

**Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, March 31, 2010 — 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 the right to vote for Canada's status Indians

Hon. Mr. Fentie: On behalf of the Yukon Legislative Assembly, I rise today to pay tribute and to recognize the 50th anniversary of the right to vote for Canada's status Indians. On March 10, 1960, the House of Commons gave support to this initiative. Then on March 31, 1960, royal assent was given to the bills passed by the House of Commons and the Senate. The initiative was put forward by the Rt. Hon. John Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada, who wanted to extend the franchise to all aboriginal people in Canada. This decision followed a very impassioned speech by Yukon's MP, Mr. Erik Nielsen, to the House of Parliament. Diefenbaker also appointed the first aboriginal person in Canada to be a senator, Senator Mr. James Gladstone, a member of the Blood Tribe of Alberta. It was not until 1968 that a First Nation person was elected to the House of Commons, Mr. Len Marchand.

Until 1960, Indian persons who wanted to vote had to give up their status under the *Indian Act* — clearly a form of discrimination this country could no longer tolerate. Interestingly, at that time, both Inuit and Métis had voting rights, because they were not recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act*. These changes were made around the same time that Prime Minister Diefenbaker put before Parliament a Bill of Rights for all Canadians, which also became law and is a precursor to the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that we experience today.

Great changes in the United States were also taking place at this time through the civil rights movement for African Americans. These changes for the better certainly did not happen all at once. In December 1948, Canada signed the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and this prompted Canada to re-examine its treatment of our first peoples, many of whom had served with distinction in two world wars. In 1951, changes were made to the *Indian Act* that removed the ban on aboriginal ceremonies, including potlatches and pow wows. Since those historic days, we have come a long way in this country, including right here in the Yukon. Today, it is commonplace for First Nation people to participate in the electoral process by voting, running for office, getting elected to the Legislative Assembly, and governing as members of Cabinet. We all recognize that our society and our government

is the better for it and today we look back and thank those who took those steps forward and made important changes take place so many years ago. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In recognition of Aboriginal Languages Day and Aboriginal Languages Month

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I rise to pay tribute to Aboriginal Languages Day and Aboriginal Languages Month. In 1989, the Assembly of First Nations resolved that First Nations set aside March 31 as National Aboriginal Languages Day. This recognition at the national level was an acknowledgement of the critical importance of language in the preservation of culture of Canada's many and diverse First Nations.

We continue to recognize that importance and acknowledge the work of many people and organizations that have strived to revitalize Yukon aboriginal languages. The diversity is rich in Yukon alone. There are eight First Nation languages: Gwich'in, Han, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish, Tlingit and Upper Tanana.

Six years ago, a Yukon languages fluency report identified all eight Yukon First Nation languages as critically endangered. We are in the third generation of non-speakers, making it impossible for natural language transmission to occur from mother to child in the home naturally.

Yukon First Nations determined that actions within their own individual governments and communities would remove barriers to language programming in the communities and lead to a revitalization of those languages. On April 1, 2008, the majority of Yukon self-governing First Nations assumed responsibility for Yukon aboriginal languages. Yukon continues to maintain and enhance aboriginal language programming through public school initiatives and ongoing programming.

In 2009-10, the Department of Education is contributing a total of \$2.872 million to provide the Yukon First Nations second-language programs. Also, through the Department of Education we provide funding annually for the operation of the Yukon Native Language Centre at Yukon College. The northern strategy fund has provided \$2.5 million for a language revitalization program that is being managed by the Self-Government Secretariat.

We believe that the diversity of languages brings richness to our cultural heritage that we cannot afford to lose. Yukon will continue to support the efforts of Yukon First Nations as they assume their rightful responsibility for language revitalization. Thank you.

Mr. Elias: Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of the Official Opposition to pay tribute to National Aboriginal Languages Day and Aboriginal Languages Month. This day, March 31, was established as National Aboriginal Languages Day by a Special Chiefs Assembly on education.

I am pleased that aboriginal languages are recognized as they are the first languages of our country. Language is one of the most tangible symbols of a culture and a group identity, but many aboriginal languages are rapidly disappearing and we must preserve them before extinction is a further reality.

If these languages vanish, they take with them unique ways of looking at the world — a precious heritage, a land-

based identity found nowhere else in the world. Aboriginal languages are an essential part of Yukon's rich history. We have eight First Nation linguistic groupings and 14 Yukon First Nations. The preservation of the ancient aboriginal languages of the Gwich'in, the Tlingit, the Kaska, the Han, Tagish, Northern and Southern Tutchone, and Upper Tanana is important. The Yukon *Languages Act* states in section 1(3): "The Yukon recognizes the significance of aboriginal languages in the Yukon and wishes to take appropriate measures to preserve, develop, and enhance those languages in the Yukon."

I believe it's going to take a commitment from each individual, each family, each community, each First Nation and all levels of government to ensure the aboriginal languages survive in this great territory of ours.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our many elders for having kept our history alive through language, oral history and tradition, and for encouraging our children to learn them before the language of our ancestors becomes extinct. I encourage everyone to preserve and enhance our aboriginal languages, including our own Yukon First Nation people, striving to learn at least one word a day in our individual aboriginal languages. Thank you.

Mr. Cardiff: I rise on behalf of the NDP caucus to pay tribute to this Aboriginal Languages Day, which was established in Canada by a Special Chiefs Assembly on education.

Every 14 days, a language dies. The rate of decline and disappearance of languages has accelerated in recent years, due in part to globalization of economics and the use of electronic media, which has made English the means of communication in much of the world. By the year 2100, more than half of the languages now spoken on Earth may disappear. Many of them have not yet been recorded. You might ask why this is important. After all, we live in a rapidly changing world and languages are altered along with everything else in response to those changes. New vocabulary and concepts are added to the world's languages, old ones become history and some languages are lost in the process. Why should we care? We should care because language defines a culture; language is the culture. The expression of a person's thinking patterns, values and actions are the culture. Without the structure and parameters of the concepts in the original language, a second language is not able to exactly translate another culture's practices or ideas. They're often misinterpreted or not understood. In our multi-cultural world, this could lead to disaster.

Further, many of the endangered languages, particularly aboriginal languages, are unwritten. The stories, the songs and the history, which are passed on to the next generation orally, are lost forever when the last speaker dies. Much of our knowledge of nature has come from aboriginal groups whose languages are oral. We are only beginning to treasure the environmental understanding and conservation practices of our aboriginal people. Their insights into the use of local lands, plants, animals and ecosystems are invaluable for everyone, especially in this time of climate change.

Aboriginal languages have suffered greatly in our society. One of the most shocking acts of destruction to languages was

through residential schools, which systematically attempted to eliminate the use of aboriginal languages. The result of forcing a foreign language and culture on aboriginal children has been devastating, not only to First Nations, but to society as a whole.

The United Nations has adopted a *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which includes language rights. Only Canada, New Zealand and the United States have not ratified this declaration. It is now time to commit ourselves to the principles in the declaration and to ensure that aboriginal languages survive and thrive.

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

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, I'd ask members of our Assembly to join me in welcoming guests from Vanier Catholic Secondary School. In attendance today, we have teacher Mr. Jud Deuling and the students from the grades 11 and 12 history program. Welcome.

Applause

Mr. McRobb: I would like all members to join me in welcoming former MLA and minister, Art Webster.

Applause

Speaker: Are there any further introductions of visitors?

Returns or documents for tabling.

Any reports of committees?

Any petitions?

Any bills to be introduced?

Any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to ensure that Yukoners who live in rural communities have access to acute health care facilities in their regions, through the construction of hospitals in communities such as Dawson City and Watson Lake.

Speaker: Are there further notices of motion?
Ministerial statements.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Porcupine caribou harvest management plan

Hon. Mr. Edzerza: I rise today to advise the House that the Government of Yukon is prepared to sign the harvest management plan for the Porcupine caribou herd. This is really great news, and I would like to acknowledge the previous ministers and the department officials for all their hard work.

Signing this plan will allow all governments — aboriginal, territorial and federal — to work together in managing the Porcupine caribou herd wisely and for the future.

The harvest management plan binds all eight Canadian managing partners to roles that will help stabilize, if not increase, the herd's population. The plan provides all parties with certainty about how we go forward.

The Government of Yukon recognizes the importance of the iconic wildlife population to all Yukoners. We know the public wants the Porcupine caribou herd to be healthy and strong. We know harvesters want to be able to sustain themselves without compromising the herd's well-being.

The Government of Yukon is pleased we are able to fulfill the commitment made in January to reach agreement with the other parties on a harvest management plan. Once all parties have signed, and the plan is ready for implementation, the Yukon government will revisit the interim conservation measures we put in place last fall.

I commend the leadership shown by all parties to the *Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement* — the Vuntut Gwitchin, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the Na Cho Nyäk Dun, and the Inuvialuit Game Council, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Canada.

