negative impacts when it comes to health coverage, for example, or benefits full-time employees receive?

To continue on from what I just mentioned, here's another question I have: if, for example, someone was an auxiliary employee and they ended up being labelled as one who has a disability, what kind of effect does that have on an auxiliary employee versus a full-time staff member?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The duty to accommodate applies also to auxiliary positions.

Mr. Edzerza: I can see that this discussion can probably go on for another two weeks and it still will be sort of put by the wayside somewhat. I'm not getting direct answers. The people who were talking to me — I promised to give them a copy of the Blues so they can see the questions I asked, the answers that were given, and then they can be the judge of whether or not their concerns were answered appropriately by the minister.

I'm going to move to another area. The minister has consistently used the phrase, "the government of the day represents equality for all Yukon citizens," whether it's in Education or whether it's in the Public Service Commission or whatever. I also have some concern around statements like that, because there are some things happening that don't exactly fall under that statement.

The minister also said that it's inappropriate to rate citizens. He just said it a few minutes ago, in answering someone else. Well, as it stands today, First Nation people born, raised and educated in the Yukon Territory do not qualify for a position under the First Nation Training Corps. I find that ludicrous. I find it unacceptable, and a lot of people I've talked to classify it as nothing other than discrimination.

I've had numerous requests to ask the minister and the government of the day to take a look at this section and correct the wrongs that are there.

It appears that what's good for First Nations going south is different from those coming north. First Nations in the Yukon Territory are not penalized like this in any other province or territory — just because they aren't beneficiaries of British Columbia, they're deprived of training positions in government, yet people who live in Lower Post, B.C., which is 10 minutes from the Yukon border, don't qualify for a training position in government. I find that unacceptable.

I know the minister's going to stand up and say, "Well, it's part of the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and we can't do anything about it." Well, there's a section in the *Umbrella Final Agreement* that speaks to how you amend something that's not right in this agreement. I've never reviewed an agreement yet in my lifetime of 60 years here that was perfect. In fact, through this sitting, we have amended several acts to make them better. I

would encourage the minister to look at this area very closely, because I can possibly see some challenges of this issue right to the Supreme Court, because just recently, the government did make the announcement that they have lifted the Yukon citizen hire restrictions for government jobs, because they believe that with the agreement of the other provinces that they want to have free movement by citizens across the country to be able work wherever they want to.

Well, that is fine, but they also said, in the same breath, that that excludes First Nations people. In one breath the government is somewhat boasting almost about how they have made it far easier for people to have the mobility to move wherever they want to be employed and then in the next breath, they say, "Except for First Nations who aren't born in the Yukon." So there is a real problem here. My question to the minister is this: would you consider looking at this area to see if there can be some improvements so that First Nations who are born, raised and educated in Yukon can apply for a training position in the First Nations Training Corps?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, we've got a couple of different issues coming out here now. One of these is really focusing on the respect for the land claim agreements and the self-government agreements that the Government of Canada, Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nation orders of government have agreed to and signed. We need to carefully look at the makeup of the citizenry in the Yukon, what our responsibilities are under our self-government and land claim agreements and the responsibility that we have to all Canadian citizens.

Mr. Chair, we do have the responsibility for employment equity, specifically under chapter 22 of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, and it does speak specifically to Yukon First Nations. The member opposite is correct that the First Nation Training Corps eligibility criteria specifies that in order to be eligible for a position through the First Nation Training Corps, people must be of Yukon First Nation aboriginal ancestry. Chapter 22 of First Nations final agreements specifies that the government has an obligation to develop a plan to attain the goal of a representative public service. That is entrenched in the agreements and must be honoured.

The corporate representative public service plan in traditional territory — RPSPs are the plans developed under chapter 22. The First Nation Training Corps is one of the programs; it's not the sole program; it's not the only opportunity for employment within the Government of Yukon, but it is one of the programs and activities that the government uses to address the goal of a representative public service and to address the responsibility under chapter 22.

Now, Mr. Chair, the First Nation final agreements are constitutionally entrenched in modern-day treaties. It is not unreasonable to expect government to have programs and services to meet the requirements in the agreements. The eligibility criteria are not discriminatory; rather, they are consistent with definitions in the final agreement.

In the Yukon final agreement it indicates and defines that a Yukon Indian person is a person enrolled under one of the

Yukon First Nations final agreements. This is not a definition that can be changed.