The harvest management plan calls for different measures, depending on the size of the herd and whether it is growing or shrinking. The parties have some work to do still. First, they must work out an implementation plan and, as part of that work, they must develop a rigorous and verifiable system for reporting. For its part, the Yukon government will be developing the regulatory regime needed to support the new harvest management plan and we will, of course, be consulting with First Nations and the public on the proposed rules.

Today, however, let us focus on the good work that has been done in the common cause that unites all of us: the continued well-being of the Porcupine caribou herd.

Mr. Elias: I must say that I am pleased to hear the minister's statement today regarding the Porcupine caribou herd harvest management plan. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Premier and the former Minister of Environment for their work on this file. I also would like to thank all the parties to the *Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement*, especially the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and the Department of Environment Yukon officials — you know who you are.

Out of the 13 Arctic barren ground caribou herds in Canada, 10 are in decline or experiencing decimated populations. Two herds have unknown populations because of their remote isolation, and only one herd is increasing in numbers. These are some sobering facts. Harvesting pressure on the Porcupine caribou herd is increasing and the population is decreasing. As far as I'm concerned, alarm bells should be going off.

In January of this year, chiefs, premiers and ministers from the Yukon and Northwest Territories met in Whitehorse. This was the first time in decades that the principals to the *Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement* met — the situation was that serious to come up with an approved harvest management plan for the Porcupine caribou herd. I am very encouraged to hear that an amicable compromise has been reached among the

parties and that certainty has been reached, which is an important factor in all of this moving forward.

Joe Linklater, Chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin, is absolutely correct when he says, and I quote: "With aboriginal rights comes responsibility" and it's the responsibility of the people who exercise those rights to do so with appropriate restraint and participation in collecting the necessary data to ensure that the future generations continue to actually have a right to exercise.

Mr. Speaker, many Yukoners are proud of the fact that we have such a wonderful resource within the boundaries of our territory, and I believe Yukoners want to see leadership on this issue. This is not about politics; it's about healthy northern ecosystems. It's about cultural preservation and survival. It's about the intrinsic value of knowing that we have a treasure that is alive and well in our territory.

The Porcupine caribou herd is the lifeblood of our community of Old Crow and is much more than just food to us. Our cultural and spiritual survival depends on the herd. It's a belonging that defies English words. The herd is all we have. If the Porcupine caribou herd population is allowed to crash, it will be the Vuntut Gwitchin and the community of Old Crow who will suffer the most.

I would like to finish my comments by quoting a former chief and member of this Legislative Assembly, Mr. Johnny Abel. He said, "I sure don't want to see our kids one or two hundred years from now reading about our caribou in storybooks and about how we used to live."

With that, I will be watching the implementation of the harvest management plan for the Porcupine caribou herd with great interest. I would also encourage the current Minister of Environment to always have a plan B in his back pocket when it comes to the conservation and protection of the Porcupine caribou herd.

Thank you for your time today.

Mr. Cardiff: We, too, in the NDP caucus are very pleased to see this today. We're glad to hear that the government is signing on to this agreement. We, too, would like to thank all those who have worked hard to achieve this, though we understand there are other parties who have not signed on to this yet. We hope they will do that soon.

Maybe the minister, in his closing remarks, can shed some light on exactly what this harvest management plan means, what, if any, impediments there are, and how the Yukon government intends to proceed in caring for the health of the herd in the absence — if it ends up that there isn't an all-party agreement to this plan.

The existence of large migratory herds like the Porcupine caribou herd is under threat from many sources: climate change, unsustainable hunting practices, resource extraction and human development. There are fewer and fewer examples of these massive wildlife populations in the world and, if we don't thoughtfully manage, monitor and enforce a plan to preserve them, they will be a casualty, like so many others.

The continued well-being of the Porcupine caribou herd requires continued pressure on the U.S. and Alaskan govern-

ments because a decision to drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge or to ramp up mining and other resource extraction activity in other critical areas will undermine any plan that we have, no matter how thoughtful it is.

Now we mustn't blame everything on the Americans, of course. In the Yukon, we have to make choices about development as well. Is everything open for development? Should every square inch of land be open to staking? You cannot preserve all animal habitats while at the same time opening everything to resource development. We must make choices here in our own backyard about things like the winter range of the Porcupine caribou herd.

In closing, once again, we're pleased that the government is signing this plan. We encourage the government to do what must be done to preserve the herd and all ecosystems throughout the territory. Once again, I'd like to thank all the people who have worked hard on this issue, not the least of which would be the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

Hon Mr. Edzerza: I want to thank the members opposite for their comments and if need be, the fallback plan will be the status quo. This is a historic milestone for the Porcupine caribou herd's protection. Now it is up to all stakeholders to do their part to uphold this agreement and give it life. I am confident we will do our part as human beings and ensure the existence of this caribou herd for many generations to come. To be proactive, and to reactive is surely the way to go.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: Prior to proceeding in Question Period, the Chair would rule on a point of order raised by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Yesterday, during Question Period, the Member for Porter Creek South questioned the Minister of Environment regarding the protection of McIntyre Creek. In his response, the Minister of Environment said he had "respect for all people involved" in this process and suggested that the Member for Porter Creek South did not. He then said of the Member for Porter Creek South, "I'm getting every indication that he would be very likely to ignore all other governments and do just as one pleases."

The Leader of the Official Opposition then rose on a point of order, citing Standing Order 19(g), and said the minister had impugned the motives of opposition members and "what members on this side of the House would do were we to be in government."

The Chair does not believe the Minister of Environment violated Standing Order 19(g) because his comments amounted to speculation as to what the Member for Porter Creek South might do at some unspecified point in the future, rather than impugning his motive for taking a certain action.

That being said, the Chair does find that the comments by the Minister of Environment tended to personalize the proceedings in Question Period. This is something the Chair has ruled out of order in the past. The Chair would like to take this opportunity now to reiterate the need to avoid personalizing our proceedings.

The comment by the Minister of Environment was not an isolated one. The Chair has noticed an unwelcome trend since the House reconvened last Thursday. Members are taking the liberty to comment on the positions held, or allegedly held, by other members. They are also freely speculating about what other members might do at some point in the future. Whenever members do this their characterizations of other members are not flattering.

The Chair would caution members against continuing in this vein. We are early in the sitting and there is ample time to reverse this trend.

The Chair will conclude this ruling by reminding the members of the meeting the Chair had with the three party leaders on November 26, 2008. The following day, the Chair gave a statement to this House with regard to that meeting. At that time the Chair said, "the leaders informed the Chair that they had reached a consensus that they, and all members of their respective caucuses, will rededicate themselves to their commitment to raise the level of order and decorum in this House. It is a fundamental principle of parliamentary debate that members should treat each other as honourable at all times. The Chair appreciates that this is not always easy for members. They are committed to improving the lives of Yukoners. They are also committed to the positions they hold on the important issues that face our territory. Often these positions are in conflict, which can lead to unparliamentary behaviour as members passionately and enthusiastically debate the bills and motions before them. However, the passion and enthusiasm members have for their own views cannot justify treating other members, who hold differing views, with disrespect."

I would ask all members to keep this in mind as we proceed with the business of this Assembly. We will now proceed to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Health care costs

Mr. Mitchell: I have a question for the Minister of Finance about a statement that was included on page 5 of the budget speech. The minister said Yukoners want to see, "some carefully planned private user fee health care services."

I haven't met a Yukoner who wants to pay more for health care and the only Yukoners I know who support private health care are members of the Yukon Party. However, if the Premier thinks the public is behind him on this issue, then he will proceed. The reason the government is looking at user fees and bringing in private health care services is because the government is broke. The government is looking for ways to raise money and the next target is people who use the health care system.

Can the Premier tell Yukoners which services Yukoners will be paying more for, and which services is the Premier looking to privatize?

Hon. Mr. Hart: For the member opposite, as I've indicated in this House before with regard to health care services, we are not planning to increase any expenses or fees with regard to health care in this ensuing budget. In fact, we are increasing our support for all services throughout health care and

we intend to provide the best health care in Canada for all Yukoners.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, the Premier was quite clear in his speech that Yukoners should prepare themselves for new and higher user fees in health care and the introduction of private health care services in the Yukon. These are the Premier's words. We know the government is broke. That is clear from reading the budget, and now Yukoners are going to be asked to help cover the cost of the Premier's reckless spending decisions.

A report the Premier commissioned came up with a list of higher taxes or user fees people could pay for health care services. They range from higher fees for long-term care facilities to higher prices for chronic disease and pharmacare, and the largest one was a health care premium that all Yukoners would pay. The report suggested \$54 a month per person and \$108 a month for a family of three or more.

The Premier said in his speech that Yukoners want to see user fee health care services. Which one of these fees is the Premier going to introduce and how much revenue will it generate?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: It should come as no surprise that the government side emphatically disagrees with the member's opinion. I would hope that the member, by now, after a number of days of being in possession of the budget documents, after budget lock-up and after a briefing by the Department of Finance, would recognize that in the budget there are no fee increases for health care. I think if the member would reflect on those areas of fact, the member would see clearly that his opinion and statements today are indeed incorrect.

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, let me quote from the budget, "Yukoners want to see...". There is a long list of things apparently we want to see, and then, "private user fee health care services". This is the exact opposite of what he told this House a year ago when I asked the same question, and he said, "Is the government intending to raise fees? No." A year later and the Premier has flip-flopped and the budget speech confirms the government is now forging ahead to plan new user fees for health care. Support for a public health care system is almost universal in our country and in the Yukon, yet the Premier, because the government is running out of money, is looking for revenue, and raising fees and taxes for health care is where he has set his sights. Again, for the Premier or the Health minister, what services will Yukoners be paying more fees for and what services are heading for privatization?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Mr. Speaker, once again, it is very difficult to be able to even answer a question from the Leader of the Official Opposition, because the question has no basis in what is before us today with once again the largest budget in the history of the Yukon Territory.

By the way, the budget includes own-source revenues that come from, actually, a reduction of taxation, which we've been applying as a government for some time. To be competitive, Mr. Speaker, income tax-wise, corporate tax-wise —

By the way, the budget does include an increase in tobacco taxes and we freely admit that. That was an agreement unanimously achieved right here in this House, but other than that

there are no fee increases in this budget and there are no moves to privatize the health care system in today's Yukon. In fact, the members opposite have great issue with investing in enhancing our publicly funded universal health care system in the Yukon. In fact, they oppose it. They oppose the building of hospitals in communities like Watson Lake and Dawson City. If the member suggests that the government's broke and is privatizing health care, could the member please point to it in the budget?

Question re: Elevator maintenance contract

Mr. Mitchell: The government is broke and it is putting the health and safety of Yukoners at risk trying to hide that fact. Yukon government elevators and handicap lifts — more than 35 in all — require regular monthly maintenance to ensure that they are safe to use. This maintenance is essential for making sure people don't get trapped or hurt — or worse — when in government buildings.

Six weeks ago, the contract for elevator maintenance was terminated. The company was told to cancel all preventive safety work and that they would only be called if something went wrong. Why did the government cancel this contract?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I'm sure there's a reason for that if, in fact, what the member says is true. I will look into it in the department and, if it needs clarification, I will send him communications.

Mr. Mitchell: The government's actions could have endangered the health of its workers, its clients and, most shamefully, the seniors and disabled citizens who rely on elevators and handicap lifts. Just to save a few bucks when it has already a \$23-million deficit, it held firm to its decision to cancel this essential safety maintenance.

The professional responsible for the maintenance, employed by a private company contracted by the government, had more integrity and commitment to safe practices than this government does. He kept coming in to perform these essential precautions.

When the government found out he was still ensuring the safety of the elevators, he was told to leave, to stay out of government buildings and to not expect payment for his work. This has happened not three weeks ago in this very building.

How can the minister justify putting Yukoners at risk to save a few bucks?

Hon. Mr. Lang: We all know about what the leader of the opposition says in here — sometimes it has some issues. I addressed it in my last answer. I will get to the bottom of it. We understand that it's a big concern to the Leader of the Opposition and to all Yukoners. I said to the member opposite that I would talk to the powers that be, get the explanation — if in fact what that member says about it is factual — we will get back to the member opposite with the response from the government.

Mr. Mitchell: We have \$23 million worth of evidence that this government cannot manage the public's money, so maybe it's a matter of priorities. At the same time that Yukoners were using elevators and handicap lifts that weren't being maintained to safety standards, this government ordered renovations to a Cabinet minister's office. Public money was spent

installing a sink in the Cabinet minister's office, to save the minister the trouble of walking down the hall like everyone else. It must be nice for the minister to have his own personal vanity, but I don't think Yukoners would agree with this government's spending priorities. Why is it more important for a Cabinet minister to be able to wash his hands in private, than it is for Yukoners to be kept safe?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: I think the member opposite has lost his way. You know, in looking at the budget speech, it's clear that what the member has said here on the floor of the Legislature is an incorrect interpretation of what the speech says. In fact, it's merely referring to the recommendations that came out of the health care report. But the government hasn't commenced with user fees of any sort, nor has the government raised taxes.

Secondly, the member has said the government's broke. Well, this government — this side of the House — will conduct its financial management based on all factors, not one estimate. So if the member opposite was in charge of the finances of the Yukon, this would be a lost cause, because the member, as he has stated, thinks the Yukon is broke, when in fact the Yukon has millions upon millions of dollars available to it to pay for the programs and services that Yukoners need and require. Mr. Speaker, we once again have tabled the largest budget in the history of the Yukon and we are investing in infrastructure and stimulating the Yukon economy, and at the same time, Mr. Speaker, we have a healthy net financial resource position — in the black — to be able to pay our way into the future.

Question re: Health care costs

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, the numbers game this government is playing with the public purse has led the territory into deficit spending and long-term debt. The Premier is in denial and is denying the likely deficit they will run up in the 2010-11 fiscal year.

Last fiscal year, the government originally budgeted \$230 million for the Department of Health and Social Services. They ended up spending \$248 million — \$18 million more than they had originally budgeted. This year, once again, they budgeted \$230 million. My question to the Minister of Health and Social Services: is this number realistic and does it mean that the Department of Health and Social Services will be cutting programs or staff in order to keep on budget?

Hon. Mr. Hart: It is not our intention to cut any expenditures in Health and Social Services. We intend to provide those services as provided in the past and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, this government's lack of planning combined with an addiction to expensive projects is putting the Yukon Territory on the fiscal razor's edge. Nowhere is that more acute than when it comes to the future of health care in the Yukon. The government conducted the *Yukon Health Care Review* and asked Yukon people to contribute their thoughts on the future of our public health care system.

But before the consultation period had even ended and Yukoners had a chance to have their voices heard, the government announced a second regional hospital in Dawson and basically a commitment of \$50 million to build two regional hos-

pitals. Here's the catch: the government told the Yukon Hospital Corporation to borrow the money to pay for the government's expensive promises, even though the corporation does not generate much revenue. In fact, 90 percent of the expenses of the corporation are covered by government.

How much will taxpayers be on the hook for and what impact will this borrowing have on the Health and Social Services budget?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: The member of the Third Party is actually implying that the Yukon has never been in debt. Well let me take the member back to the days of an NDP government. In fact, debt is not new here in the Yukon, and we pay for investments on an ongoing basis. Let me just use an example.

In the last NDP government under Tony Penikett, the total Yukon government debt was \$88 million. That represented 26 percent of the total budget of the day. In those dollars of the day, if you compare them to today's dollar, that was a range of \$160 million to \$230 million. In fact, the debt servicing for that in those days was likely larger than what we're doing today.

Furthermore, the NDP invested in what? Failed enterprises — sawmills, Totem Oil. This government is investing in Yukoners. We are building hospitals to meet the health care needs. We are investing in hydro, green energy to provide affordable electricity to Yukoners and reduce our carbon footprint. We'll stand on our decisions.

Mr. Cardiff: Let the record show that the Premier did not answer the question about not listening to what Yukoners said and giving a chance for their voices to be heard in decisions about health care. Being fiscally responsible when it comes to building new capital projects means that you have to take into account the O&M costs for new facilities.

The chair of the Yukon Hospital Corporation said the two new regional hospitals would cost between \$8 million and \$9 million a year to operate. This amount would be at least double what the government is currently spending. The Premier has denied this outright. If the chair is correct, there is an extra \$4 million on the books every year in perpetuity in the Department of Health and Social Services.

Can the minister tell us if the anticipated O&M budget for the two regional hospitals — if that is what the budget is for the two regional hospitals — and if so, what impact is that going to have on the health care budget in the long term?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: You know, the issue really is this: the members opposite oppose the building of hospital facilities in two rural Yukon communities. The members opposite oppose delivering an enhanced, improved health care service to citizens of the territory. The members, if you take their logic, would support sending Yukoners far from home to receive the health care that this government and the Hospital Corporation of the day are going to provide them right here at home.

This government stands on its decisions. We support the Yukon Hospital Corporation for taking its full mandate and applying it on behalf of Yukoners to ensure that we provide the best health care services we possibly can in this territory. We're not investing in sawmills — failed enterprises. We're investing in Yukoners' future and their health care.

Question re: Territorial health access fund

Mr. Cathers: I'd like to begin today by again commending the Minister of Health and Social Services and officials for their success in negotiating an extension to federal health funding. The territorial health access fund, or THAF, has played a key role in enabling the Yukon to provide health services and enhanced local capacity.

The THAF spending plan was set to end today when the original agreement ended. The government has not yet clarified if the successor agreement will support the programs funded under THAF or if there will be changes. The majority of the THAF dollars were used to fund the health human resource strategy with its programs, including bursaries for Yukon students training to be doctors, nurses and other health care professionals, incentives to encourage physicians to move to the Yukon, and initiatives supporting increased collaboration between health care professionals.

Will the Minister of Health and Social Services please confirm that the health human resource strategy will continue to be funded in the fiscal year that begins tomorrow?