Mr. Chair, we will continue to honour our agreements. We will put in place programs to address this. We will also put in place other programs to assist other citizens to seek employment opportunities in the Yukon.

We have a responsibility not to discriminate against other people in positions of employment in the territory. While we do have certain employment equity programs in place, there are many, many other opportunities for people to seek employment. We do have one specific program that the member opposite takes issue with; however, there are many other options and alternatives that are available in the Government of Yukon.

We have a responsibility under the *Umbrella Final Agreement* and our agreements with Yukon First Nations to address the specific needs and commitments that have been made there. However, we do have other programs that are available to other people, should they wish to seek employment in the Yukon.

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. 15, *First Appropriation Act, 2009-10*, Department of Public Service Commission.

Mr. Edzerza: I understand fully that nothing is going to be changed with regard to this issue today. However, I would encourage the government to really consider revisiting this area, because I did do some research on it. As a matter of fact, the chief federal land claims negotiator made the comment to me that he feels that the words "Yukon Indian person" are being misused when it comes to training First Nation people. It might have just been a way to get rid of me and my questions; however, that was coming from the land claims chief negotiator who said that to me.

I just find it rather unfortunate that I've been living in the Yukon for 45 years, and I'm not considered a Yukon Indian person. There are a lot more just like me out there. And there are a lot who have been born and raised in the Yukon who are not considered to be a Yukon Indian person. I find that unacceptable, and I did want to at least get this on record because somewhere down the line — you know, like maybe another 30 years or so — somebody is going to read this and they're going to say that that Independent Indian member was right. There is a problem here. I'm hoping it will be fixed by then.

There is another way that the government can counteract this, if they have any political will whatsoever to try to correct this issue, and that is to start a program exactly like the First Nation Training Corps and leave it open to non-beneficiary First Nation people. The problem I have with this is that I've known of positions that have come open, and First Nation people wouldn't take them, so they were never filled.

And there were other First Nations that were willing to go right into this and do the training.

Now, I've been asked by some Yukon First Nation people to ask a question to the Public Service Commission. They are wondering why people who go through the First Nation Training Corps stay on training forever and a day, and never get full-time jobs. So I don't know too much about the background behind this, but is that an accurate statement by a person who has been in the Yukon First Nation Training Corps for a number of years now?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: No, Mr. Speaker, the impression that the member has right now of this program is not in keeping with what's actually going on with the program.

The First Nation Training Corps placements range in duration from one to two years. There is a possibility for an additional year, depending upon the classification levels. Based on the participation in this program and statistics I have for 2008-09, of those who completed the training program, one was retained by the Government of Yukon, one was hired by their First Nation government and one is receiving higher level training in Yukon government. So those are pretty good statistics. It shows that there is a commitment to those people on this program, that there are opportunities for them within the Government of Yukon and also that there are employment opportunities for them with their First Nation.

Mr. Edzerza: My final question in this particular area would be: does the minister have any numbers in front of him that can tell me how many First Nations have actually gone through this First Nation Training Corps since it was implemented? And how many have actually got full-time government jobs?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: As the member I'm sure appreciates, this is still a fairly new program and has only been in existence for a couple of years now. I gave the member the statistics about the three who had completed the program and where they are at right now. I understand that there will be 18 training positions for 2009-10. In 2008-09, there were 17 positions in nine different departments. People in those are in a variety of stages in the process. As I mentioned, there can be a one-year or two-year time in this program, as well as a possible extension for this. So this is a good program. It's not the only opportunity for people of Yukon First Nation ancestry to obtain employment situations in the territory, but it is one more opportunity.

Additionally, there are other opportunities for other people of First Nation ancestry for some positions where there is preferential hire for people of First Nation ancestry. Those are open to, I believe, all Canadian citizens of First Nation ancestry. I think that should address the member's other questions.

Mr. Edzerza: Mr. Chair, the bottom line is that there is differential treatment here. That is the bottom line. One suggestion that I would like to leave with the minister and my final suggestion here would be to revisit this area and look at maybe getting something that could be acceptable. One of the suggestions that I would have is to divide the First Nation Training Corps up into three classifications, so that those First Nation positions are filled by First Nation people. I would suggest that the first choice would be the people who are identified as Yukon Indian people as defined in the *Umbrella Final Agree-*

ment. If those people refuse the training position, which I know has happened in the past and the positions were never filled with First Nations, then it should go to a First Nation who was born and raised in the Yukon and who can move into that training position. If you don't have those individuals, then open it up to any First Nation in the Yukon Territory. I think something along those lines would probably be acceptable and may prevent a court challenge in the future on this very issue.

With that, I just want to close by thanking the staff of the Public Service Commission. I understand fully that this issue is not going to be resolved today, but it's now on record that it is an issue. Somewhere in the future, I certainly hope that it's going to be considered to try to come up with something that's appropriate to the First Nations who are not beneficiaries, because there are several hundred who are not beneficiaries.

According to our traditional ways, we are, as First Nation people, supposed to share and treat each other as equals. This does not fill that traditional belief. In fact, it works in opposition to our traditional beliefs. That's why several of us do have an issue with this part of the First Nation Training Corps. We support the First Nation Training Corps, but the criteria to be able to be accepted are where the issue lies.

So I close by thanking the staff. I know all the issues that come across their plate, and some of them are quite difficult. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the Independent member for his comments and his suggestions. I've always appreciated the perspective that he has brought to discussions, and I will certainly take his comments under advisement.

Mr. Fairclough: I do have a couple more questions for the minister.

One of them, following along the debate here this afternoon, is about auxiliaries, seasonal workers and those who are on call, who have been constantly coming back to employment with the Government of Yukon. And this one is about respect.

It has been brought to our attention before, over and over again, and I would like the minister to consider changing the policy when it comes to recognizing our auxiliary workers and our seasonal workers, when it comes to long service awards.

It has been an issue that has been raised over and over again. If they have been here for 30 years, and they've only worked during the season — in the summer months, for example, in highways and such — they've been here 30 years. It is showing respect to them. It's not the way it goes right now; it's an accumulation of the amount of time they've put in to add up to a year. I would like to ask the minister to strongly consider that and change that policy to show respect to those auxiliary workers and seasonal workers.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I've had the honour and the pleasure of attending several of the long service awards and indeed, it's a great opportunity to meet with many Yukon employees. I think it will only be taking me another two more years until I think I will have seen every Yukon employee who has had the opportunity to either come through on a five-year type of rotation, although some of the recognitions are for periods of time of 10 years or more.

I appreciate the member's comments. The folks who provide seasonal services are indeed valued by the government and I will discuss those with the Public Service Commissioner and take the comments under advisement.

Mr. Fairclough: I thank the minister for that. I think it would go a long way if we could change that policy and recognize them for the amount of time they have put in here in the territory.

I just have one more. I wanted to go back to thank the minister for the total number of employees who are employed in the Yukon government. It is up slightly from last year — 1.2 percent. I am wondering if the minister doesn't have the numbers with him right now, if he could send it over to me by legislative return — the numbers of employees that we had in 2002 and each year since. I know there is going to be a spike in there because of devolution, but if he doesn't have all those numbers then I'd accept that by legislative return.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: The statistics I have here only go back to 2004, so I will endeavour to provide the information to the member opposite.

Chair: Is there any further general debate?

Mr. Fairclough: I request the unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared or carried, as required.

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

Chair: Mr. Fairclough has requested unanimous consent of Committee of the Whole to deem all lines in Vote 10, Public Service Commission, cleared as required, as required. Are you agreed?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

Chair: Unanimous consent has been granted.

On Operation and Maintenance Expenditures

Total Operation and Maintenance Expenditures in the amount of \$36,051,000 agreed to

On Capital Expenditures

Total Capital Expenditures in the amount of \$50,000 agreed to

Public Service Commission agreed to

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Chair, I move that progress be reported on Bill No. 15, *First Appropriation Act, 2009-10*.

Chair: It has been moved by Mr. Rouble that we report progress on Bill No. 15, *First Appropriation Act, 2009-10*. Motion agreed to

Chair: Committee of the Whole will now proceed with Bill No. 13, *Third Appropriation Act, 2008-09*.

Do members wish a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 13 — *Third Appropriation Act, 2008-09* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 13, *Third Appropriation Act, 2008-09*. I do believe, Mr. Fentie, you have a little bit of time left.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: In the presentation for Committee of the Whole on the supplementary budget for 2008, I think it's important that we once again emphasize the fact that this gives us our starting numbers for the main estimates of the fiscal year that we are entering.