Hon. Mr. Hart: The territorial health system initiative was commenced back in 2005 when the government provided the territories a five-year targeted fund to facilitate the transformation of territorial health systems to ensure greater responsiveness to northerners' needs and to improve community level access of services. Budget 2010-11 temporarily extends the supplementary period, as the member opposite indicated, to 2012. That was just confirmed in the recent national budget earlier this month and we are currently working with the other two jurisdictions on just exactly how the funding is going to take place. We're working with the federal government and the Department of Health on how that funding will be attributed to the northern territories.

Mr. Cathers: I thank the minister for that answer and I would then take this opportunity to encourage him in finalizing those plans to ensure that the health human resource strategy continues to be funded and to make that announcement as expeditiously as is possible.

Other valuable programs that were funded by the territorial health access fund include the 811 Yukon health line, the satellite specialist clinic, the diabetes collaborative and chronic disease collaborative, the palliative care program and mental health services provided in communities and through the telehealth network. Will the Minister of Health and Social Services please confirm that these important programs that were supported by THAF will continue to be supported by the department?

Hon. Mr. Hart: For the member opposite, as I indicated, we are in discussions with Health Canada and the federal government with regard to the THAF funding, and we are looking at all aspects of the funding and programs that were provided previously under THAF to ensure that we can provide the best possible services to all Yukoners.

Mr. Cathers: I thank the minister for his answer that work is underway.

I would remind him that some of the initiatives that I outlined — including the diabetes collaborative, chronic disease

collaborative, palliative health care program, mental health — are ongoing initiatives that are operating right now. I'm assuming there will be no disruption in service when tomorrow begins. Would the minister please confirm that any of these ongoing programs that are not cyclical in the year, such as bursaries are, of course, will indeed be operational tomorrow morning?

Hon. Mr. Hart: There will be no April Fool's Day for tomorrow. Business will continue as usual.

Question re: Dawson City sewage treatment

Mr. McRobb: I have a question for the new Cabinet commissioner for the Department of Highways and Public Works. I know the commissioner is anxious to answer questions about his new responsibilities, so let's start with a project in his Klondike riding.

Last summer, the commissioner was part of a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Dawson sewage treatment project, estimated at \$24.8 million. Eight months later, the cost of the project is \$34.3 million, according to the budget tabled last Thursday. Part of the increase is due to the addition of a district heating system, estimated at \$4.5 million. After doing the math, there is an unaccounted-for increase of \$5 million. Can the commissioner explain why this project is now overbudget by \$5 million?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the member opposite, I remind the member opposite that this is a court-driven process. We're working in partnership with the City of Dawson on a court-ordered request on the new waste-water treatment centre. Of course this government is working. The contract has been let. It's work in progress. As far as I've been informed and briefed, we're on time and on budget. Certainly, there's the added advantage of having the opportunity of putting the waste heat unit in, which will benefit the City of Dawson. I can report to the House that we have an agreement with the City of Dawson now on the new boiler system that's being put in place with the waste-water treatment plan. We're moving ahead with that. It's certainly going to be a benefit to Dawson, because it will heat the pool; it will heat the new Korbo Apartments — which should be announced in the next 10 days; it'll heat the hospital, potentially. It's going to be a big asset to the community of Dawson. Plus, it will heat the water system that they have to heat at the moment. It's on time, on budget, and we're looking forward to a closing date of late 2011-12.

Mr. McRobb: What do we have to do? Seek a court order to force this government to explain the cost overrun? Now, the Member for Klondike had lots to say about this project in his budget reply yesterday, but today he is not allowed to talk about it. Yukoners have seen this movie before. The Yukon Party government has been called on the carpet repeatedly by the Auditor General for its inability to manage large capital projects. The Watson Lake health centre is a good example. The Carmacks school is another, so is the athletes village, the Mayo recreation centre — the list goes on. We can now add the Dawson sewage project to the list. Eight months ago the price tag was about \$24.8 million. That figure is now \$34.3 million. That's a huge cost overrun, yet the project is barely underway.

Can the new Cabinet commissioner, who has responsibility for this project, explain why it is already so far overbudget?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Again, we're talking about a court-driven process here. I remind the member opposite that this is a great investment for the City of Dawson. It will benefit Dawson. I know the members opposite — it would be one of the projects they would slash, but this government is looking very positively at it. It's a go-forward plan. The contract has been let for the actual unit. The subcontractors have been put in place. There is a firm price on the actual project. We did add the waste heat element to it, but that was an investment, not only for us, but for the City of Dawson. It will create a secondary industry for the City of Dawson for producing the pellets that this unit will consume, and it will also improve Dawson's situation at an economic level, in their obligation to supply fossil fuels to heat their own domestic water.

So this is a good-news story. It doesn't matter what the member opposite says. We'll look at the budget as we go, but as far as the budget today is concerned, from the briefings I've had, it's on time and on budget.

Mr. McRobb: Well, the minister has not explained the missing \$5 million. He has talked about the addition of the district heating system and what that involves, along with the original project description. Our question is this: what is the missing \$5 million for? Let's have some accountability in here.

Now, Yukoners deserve an explanation for this cost overrun. A contract for this project was awarded in July of 2009 for \$24.8 million. Eight months later, the cost has increased to \$34.3 million. There has been no improvement during 7.5 years of Yukon Party government's time in office with respect to cost overruns on large capital projects.

Will the newly appointed Cabinet commissioner responsible for this project in his riding now explain why this project has gone so far overbudget in only eight months? I'd like to hear from the Cabinet commissioner.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I remind the member opposite that this is a court-driven process, and we're following the court's understanding on how this project will move forward. I remind the member opposite, it was only 10 years ago that the Liberal government of the day gave the City of Dawson \$10 million to do exactly what we're doing today. So I may ask the member opposite, what happened to that \$10 million?

Question re: Peel watershed land use plan

Mr. Fairclough: The public is waiting for answers from the Minister of Environment regarding where he stands on protecting the Peel, but the minister remains silent. He refuses to speak. I hold a joint letter of understanding on the Peel watershed regional land use planning process.

The Minister of Environment of the day's signature is on the agreement, but this minister refuses to speak about his department's involvement in the Peel planning process. When will the Minister of Environment stand up, speak up and have his voice heard for the environment and the Peel?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for Mayo-Tatchun for the opportunity to put forward the government's position on the Peel regional land use planning process.

As I have reminded the member a couple of times in this session so far, the Government of Yukon, in cooperation with affected First Nations, has signed a joint letter of understanding on the Peel regional land use planning process. We all recognize that the region has significant cultural, heritage and economic value and the parties are committed to continue to work collaboratively to enable the completion of the *Peel Watershed Regional Land Use Plan*.

We will work collaboratively to achieve a final plan that incorporates a variety of land use activities in a balanced manner within the Peel watershed, that also addresses the interest of the Gwich'in Tribal Council, First Nation of Na Cho Nyäk Dun, Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and Yukon government on behalf of all our citizens. I have tabled the workplan, I have tabled the schedule, and I have discussed how there will be opportunities for the public stakeholders and affected communities to offer their perspectives on the plan.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, Yukoners want to hear from the Minister of Environment, Mr. Speaker. He had a lot to say about protecting our environment before he crossed the floor and rejoined his Yukon Party government. Unfortunately, that has all changed. The Minister of Environment told the House that he supported the concept of protecting McIntyre Creek when he was a member of the opposition but things are different now that he's a minister. My, my, Mr. Speaker, how the ravens have come to roost.

The Minister of Environment needs to remove his muzzle. We want this minister to tell us if he has changed his position on the Peel, like he did on McIntyre Creek. Will he do that?

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Mr. Speaker, every day in Question Period we do have the opportunity to discuss the government's position, Cabinet decisions, and issues and areas of responsibility. Once again for the member opposite, the Peel planning process is now in a review by the affected First Nations and Government of Yukon. We put forward a timeline of how this process would be followed. I think I've been asked this question five times now, or in five different Question Periods with —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Speaker: Order please. The member is speaking.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: Often it is a challenge with the chatter coming from opposition sides. There is a certain amount of focus that is not apparent from the members opposite as the leader of the Liberal opposition decides to toss in comments off microphone, once again. This is the fifth question that the government has been asked about this. With three questions per question, I think this is about the sixteenth time. So, I'll just, if I may, say this question has been asked, and this question has been answered.

Mr. Fairclough: Well, the Minister of Environment remains silent, and Yukoners want to hear from him — not the Energy, Mines and Resources minister. Now, the new Minister of Environment wants us to believe that he is committed to the environment, but it's the same old story. The Department of Environment is a revolving door for ministerial appointments. This government continues to avoid and deny the significance of an environmental agenda. It simply appoints a new minister

to the portfolio. Now, each successive minister has been muzzled, just like this minister. This minister —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Order. Point of order. The Hon. Government House Leader.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, again, pursuant to Standing Order 19(g), the member opposite appears, once again on the floor of the Legislature, to be imputing false or unavowed motives to members on this side with his statements.

Speaker: On the point of order, Member for Kluane.