But I was also talking about some issues related to the overall debate in the House, given the fact that we are in a serious, serious crisis globally. We know that impacts will take place, and we've had very little debate with regard to that. I was making the point in Committee of the Whole the other day that it would be very encouraging if we could get into that type of discussion and debate, because much of what the government has done — not just now, not just last year and not just this new fiscal year in the main budget that we've tabled, which is a record budget for the territory, with record investments in capital and public infrastructure, whether it be roads, highways, bridges or other public facilities — an investment in people overall.

We have to look at the facts — the historical facts — whereby this type of stimulus has been ongoing in the Yukon for some time, and the corresponding result of that, Mr. Chair, is pretty clear. We have reversed the trend of double-digit unemployment. We have reversed the trend of the exodus of our population, and we have turned the corner in the Yukon, and have now got a growing population, a single-digit unemployment rate, GDP factors that are in the high levels in the country, far ahead of the national average, growing corporate profits, growing own-source revenues, and larger and larger surpluses to be able to address issues today and into the future.

So, Mr. Chair, it is encouraging for us as a government to see all the corresponding results from the efforts of our investments and our approach to fiscal management. What's discouraging is we're not hearing much from the opposition in regard to their views of the situation the Yukon is in today, because I think the opposition simply stays totally away from those types of things — they're far too positive — so we get into this needless discussion of negativity that is not part of what the Yukon today is really all about.

So I'm issuing a friendly challenge to the opposition — both the third party and the Official Opposition — that we engage in a serious debate about the Yukon economy, because the opposition was quite clear some time ago — until they saw the size, the scope and the value of the budget the government side has tabled — and quite insistent that the Yukon was in dire straits. That's the type of a discussion we should be having, but I'll leave that to the members opposite. It is indeed a matter of choice and Yukoners will be the judge.

So with that, Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to be able to table our supplementary budget. It is again another positive sign for the Yukon in what we've been doing over the course of the last fiscal year. It sets the stage, the foundation if you will, for the budget that we have tabled for the fiscal year 2009-10, and

it is certainly in keeping with this government's plan and vision for the Yukon and its future.

Mr. Mitchell: It is indeed a pleasure to actually finally have an opportunity to stand and debate budgetary items, so I think that the Premier and I are *ad idem* with that.

First of all, I would like to start by thanking the officials who not only go through all the work of preparing this budget — this supplementary budget from last year, as well as obviously the mains for this year — but have also been in the unenviable position, on several occasions, of being present, standing by and prepared to provide advice to the Premier on the budget, if only we would get to debating the budget.

I would like to point out a couple of things for the record. First of all, the Premier and his government set the agenda every day as to what we are going to debate and we in the opposition show up prepared to debate whatever it is that the Government House Leader presents to us. From my recollection — and I obviously don't have all the Blues in front of me — I think it has been well over a month since we entered into general debate on the main estimates — since the Premier has made reference to them — at around 20 minutes to 5:00 of a particular afternoon, and my recollection is that the Premier gave opening remarks for some 20 minutes.

I responded with some questions, and then the Premier spoke again until the time had expired so, as far as debate, we're happy to engage in it. The Premier has only called general debate on that one occasion on this year's estimates and never again. We don't get to call debate, and I think members of the public should understand that the Premier is issuing a bit of a hollow challenge because he actually has to put something on the Order Paper, put it on the agenda for the day's debate, in order for us to engage in debate.

Secondly, it was only two days ago that the Premier first rose to debate Bill No. 13. He first rose to debate it two days ago and that was May 5. The Premier again rose, put his remarks into the record. His remarks at the beginning of debate in Committee of the Whole were much the same as they were on second reading of Bill No. 13, and then he talked until time expired, so challenging us to a debate would actually require giving the opposition (a) an opportunity to respond and (b) calling the departments.

The Premier can call the Department of Finance any day he chooses, or the Executive Council Office — those are his departments — and I would encourage him to do so on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday of next week. And, God willing, I'll be here to enter into the debate that he so looks forward to.