Mr. McRobb: On the point of order, there was no false or unavowed motive mentioned by the Member for Mayo-Tatchun; therefore, there is no point of order. I would further add the Government House Leader did not cite the example that pertained to the clause in the Standing Orders referred to.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: From the Chair's perspective, there is no point of order. It's a dispute among members. However, honourable members, as I said earlier today in the Speaker's ruling, we must respect each other as individuals in this House.

Member for Mayo-Tatchun.

Mr. Fairclough: The minister's voice could make a big difference right now but he has remained silent. The public expected a change with this new minister. Yukoners want to hear directly from him. When will the Minister of Environment find his voice?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Before the Hon. Premier speaks, I want to remind all Members of this Legislative Assembly that the government is a collegial body. Any member can stand up on that side and speak to any question. I would just like to reiterate that.

Hon. Premier.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Taking up on the theme of ravens, the answer is clearly available to all the members opposite. I would encourage the Member for Mayo-Tatchun to hop back to the office, pick up a copy of the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, and peck his way through chapter 11.

Unparliamentary language

Speaker: Hon. Premier, that statement could be taken by the honourable members as a personal remark. I would ask the honourable member to retract that.

Withdrawal of remark

Hon. Mr. Fentie: So be done, Mr. Speaker.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 848 — *adjourned debate*

Clerk: Motion No. 848, standing in the name of Mr. Elias; adjourned debate, Mr. Elias.

Mr. Elias: Mr. Speaker, last week at home in Old Crow at our Chief Zzeh Gittlit School, it was so wonderful for me to see the students speak Gwich'in with pride and say the Lord's Prayer in Gwich'in before we sat down to eat at the hot lunch program.

You know, Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the students speak in Gwich'in, I was encouraged and inspired, yet worried and concerned about the future because the task that lies ahead to ensure that our Yukon aboriginal languages are spoken fluently 100 years from now is serious and will be an uphill battle.

In the fall of 2004, the Yukon Party government released a study published by the Executive Council Office Aboriginal Language Services. Two reports were published at that time. One was called *Sharing the Gift of Language: A Profile of Yukon First Nation Languages*, and the second was an evaluation report, called *Hope for the Future: A Call for Strategic Action*.

In that 2004 report, it spoke about how at least two Yukon First Nation languages, the Han and Tagish languages, are in the most dire state — with only a few true speakers remaining — and are on the verge of extinction, and more languages will follow unless something is done. It also went on to report that only two out of 10 aboriginal people are learning their native language in the Yukon, mostly through informal means, such as on hunting trips in the bush and during traditional activities, instead of in the classroom.

At the time of the release of the report, a local press headline said, "Extinction Looms for Yukon Languages," and the following story included words like "shocking" and "bleak" and reported direct quotes from Yukoners that said, "If we have two generations of non-speakers, our languages are dead." That was six years ago, Mr. Speaker.

The report also mentioned that there was a lack of strategic planning between all levels of government and the First Nations. The long and short of it was that there was a call for action because our territory's aboriginal languages were dying.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke my Gwich'in language in this Assembly three months ago on December 9, 2009, and my aboriginal language is also considered endangered by the Government of Canada.

I put this motion forward because I believe our territorial public government should have a significant role in the preservation of the rich linguistic tapestry in our territory. The commission that I suggest be created by this Legislature would be comprised of four Yukon residents who are experts in language who would be appointed by each of the party leaders, and the chair by the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Government Boards and Committees. The commission would

conduct research, analysis, and a public consultation campaign about the revitalization, promotion, preservation and protection of our aboriginal languages over a period of two years and would present its findings and recommendations to this Assembly. It is a question of viewing our First Nation languages as being important to the very strength of our Yukon society now and into the future.

I believe this motion is important because it asks everyone to step back and take an analytical look at the state of the aboriginal languages in our territory, because so often the debate gets bogged down on who is doing what, who is providing what dollars, and who has responsibility for doing what — which ministry, government or organization.

Much work has been done and has been accomplished since the 2004 report from the Aboriginal Language Services. Some programs had a narrow scope and some had a broader scope. There have been many excellent language initiatives implemented by governments and other organizations around the territory, strengthening my argument for the creation of a commission on Yukon aboriginal language protection in the sense that the commission could look at what has worked in our territory, what hasn't worked in our territory, and they could look at programs or initiatives that could be expanded upon and implemented in a broader scope or in a different philosophy within our territory, and in fact, around the world.

Mr. Speaker, if this motion gets passed today and is implemented thoroughly, it will have been almost a decade since the state of our aboriginal languages was looked at by our territorial public government. I think that my proposed review of our territory's aboriginal languages can help achieve a much needed and balanced view of the field we are dealing with and the players involved.

The motion is important, as well, for its potential examination of the Yukon *Languages Act*, which is in need of review in light of current realities. It is clear that our territory's aboriginal languages are all endangered to varying degrees.

A strong cultural and linguistic fabric can only contribute to healthy, resilient Yukon communities. Language is one of the most tangible symbols of a culture and group identity. Should these languages vanish, they would take with them unique ways of looking at the world, precious heritage and a land-based identity found nowhere else in the world.

The preservation of the ancient aboriginal languages of the Gwich'in, the Tlingit, the Kaska, the Tagish, the Han, Northern and Southern Tutchone and the Upper Tanana deserve a priority amount of attention in future Yukon government budgets, as they are in danger of becoming extinct. Ownership of these languages belongs to the fluent speakers, and the speakers are becoming few and far between.

I do not view the possible work of the commission as an easy task, by any means. We have eight aboriginal languages. There are 14 Yukon First Nations that the commission will work with side by side — hopefully. We have a territorial government with various responsibilities, and the federal government also plays a role. Three months ago in this House, I spoke about the northern strategy monies that have been allocated to address some specific language concerns in our territory, like

Revitalizing Culture through Story and Technology, that was recently funded for \$345,000 and was led by the Department of Education. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the minister for his partnership and attention to these language initiatives around the territory. This initiative will be using DVD technology to produce high-quality teaching resources to introduce students to First Nation culture while reviving storytelling traditions. Another important initiative to mention under the northern strategy is "Walking Together to Revitalize and Perpetuate Yukon First Nation Languages", which was funded for \$150,000. The status of this initiative is close to completion — again led by the Department of Education. This initiative was to build upon, strengthen and optimize existing language revitalization and maintenance efforts.

It is also important to mention the tribute that was made on the floor of the House today, and the Premier mentioned \$2.872 million from the Department of Education to the second language program. I recognize that allocation but have yet to see a breakdown of the allocation and how it's going to help all eight of Yukon First Nation languages.

Under the New Horizons, there is the Southern Tutchone bicultural program, the ongoing delivery of programs from the Native Language Centre, our education system and our First Nation governments. There are cultural programs being implemented in various Yukon College campuses like the one in Mayo called the heritage and cultural essential skills program, which includes a language component.

I would be remiss not to mention the great work being done by the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee that helps to ensure that Yukon First Nations' goals and priorities are represented in Yukon schools. Much of their work strives to include language and culture in the public school curriculum. So there are dozens of great pilot projects, land-based experiential learning projects and programs already going on in the territory, but the question remains: are they going to keep all of our aboriginal languages alive?

In my own home community of Old Crow, we have a program called "Plunge into Vuntut Gwitchin waters" on the community's website. It is an interactive, sharing and learning tool, so to speak, of the Vuntut Gwitchin traditional territory, language, traditions and resources. On this website, any person can view maps, learn Gwich'in words, listen to stories of elders, or if you are a teacher or researcher, you can download resources like the culture and geography educational packages.

The Vuntut Gwitchin Heritage branch also has a collection. The Vuntut Gwitchin government collection includes over 600 oral history interview transcripts and associated audio recordings, 100 video recordings and footage and 4,800 historical and contemporary images and maps. The oral history transcripts are indexed and a master index allows the user to search for key words. The collection also includes published and unpublished books, manuscripts, reports and articles relevant to the Vuntut Gwitchin.

Mr. Speaker, these language and cultural resources were made possible by a partnership between the Vuntut Gwitchin government and the Department of Canadian Heritage. We need more of these types of partnerships, Mr. Speaker. I would

also like to mention the recent book launch from the community of Old Crow. It was called *People of the Lakes: Stories of Our Van Tat Gwich'in Elders*. The book is about the preservation of our rich oral history, knowledge and enduring relationship between our people and our lands.

It is also important to mention the ongoing financial transfer agreement negotiations between the self-governing First Nations and the Government of Canada, which continue to be outstanding. Obviously the vast array of public views and opinions that exist out there are also important to this topic. So you see, we have a lot of stakeholders and parties that need to address this language process, and a lot of important issues that require a forensic-like examination.

During my time as a national park warden for Vuntut National Park, I had the opportunity to take several elders and about 10 community youth out to the remnants of the caribou fences within Vuntut National Park. We flew out one summer day with helicopters and set up camp and stayed there for 10 days. It was just amazing to see the elders' passion and voices come alive when they sat around the fire and spoke in Gwich'in of old times — we recorded some of that — and for the youth to sit around and listen and watch that cultural transformation between English and Gwich'in and the explanation about how those caribou fences were used, the history of the families that used to use them, when they were used and how the technology abruptly changed when the repeater rifles came, and that technology was no longer used.