A couple of things, Mr. Chair. When the Premier left off on May 5, two nights ago, he was indicating that, in his view, as Leader of the Official Opposition, I wanted a different approach. He noted several times that with the Yukon Housing Corporation we take issue with officials. I want to be clear for the record that our issues are not with officials. They never have been, and they won't be. Our issues are with the ministers responsible. The minister is sitting across from me. He has an official with him. I think the official understands quite well that my comments are directed to the Premier, as the minister re-

sponsible, and to no one else. And it's quite similar if we're in a Department of Health and Social Services debate or any other area for which I am responsible in a critic's role. It is our role in the opposition to hold the minister responsible.

Looking at the remarks that the Premier made on Tuesday afternoon, he made reference to the lapses on the capital side of the ledger. He gave some examples. He said Community Services — \$1.79 million of which \$1.28 million is attributable to lapses in the Army Beach community well project and \$200,000 under an MRIF project for Takhini North infrastructure. He mentioned Highways and Public Works lapses of \$3.5 million related to the expansion of the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport and \$550,000 related to the Tombstone interpretive centre. In Justice, he noted \$527,000 for the women's transitional living unit and \$3.6 million for the work that was not done last year on the Whitehorse Correctional Centre.

Then the Premier went on to make quite an interesting statement. After talking about all of the work that wasn't completed, he indicated that we should worry that they'll be revoted. He said, "...contributing by the way, Mr. Chair, to the increased stimulus that we've brought forward for the coming fiscal year." I find it rather incredible that the Premier has now framed his government's inability to get several major projects done last year — to actually get going on the oft-announced new Whitehorse Correctional Centre, for which he certainly in good faith budgeted \$3.6 million last year that he did not manage to have spent. The \$3.5 million for the expansion of the Erik Nielsen Whitehorse International Airport — there's a project that didn't go ahead, because the government was being threatened with court action for not following the YACA agreement with Kwanlin Dun First Nation. They had to enter into negotiations, the results of which have never been made public, to settle that out of court.

The women's transitional centre work was not completed last year. And the Tombstone interpretive centre — now, the government — the Premier and Minister of Finance are now describing this as creating increased stimulus this year.

I would say to the Premier that we could have used that stimulus last year. I certainly hope that the Premier won't be on his feet 12 months from now saying to us that there have been lapses and we didn't get going on the correctional centre and we haven't completed the airport project or other projects, and then say to us: "Don't worry; we now have even more stimulus for the next year." I don't think not being able to get the job done and having to revote the money year after year is a good description of "stimulus".

The Premier noted how shocked he was — a budget sitting at a time with such global uncertainty, at a time when the world economy is in deep recession and that we haven't had much debate on it. Again, the Premier hasn't called his departments for debate. The Premier still isn't calling the main estimates for his departments for debate — he is calling last year's supplementary estimates and as we know, we do have to approve them. That is part of our job, but we are debating money that is already spent, Mr. Chair, as opposed to money that may or may not be spent in the current fiscal year.

My challenge to the Premier would be: let's not get any further than the final four days of this sitting, which is coming up, without working to debate the main estimates. Call your departments, Mr. Premier. I look forward to the debate.

The Premier, in his opening remarks, twice repeated — once at second reading, of course, and then again in Committee of the Whole — made reference to the changes in the year-end figures, which do become the starting figures for this year. Obviously, we have confidence in the officials, as they've presented the figures, so there's not really that much to debate there. The budget says that what was previously projected as a \$4-million year-end surplus — due to additional spending largely in Health and Social Services, where there has been increased O&M, and in some other areas — is now being projected to be a \$2.6-million surplus. I guess one question that I would ask the Premier — so he can take notes of it for when I sit down, because I'm going to ask a few questions knowing that I may not get to my feet many more times — is this: at this point, since there has been additional spending since this supplementary budget was prepared, is it still projected that at the year-end, when we finally close the books on 2008-09, is it still projected to be a \$2.6-million surplus, or has there been any significant changes in that?

There's \$2.85 million in the adjustments for the Yukon Housing Corporation, and I would ask how much of that was for mortgage loans and if not, why not? I would note that the Premier announced \$16 million in stimulus at a Business After Hours several months ago, at Northerm Windows. I was there and he mentioned it a couple of times. When the special warrant came forward, I think it was for \$3.6 million — I don't have that number right in front of me — but certainly there was not \$16 million worth. He talked specifically about additional funding for the Yukon Housing Corporation, and there has been a lot of concern expressed by Yukoners recently about there being no funds left in the Yukon Housing Corporation. We started this fiscal year on April 1 and by April 22, Yukoners — including constituents who were phoning and e-mailing me — are being told that this year's money is gone. There is no more money this year. In Question Period, the minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation was asking questions of this side regarding what departments would we cut. Would it be Education spending or Health spending in order to actually provide the additional funding?

I guess what I would suggest is we're not suggesting that any departments be cut. The minister has indicated that there is still some \$150 million or \$151 million in surplus accumulated net financial resources available. So we don't believe — if we're talking about stimulus and if we're talking about needed programs — that anything needs to be cut. The Premier could simply put more money into the mortgage financing loans or provide the funding for his minister to do so and the owner-build loans and the home-completion loans, because we notice in this year's estimates that — not comparing mains to mains, but in terms of last year's forecast — it's significantly down — percentages of 40 some or 50 some budgeted this year for a total of \$7 million in those two programs versus what was forecast for last year, including additional monies that were put in.

The Premier made that announcement. If there are going to be additional funds put in, let's do it when people still have the opportunity to get started on their building projects. There are people who want to build in Mount Sima and in Whitehorse Copper and they were told, when the money was running out in the previous fiscal year, there would be more funds in the new year. Now they are being told that there was a list and all the funds for the current fiscal year have been attributed to projects, to particular loans and they have no way of knowing if there will be any more.

I have an overall fiscal question I would ask of the Premier. When everything was said and done and with the adjustments we've seen to date, we are down to a \$2.6-million surplus on a just under \$914-million budget from last year. It is not this year's billion-dollar budget, although perhaps it will head that way. Is it that the Premier didn't want to put any more money into this supplementary budget and has made that available in the last fiscal year for people who were counting on these loans? Is it because he was only \$2.6 million from not being able to say it was his sixth or seventh surplus budget? That would be very unfortunate, Mr. Chair, if Yukoners, who were requiring these funded programs, who had engaged contractors in some cases, to build homes in this building season, now are scrambling. They've already been turned down by banks; that's why they go to the lender of last resort, the Housing Corporation. That's its mandate. Is it only so that we can maintain this mantra of how many successive surplus budgets? Because I will promise not to criticize the Premier if he wanted to put more money into last year's budget — if he had put more money into last year's budget — in order to help those people. I certainly won't criticize him if he does it in the current fiscal year. Let's get the money to the people who need it. I would suggest that putting money into those programs is real stimulus — that's real, new construction that could occur. There are people who want to build houses.

I've had one resident contact me, and she has family living with her. They've got an adult child and spouse living with them; they have a grandchild living with them, and her child was counting on being able to build a house this year and had saved up a deposit to do so, and then was told that there's no money to be loaned by the Yukon Housing Corporation.

Since the minister is so happy with the statistics, they will have more building permits issued if he actually makes the funds available to people.

Another question I'd like to ask is about the reduction in the amount for the family-focused housing — that's the building in Riverdale. Now, last year, that was being spent. We'd been told during briefings and the minister had said during debate that that money was coming from the previous northern housing trust, out of the \$17.5 million that the Government of Yukon retained when \$32.5 million was transferred to the First Nations.

Now, we've been told that this year, the funding is going to come from the new fund — the two-year sort of time-limited fund — for affordable housing, of which I believe there is \$50 million to the Government of Yukon. That raises the question: what about the previous funding? We were told it was coming

from one particular fund. If it's not, what other projects is that money going toward?

Number two, is that acceptable to Canada? This was supposed to be new projects and this was a project that was in last year's budget and announced last year and now it's being re-announced, coming from a different pool of money. So, we'd like some clarification on that and how that is going to work and if in fact the Yukon government has been told that that is approved. Or is it just their hope that it will be approved? So, I think with that, I'll give the Premier a chance to answer those questions. Particularly, firstly, we want to know: will there be more money for the Yukon Housing Corporation programs such as the announcement that was made of \$16 million at the Business After Hours? We haven't seen funding totalling an additional \$16 million. Secondly, there is the change and reduction in the amount for the family-focused housing. Finally, what is the latest projection, because we've had these books on our desks for a month and a half now, to the surplus that was last projected to be \$2.6 million for 2008-09? And I accept the Premier's challenge to debate the budget any time, any day.