I go back to that story because many of those elders who were telling the stories to those youth are no longer here, and we're losing our elders very quickly — not only in Vuntut Gwitchin territory but around the Yukon, and the transformation of language between elders and youth is so vitally important.

We need to sit down together and find out what really needs to be done in the long term to save our Yukon aboriginal languages from extinction. It's the territorial government that can play an important role, a leadership role, alongside our First Nations in this territory, to get the commission up and running, because it's crucial that this Legislature and our public government also do their work and complement the ongoing work of the Department of Education, First Nation governments, the federal government, the Yukon Native Language Centre, Yukon College and so on, because at the end of the day the number of fluent speakers of our aboriginal languages in this territory is decreasing at an alarming rate. I and many Yukoners would like to know why, how we can stop it, and what we collectively can do to solve the problem, and how much is it going to cost? What is working out there that we're doing, and what is not working out there that we're doing? Those are some of the questions that need to get answered, and a commission could answer those questions. Language protection, to me, is a shared responsibility in our territory. Self-governing First Nations have the legislative powers to provide aboriginal language programs and services for their citizens. Nobody's disputing that fact. Recognizing that fact does not prevent the Yukon government from suggesting modifications to the Yukon *Languages Act* to preserve, develop and enhance aboriginal lan-

guages in the Yukon. To me, an aboriginal language protection commission that is successful in making language protection recommendations to all the members in this House will also substantially assist all three levels of government in deciding how to share this responsibility now and into the future.

Nunavut, for instance, passed its new language legislation in 2009. It revised its *Official Languages Act* to provide more accountability and introduce the *Inuit Language Protection Act*, giving the Inuktitut and Inuvialuktun languages the most powerful protection among Canada's aboriginal languages.

Last month in Nunavut they had a language summit to discuss how to preserve and implement their new laws aimed at making Inuit languages, including Inuktitut and Inuvialuktun, more prominent in the day-to-day lives of their citizens. Over 200 delegates attended the language summit in Nunavut last month. Some of the topics that were discussed included language development in children and youth, language leadership, or how people can be good language role models, standardizing the Inuit language, Inuit languages in workplaces, media, culture and government. Those were some of the topics that were discussed.

Also in February the Nunavut government recognized Microsoft Canada for its work in developing Inuktitut language software. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation reported that, as a result of the software giant's work, Windows computer users can freely download versions of Windows XP and Vista, along with Microsoft Office 2003 and 2007, in the Inuit language.

The Inuktitut versions of Vista and Office 2007 were launched last spring. Since 2004, Microsoft has been working with the Nunavut territorial government and Pirurvik Centre for Inuit Language, Culture and Wellbeing on creating Inuktitut language software packages. More than one million words have been programmed in Inuktitut through the collaboration, about 5,000 of which are new Inuktitut words. The project is part of the Nunavut government's broader goal of making Inuktitut a working language in offices, schools and homes in predominantly Inuit territory. In a release, Nunavut languages Minister Louis Tapardjuk said the collaboration is a great example of the government and the private sector working successfully together to make the Inuit language the territory's working language. I ask myself why we can't do innovative things like this here in our territory.

About 84 percent of people in Nunavut identify themselves as Inuit, according to the 2006 census. About 91 percent of that population can converse in Inuktitut, while 83 percent of Inuit say Inuktitut is their mother tongue.

The new *Official Languages Act* that was ratified by the Canadian Senate on June 11, 2009, creating two distinct acts, is a creative way to recognize the linguistic duality of Canada while recognizing also the specific legislative needs of the Inuktitut language. There is no reason why Yukon can't be as creative to help preserve Yukon aboriginal languages here in our territory.

In the Northwest Territories' *Official Languages Act*, they recognize Chipewyan, Cree, English, French, Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey, South Slavey

and the Tlicho as the territory's official languages. This act has been revised many times since it became legislation. Section 35 of this act asked for a revision in 2008. The Northwest Territories government responded to that revision with committee findings on October 15, 2009.

The Northwest Territories government responded to that revision with committee findings on October 15, 2009. The Yukon *Languages Act* was passed in 1988 and it has never been revised. The Aboriginal Languages Service, a unit of the Executive Council Office in the Yukon, was abolished in 2008. The Yukon government has yet to announce how it will fulfill its responsibility under the Yukon *Languages Act* now that the Aboriginal Languages Services is no more.

The federal funding formerly administered by the aboriginal language services has now been funneled directly to First Nations and that's great, but the Yukon territorial government still has obligations to fulfill under the Yukon *Languages Act*. It is important to mention that once the work of this commission, if created, is complete and recommendations are received by the House, the government of the day can deal with First Nations and the federal government on a government-to-government basis at let's say the Yukon Forum, for instance, and deal with the recommendations jointly.

I'm going to take this opportunity to review once again some of what I've heard from Yukoners since I introduced the motion on the first day of the fall sitting in 2009.

Some Yukoners have said that maybe it's time that Yukon had an official languages act, complete with a language commissioner and a minister responsible for our official languages.

That would include French, English, and all of our eight aboriginal languages in the territory, an official languages board in addition to this, and an aboriginal languages revitalization board comprised of representation from all the linguistic groups.

Maybe we could conduct pilot projects — and this is another thing; this is another point from a Yukoner — maybe we could conduct pilot projects and implement language nests like the Maori in New Zealand have invested in that have been very successful. Maybe we could provide oral and written government services in aboriginal languages that may be required in the future in some situations across this territory as essential services, like in Justice, Health, and Education.

Another point from a Yukoner was that technology could play an important part in language revitalization, especially for the youth of our territory. I had the opportunity to speak with some tribal representatives from the coast of Alaska. What they're working on is downloading their traditional languages to technology the youth use quite regularly, like iPods, video games and computers, so the youth can learn from the technology that exists now. I found that comment from a Yukoner particularly interesting.

Another comment was that we need to find out what exactly the Yukon First Nation issues are, what the francophone and English speaking issues are, with regard to language revitalization, and what members of the public want.

It has also been brought to my attention there's a new website called "First Voices" that has developed a new on-line tu-

toring system to help teach communities their traditional languages. The site was launched last week, which will allow First Nations from across Canada to build intuitive language lessons specific to their communities.

The Yukon is not alone in the fight to save its aboriginal languages. In my discussions with Yukoners, language protection initiatives exist in New Zealand, Hawaii, with the Navajo Nation and across our own country in various provinces and territories.

Those are some of the things I've been hearing from Yukoners and what other jurisdictions have addressed when trying to secure a future for their aboriginal languages. One comment that resonated throughout the comments from Yukoners was that whatever we do, we have to be cost-conscious.

The Yukon *Languages Act* was proclaimed in 1998 and the public has the right to use English, French or a Yukon aboriginal language in this Legislative Assembly and the right to use English or French in any court.

Actual language legislation is an important part of any effort to revitalize aboriginal languages in Canada. Language legislation sends a strong message that aboriginal languages are valued by the territorial public government and encourages young people to use them. The Yukon *Languages Act* states in section 1(3), "The Yukon recognizes the significance of aboriginal languages in the Yukon and wishes to take appropriate measures to preserve, develop, and enhance those languages in the Yukon."

The act does not, however, provide an accountability framework, like a language commissioner or annual reports to be submitted to this Legislative Assembly, or a mechanism to create a partnership between the Yukon government, self-governing First Nations, other First Nations, the federal government, and Yukon citizens to achieve its goals.

One specific point to make about the current *Languages Act* is that, to me, it is not clear what "appropriate measures" actually means, and it appears nobody is actually responsible to define it.

Some of the research and analysis that an independent language commission could address are our language indicators and trends in individual Yukon communities, like seeking out the data with regard to what is the first language learned at home in a childhood and still understood — or "mother tongue", as it's called.

"Home language" refers to the language most often spoken at home. "Ability to speak" means that a person is able to carry out a conversation in that language. One of the most important tools for assessing the vitality of a language is language shift. Language shift measures the number of speakers a language loses or gains over time. It measures the ratio of a home language to mother tongue languages.

So, you see, data like this is very important, and a commission formed by this House could gather such data for all Yukoners and analyze data for future decision-makers. A commission could also analyze language vitality protection and revitalization and make recommendations as to the approaches required here in the Yukon to ensure the long-term strength and existence of First Nation languages. It is important to recognize

the fact that 10 Canadian aboriginal languages have gone extinct in the last 100 years alone.

It is very evident that language extinction could happen in our very own territory. That's the reason why I bring this motion to the floor of the House today. In 1998, Statistics Canada issued a special report on aboriginal languages based on 1996 data. Out of 50 aboriginal languages in Canada, only three — Inuktitut, Cree, and Ojibway — are considered flourishing by over 20,000 who identified an aboriginal mother tongue.