If we can't get it done Monday to Thursday, let's go meet somewhere and do it on a Friday. I am sure the Premier is interested in responding to all of those questions and I eagerly look forward to hearing his responses.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I think the best approach that I can take in trying to help the member opposite even understand the budget is to point a few things out. First off, the member has now alluded to the fact — and I would remind the member that we have ministers responsible for departments and the Yukon Housing Corporation. I don't know why the member has such an aversion to allowing his colleagues to debate department by department, line by line with ministers, but there seems to be that issue. However, the member did point out that on the Yukon Housing Corporation there was a reduction, if I heard the member correctly, in the budget. We have tried on many occasions to point out to the Official Opposition that regarding budgeting and comparisons, the government has to go on a mains-to-mains basis. We do not put into the department A-base budgeting — budgets that are inclusive of one-time expenditures during the course of the fiscal year that in all likelihood are expenditures that would not be an ongoing factor.

So on a mains-to-mains basis, for the Housing Corporation for example, the member says reduction — there's no money. He's got e-mails, phone calls and all these things. I wonder how the member can explain then that, in the fiscal year of 2008-09, there was \$16,581,000 of capital investment in the Yukon Housing Corporation. Then in this fiscal year 2009-10, the capital investment in total for the Yukon Housing Corporation — \$24,413,000 — a 47-percent increase. I'm not sure how the member comes up with or draws his conclusions, because it certainly isn't reflected in any budget document that the government has. I'm quite positive we haven't tabled different documents for the opposition than we have on the government side. They would be the same documents; they're the same budget.

The member went on to say that it would have been nice, when he was referring to lapsed monies and revotes and so on

— and, by the way, Mr. Chair, it is basically a standard procedure that capital projects do not always get completed in the year they are commenced or even in a second year and sometimes, depending on the scope and size of the project, into the third year. So there are always going to be lapses and revotes. If the member wants to look at the historical factors, I think the member will be quite shocked by the consistency of that fact.

But in that dissertation of lapses and the misunderstanding by the Leader of the Official Opposition on how projects actually get constructed and that they just don't end because a fiscal year ends — that would be interesting, being able to build things in that manner — and many projects are also seasonal and must wait for the next season again. The member alluded to the fact that we sure could have used that extra investment in the Yukon. I'm assuming now that the member was referring to points made earlier by the Official Opposition before we tabled this massive budget of \$1 billion plus — a record budget.

Before that, the member was really emphasizing the fact in the Yukon that we were in an economic crisis. So it makes sense, then, to the government side and to myself, when the member refers to lapsed funds, and how they sure could have been used in the previous fiscal year, 2008-09, because in the member's mind, there was this terrible economic crisis in the Yukon.

I'd like to take the member back to some statistics that I think are quite important. So this is to help the member recognize what's really going on in the Yukon. I would like to encourage the member to maybe explain to Yukoners how it is that the view of an economic crisis fits with the fact that in 2008, the Yukon's GDP totalled \$1.527 billion, a growth of 5.2 percent, second only in Canada — second only in Canada. The Canadian GDP growth overall was 0.5 percent.

So the government side is really trying to understand in the spirit and the context of constructive debate where the Leader of the Official Opposition draws these conclusions from.

It goes on, Mr. Chair. Yukon experienced, in corporate profits — and I would encourage the member to recognize or understand what corporate profits mean to a region's or jurisdiction's economy — saw an 84-percent increase in the year of 2008. I think, Mr. Chair, we have a fundamental problem in being able to debate with the Leader of the Official Opposition. That is why I encourage the member and the leader to allow for ministers on a department-by-department debate to engage, because it would be much more productive and expeditious in dealing with the public's business.

We are talking once again about Yukon Housing Corporation and yes, there was a special warrant for some \$2.8 million that the government proceeded with, and it certainly assisted Yukon Housing Corporation. There was also an announcement — and I know the member was there, of \$16,000 of cash transfer to the Yukon Housing Corporation to meet their budgetary requirements.

Therefore, there was a significant investment for Yukon Housing Corporation last year. And as I pointed out, another significant investment for the Yukon Housing Corporation this year of a 47-percent increase in capital. So there's no question here of lack of funds. There has been a steady increase by this

government in investments across the corporate structure of government.

Now, the member pointed out something else that is very confusing on how the member views budgeting, suggesting that we have somehow reduced the investment to Yukon Housing Corporation to maintain a surplus. Well, the member should know that loans that go through Yukon Housing Corporation have no effect on the surplus position of government. So how can that be? How could the government be reducing allocations to Yukon Housing Corporation loan programs to maintain a surplus when, whether we increased it or reduced it, it would have no effect on the surplus position anyway?

You see, Mr. Chair, there is a problem in being able to debate the budget with the Leader of the Official Opposition. So we will continue to try to help the Leader of the Official Opposition understand budgeting, public sector accounting guidelines and all that we must do in our budgeting process — the investments being made, how these investments are relative to the plan and the vision of the Yukon Party government for the territory. We've certainly been experiencing some very positive results over time. We're very encouraged by those results. We know there is lots of work yet to do. We are certainly up to the task of continuing to do that work. We are indeed building Yukon's future — socially, economically, fiscally — and that's an important part of the fabric of our territory and indeed, we will be making a very positive impact on what we do today in terms of where the Yukon will be into the future.

In mentioning things like relationships and agreements with Canada, the member asked whether we are meeting the conditions and requirements of the federal government — of course. If we don't, then we will not be eligible. We must always meet those terms and conditions, and that's exactly how this government conducts itself.

The Leader of the Official Opposition is fixated on general debate, so I'm now going to attempt to make a point for the member as it relates to the budget. General debate is fine to a certain level for discussing and debating generalities, but the real issues are in the departments, because that's where the spending authority has been provided, and that is where the investments are flowing from, and that is where the positive impacts that the Yukon is experiencing stem from, and that is where the debate is the most constructive and most meaningful.

I hope this will enlighten the Leader of the Official Opposition — it gives the members an opportunity to berate, criticize, and suggest to the government matters that they believe are wrong. General debate, frankly, serves very little purpose other than providing the member opposite an opportunity to express his views and opinions of budgeting that are, in fact, inconsistent with even the budget documents tabled before us.

Let's look for example, at the main estimates. I can't understand why the member opposite doesn't see value in the member's critics for the Department of Community Services debating \$122.8 million. That is pretty significant. That is a sizable investment in stimulus in the Yukon Territory because it has, to a great degree investments, in infrastructure, in communities —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: Mr. Mitchell, on a point of order.

Mr. Mitchell: I did certainly respond to comments that the Premier made on —

Chair's ruling

Chair: Order please. There is no point of order.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: Mr. Mitchell, on a point of order. Please, if you are going to mention a point of order, please read the point of order before you continue.

Mr. Mitchell: Yes. The point of order is that we should be debating —

Point of order

Chair: Order please. There is no point of order.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If this helps the Leader of the Official Opposition, the supplementary budget providing those start numbers for 2009-10 is very important, but the comparisons we're making now are in the context of debate, and what would serve the public better.

Community Services, I touched on. The Department of Education — \$128 million. Health and Social Services — \$238 million. Highways and Public Works — another \$194 million. These are just examples of what the government has brought forward based on the fiscal management of six prior years, year-end surpluses, and our fiscal strength and capacity going forward. So general debate is one thing, but it's the members opposite who manage their time. We've witnessed, on many occasions, time not well managed when there could have been department debates and line-by-line debates on what is a significant investment in the Yukon and its future.

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Chair: Order.

Mr. Mitchell: Standing Order 19(b)(i): "speaks to matters other than the question under discussion," which is Bill No. 13, and the member headed straight to Bill No. 15, and that's what I was trying to say.

Chair's ruling

Chair: When members are discussing a budget bill like Bill No. 13 and are speaking generally about the finances and overall issues encompassed by the Government of Yukon, it is allowed, because we are on general debate on a budget bill, which is Bill No. 13.

Mr. Fentie.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Thank you, Mr. Chair. You see, I'll make the point. Here's the Leader of the Official Opposition's problem: if the member would go department-by-department in debate, then this problem would not be affecting the member so adversely, because the opposition then could engage in matters that are strictly adhered to in a department by department de-

bate. We are in general debate, so the member will have to bear with me because I will speak in generalities.

Mr. Chair, the issue for the member opposite —

Chair: Order please. Seeing the time, the Chair will rise and report progress.

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order.

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

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 15, *First Appropriation Act, 2009-10*, and directed me to report progress on it.

Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has also considered Bill No. 13, *Third Appropriation Act, 2008-09*, and directed me to report progress on it.

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

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried. The time being 5:30 p.m., this House now stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:32 p.m.