The commission could also analyze language vitality, protection and revitalization and make recommendations as to the approaches required here in the Yukon to ensure the long-term strength and existence of First Nation languages. I encourage all MLAs to vote in favour of this motion, to send a strong and clear message that our territory's aboriginal languages are valuable, that they are worth protecting, and that the striking of this commission is an important step for the survival of our ancient languages.

Again, it's a question of viewing our First Nation languages as being important to the strength of our Yukon society now and into the future. I ask each and every one of our MLAs in this Legislative Assembly to open their hearts and minds and to reflect on the value of the languages in our territory and the cultures in which they are rooted.

We must continue to invest in our languages as a means of preserving, promoting and protecting our rich linguistic tapestry that our territory has to offer.

I think the Yukon government and this House need to commit to action, commit to protecting and revitalizing our aboriginal languages by supporting this motion. Why would any public government stand idly by and allow ancient languages to perish? Does this motion make sense? I believe it does, Mr. Speaker. Is this motion the right thing to do? I believe it is.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank the many, many elders for having kept the history alive through language, through oral history and tradition, and for encouraging our children to learn them before the language of our ancestors becomes extinct. Is the responsibility to promote, protect and preserve aboriginal languages in the Yukon our government's responsibility alone? Absolutely not. I believe it is going to take each individual, each family, each community, and all levels of government to ensure language longevity in this great territory of ours. There is much work to do to build a strong revival movement.

Nohwah ts'o' gi khii yah een jit gwiin th'oh shoh ih lii.

I am happy to speak to you today, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Mr. Rouble: It's my honour and privilege to rise today in response to the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin's motion. I would like to thank him for his emphatic and impassioned debate. I do appreciate that his presentation today was somewhat restrained by his throat issues, but certainly, his passion for this issue has come through loudly and clearly.

I would like to build upon one of the points that he just made, and that is that I believe that all MLAs in this Assembly would be unanimous in their belief that aboriginal languages

and, more specifically, Yukon aboriginal languages, are valuable and worth protecting. That is a responsibility that we as legislators, as members of the government, as representatives of our constituents and as citizens of the territory all hold.

I also appreciate his comment that Yukon is not alone in this issue. The issue of aboriginal languages and their decline in use and their disturbing rate of extinction is not unique to Yukon; it's not unique to Canada. Unfortunately, it is a situation that is occurring around the globe.

We've heard some of the reasons behind those issues — technology, globalization, languages of commerce, as well as the other darker influences like colonialization and other issues that have affected the loss of language throughout the world. Although, I think we can also use some of those same technologies the member opposite referred to as tools and techniques for helping to revitalize some of the languages. As the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin indicated, the Government of Nunavut has been working with Microsoft to create a keyboard and a language. Now it's also not uncommon for Nunavut youth to text each other in Inuktitut, which is creating a whole new language.

Just as the English version of words often texted by young people these days is foreign to people of an older generation, so too is the text version of Inuktitut.

This is a significant issue, the issue of declining aboriginal languages. I'll keep my comments germane to Canada because we could go on for quite some time about issues globally. In Canada, we have certainly recognized there has been a decline in the number and use of aboriginal languages. Researchers in linguistics have for the most part concluded that there are 11 language families in Canada. One organization, the First Nations Cultural Education Centre in Canada, demonstrates that the steady decline of aboriginal languages over a period of about 50 years has indicated that there is a significant number of people who don't speak their ancestral language.

In 1991, the Assembly of First Nations of Canada produced a nationwide First Nation language strategy, which stated that only Cree, Ojibway and Inuktitut were strong enough to endure. There are many reasons of this. Some of it is the lack of use; some of it is declining aboriginal populations. Indeed, I have been reminded of one statistic that indicated that, in Yukon, even if all the potential speakers of a language spoke the language, by the very nature of the population of the group, it would still be considered an endangered language.

We do have a challenge that, even if we have a success of having a 100-percent participation rate of a potential language group speaking the language, we could not rest on our laurels, that it would take continued and long-lasting efforts to ensure the language continues and to ensure that the ideas and thoughts conveyed in those languages still have the opportunity to be conveyed to others.

Just as scholars today read documents in their original Greek or Latin or Hebrew to understand the context of the time, so too is the context of aboriginal languages important in telling their stories.

Yukon First Nation languages include eight language groups with many different dialects. As I mentioned, all eight

languages are in danger of vanishing. In fact, the Tagish language is near to extinction. Personally, I have had challenges even in trying to find a translation of something like “Merry Christmas” or “Happy New Year” and of having that translated into the Tagish language.

The Han language has only a handful of speakers remaining. Most fluent speakers are elderly. There is a challenge in teaching children their ancestral language and we all recognize that, for the majority of uses, it certainly could not be always the choice of language, but English is the main language of business and government in the territory.

I do appreciate that the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin recognized that there are programs in place in Yukon schools that are trying to make a difference. It is always exciting — I think is the appropriate word — in seeing languages being used outside of the home too. I was recently at the barber shop and there was an elderly gentleman in the chair and another older gentleman waiting and they started to speak in a Yukon First Nation language to each other. Unfortunately it did come as a surprise to me because it's not something we see on a daily basis, or at least I don't see in my communities or here in Whitehorse. We don't always see people exchanging information and having those conversations outside of the home in their mother tongue, but seeing that in the barber shop gave me a bit of hope.

It was very encouraging to see that people have had the confidence, because we are all certainly aware of the legacy of residential schools and people being punished for speaking their language outside of the home, so it was also important for me to see the confidence with which these people spoke their language outside of their community.

There has been a considerable amount of work on the issue of aboriginal languages done in Canada. I'll start with some of the larger, more national organizations and then I will start to focus on some of the issues that are going on here in Yukon and also with some of the Yukon-specific organizations and activities.

Following the federal government's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, I understand that the Assembly of First Nations created a Chiefs Committee on Language. The Chiefs Committee on Language, or CCOL, was established in 1998 by resolution of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of First Nations. The mandate of the CCOL is “to protect and maintain Aboriginal and treaty rights to languages and provide advice, guidance and recommendations to the National Chief, AFN Executive, Confederacy of Nations and Chiefs in Assembly on matters pertaining to First Nations languages.”

Also, the Aboriginal Languages Initiative, or ALI, was established in 1998 by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Since its inception in 1998, the AFN has coordinated and monitored the national Aboriginal Languages Initiative on behalf of First Nations throughout Canada. The national First Nation language delivery structure for the AFN ALI was developed by the Chiefs Committee on Language.

We see there is a coordinated response among chiefs across Canada through the Assembly of First Nations, and also a response by the federal government. At that time, the national

First Nation languages strategy was established in 2000, and the national First Nation language strategy, “A Time To Listen and The Time To Act”, was developed by the AFN Languages Secretariat under the direction of the Chiefs Committee on Language.

The strategy contains 14 recommendations based on the body of research conducted by the AFN during the past 30 years, including directions provided by elders at the national language conference in 1993. The strategy was adopted by resolution of the chiefs and Assembly in July 2000.

I think it's important — and we'll see this more and more as I present a bit more information — that there is no shortage of organizations that have stopped and taken a look at this issue, expressed their concerns, and put forward many of their recommendations. Indeed, while many recommendations are being acted upon, I think it's also important to note that we do have to make a difference in the programming that we are working with and working through, in order to make the changes that the recommendations are hoping to achieve.

The Assembly of First Nations has identified First Nation language and culture as a priority since 1972, with its position paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education*. That position paper states, “Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him, the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being.”

That's an important statement, and one that I'm certain we will all take to heart.

During the past 30 years, the Assembly of First Nations has conducted extensive research and continued to lobby for protective legislation to advance the language rights of First Nations.

I know members are aware that this has been an issue for some time and that there have been numerous different interventions, different reports and different levels of involvement by all orders of government. One important note that I would like to put forward is that in 2007, the Assembly of First Nations, in a resolution regarding a national First Nations language strategy, put forward a resolution on this issue. They declared a state of emergency on First Nation languages and prepared a national strategy in 2000.

The First Nation language strategy I believe was adopted at an annual general assembly in July 2007 in Halifax. This strategy has identified five major goals envisioned. They are as follows: (1) increase the number of First Nation people who speak their language by increasing the opportunities to learn their language; (2) increase the opportunities to use First Nation languages by increasing the number of circumstances and situations where First Nation languages can be used; (3) improve the proficiency levels of First Nation citizens in speaking, listening to, reading and writing First Nation languages; (4) increase the rate of which First Nation languages can be enhanced, revitalized and developed so they can be used in the full range of modern activities; and (5) foster among First Nations and non-First Nations a positive attitude toward accurate beliefs and positive values about First Nation languages so that multilingualism becomes a valued part of Canadian society.

They have put forward their vision is that by 2027, First Nation languages will be revitalized and in common use in First Nation homes, communities and nationwide. Canada will respect and ensure the protection of our language as evidenced through legislation and long-term, sustainable investment.

Through their work, they have identified that there are a number of different initiatives or areas to invest in or be involved in. These included: early childhood development and preschool language nests, immersion programs, software, Web sites and e-clearing houses, sharing of best practices from jurisdictions to jurisdictions, passing down of elder oral traditions, post-secondary education programs, parent and community involvement, K to 12 programs, advanced language programs, translator-interpreter courses, language teacher training needs assessment, English as a second language, adaptation to fit the range of modern activities — I would expect that would be the adaptation to use of computers, keyboards or texting devices — language certification, TV-radio telecommunications, proficiency testing, public policy, use of language in community governance activities, activities for youth, involvement in entrepreneurship and tourism, language and culture, K to 12 language and curriculum design, storytelling and publications, training and development, language assistance, language archives, community resources and activities, research and development and linguistics.

These have been identified as some of the key areas that are to be supported. I believe when we look at Yukon as a jurisdiction, we'll see that many of these areas are already being addressed through specific programs, either through the federal government, the territorial government, First Nation governments or through other organizations.

The First Nation language strategy also included that there was a strong involvement and necessary commitment needed from Heritage Canada for language and culture, through INAC for education in elementary and secondary schools, post-secondary schools, parental community involvement and cultural education centres. They also recognized that other government agencies, including Health Canada, Industry Canada, HRSDC, and provincial and territorial governments also played strong roles in these areas.

Additionally, following up on that, the Assembly of First Nations created the national First Nations language implementation plan, which was presented to the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in Ottawa on November 29, 2007. I won't go through all of that, but that certainly includes some key recommendations for programming and approaches that would help to address this. Those are some of the other national bodies that came out with specific recommendations on this.

I would like to assure members of our Assembly that Canada's Education ministers have considered this a very important issue. The Council of Ministers of Education, which includes representation from all provinces and territories, last February held a summit on aboriginal education. The summit was entitled "Strengthening Aboriginal Success" and it included representation from all provinces and territories, including representation from a Yukon First Nation chief. Additional parties were also invited to this.

We also had national representation from the Assembly of First Nations. It also included representation from national aboriginal women's organizations, Métis organizations and Inuktitut organizations. One of the key issues that this conference heard was that there was a need to strengthen aboriginal language and culture. CMEC went on to state that "Language is the foundation of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures. For learners to achieve success in education, affirmation of their language and cultural identity is essential." The summit identified building blocks for approaches based on language and culture, including curricula, curriculum resources, cultural content, diverse perspectives, instructional methods, programs and services. Clearly this was recognized as an issue of national importance across Canada, and all Ministers of Education from across Canada endorsed the initiatives that were identified and made commitments to return to their jurisdictions and take action to address the concerns that were raised. These national standards or national expectations on learning have also been raised by other organizations, such as the Canadian Council on Learning.

The member opposite said that Yukon is not alone. Indeed, we are not. This is an issue of national importance, one that has a federal government responsibility to it, but the individual provinces and territories have also made specific commitments to address the issues. A little bit closer to home, the three northern territories have recognized this as a significant issue. With my colleagues from Nunavut and Northwest Territories, we have identified that aboriginal language is a key issue facing the north in addition to other issues such as increasing post-secondary education opportunities for northerners.

Recently the three jurisdictions, in cooperation, wrote to the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages. On March 2, we sent a letter that states in part, "We are writing regarding our shared desire to improve the state of aboriginal languages in our respective territories. The territories have a long tradition of practising and integrating aboriginal languages and culture as a priority in our education system as a key element of making lifelong learning meaningful for and reflective of our aboriginal constituents. Unfortunately, even with significant investment of resources, the health of our aboriginal languages has been in decline for several years due to a number of factors such as societal influences where English is the predominant language of utility, the decreasing number of unilingual-speaking elders and the intergenerational impact of residential schools."

We went on to say, "While we believe the primary responsibility for using and sustaining languages rests with individuals and families, governments have an important role for supporting these efforts in helping people overcome the external forces that impact the health of the aboriginal languages. Making more programs available across the lifespan from early childhood to elders is important for supporting our languages and for preparing aboriginal people to fully contribute to Canada's labor market needs. The investment that we receive from the Government of Canada is important to our efforts in working with our communities and partners to support the revitalization of our aboriginal languages. However, we wish to point

out that the current level of federal support has not changed for several years, and does not reflect the diversity of needs and priorities among aboriginal languages.”

We went on to request an opportunity to meet with the minister to discuss how we could strengthen our partnership in a manner that would ensure that we were able to effectively support the needs and priorities of aboriginal languages across the territory. That was sent on behalf of me, Minister Jackson Lafferty from the Northwest Territories and Minister Louis Tapardjuk from Nunavut.

As I mentioned, this was sent on March 2, and we have yet to receive a response from the Hon. James Moore. I will share the response with the member opposite though when we do receive that. We have found that in the past, working collaboratively with our northern partners has been a very positive approach. We have the support of the Council of Ministers of Education and from the rest of Canada. Now we are calling on the federal government to also remember their responsibility to provide additional resources so that the work can happen on the ground here.

Closer to home, Mr. Speaker, there are several different initiatives underway in Yukon. I will start with the Yukon Native Language Centre. The Yukon Native Language Centre is a training and research centre that is housed at Yukon College. It provides a broad range of linguistic and educational services to Yukoners, to Yukon educators and to the general public.

It began in 1977 by the Council for Yukon Indians, and now has a very strong and vibrant staff that provides services at Ayamdigt campus. It provides training and certification for Yukon aboriginal language speakers. They have developed a diploma program for Yukon native language instructors. It develops teaching and learning materials for aboriginal languages. It works with Yukon First Nation elders to document Yukon's oral traditions, oral history, personal names and place names. Also, the Yukon Native Language Centre provides information and materials on Yukon languages to governments, educational organizations, researchers and others who have an interest in the area.

It does a significant amount of work throughout the north with people coming, really, from coast to coast to coast, from the Atlantic, the Arctic and the Pacific Rim areas, to Yukon College and to the Yukon Native Language Centre in order to study aboriginal languages.

I had the honour of attending their class a week ago. I met with a group of people who were learning to become aboriginal language educators and it's always interesting to see the mix of people in there, some who have a background in education who are learning the language and others who have a background in the language and are learning educational techniques.

It's always very impressive to see the breadth of languages that are spoken by all the people in the room. Last week there were over 20 people who were there to enhance their training and certification, and they were certainly champions for language. I had the opportunity to congratulate them for their commitment to their language and their culture and to really encourage and support them as they went forward to do additional work in their own communities.

Additionally, the Public Schools branch offers a large number of second-language options for students. We currently have programs at 19 Yukon schools. The department continues to work under the advice of the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee, which was established in 2004. This committee is working in partnership with various stakeholders in education to improve the results and experience of First Nation students across the territory.

This is a very strong committee that the Department of Education works with. We meet regularly with them. Their recommendations and advice is very much appreciated. We have seen a significant number of their recommendations incorporated into our programming and creating a change in actually how we go about delivering many of the educational services and lessons that we have in our schools.

I really do want to publicly acknowledge the work of the First Nation Education Advisory Committee. They have been in operation for a couple of years now. The energy and enthusiasm continues to grow from this body and we appreciate their continued involvement in how we can increase educational opportunities for all Yukoners.

Additionally, the Yukon First Nation second language program curriculum development and teacher training is supported through an agreement with the Council of Yukon First Nations. The Department of Education provides for the salaries of 10 Yukon Native Language Centre staff members as a direct contribution. Additionally, we employ 30 Yukon First Nation language teachers, including on-the-job training for six First Nation language teacher trainees. That's an important point to note because we realize that we have a responsibility to bring the next generation of teachers on board as well.

As we have seen, many of these languages, unfortunately, are becoming extinct as the speakers of those languages grow older and pass on. So it's very important for us to work with younger people as trainees. Additionally, with this group, some of them do come with an educational background, and then we work with them to give them the language skills. Others come with language skills, but then we have to work with them so that they can gain the pedagogical skills for teaching in the classroom.

Additionally, the First Nation language program and curriculum consultants work in partnership with other Yukon First Nations and we continue to develop programming throughout the different schools in Yukon in order to meet the different needs in the communities. One of the most recent ones is the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations' bicultural program.

I will note, too, that we do have the eight different language groups throughout the territory, so what might work in Haines Junction would not work in Carcross and would not work in Old Crow, due to the different languages being spoken, although we do bring the teachers together because many of the curriculum practices or the exercises that they do, the best practices can be exchanged back and forth and they can then apply that to the specific linguistic context for their community.

One of the exciting programs that has started recently was the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations bicultural program. This is a program at the St. Elias Community School in Haines

Junction, and it is being developed in partnership by the Government of Yukon and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. This bilingual and bicultural program fits the department's goal of planning, developing and implementing educational programming for all learners.

We expect that the program will dramatically increase the level of Yukon First Nation content and perspectives taught in the school using traditional First Nation methods of learning. It is designed as a practical alternative to requests from the community for more First Nation language and culture in the school. The program is a pilot project, and it is in the first year of implementation.

If the project proves successful, the foundation and framework may be expanded to incorporate more grade levels and used as a model in other Yukon communities.

This is one of the specific programs — I should add that in the majority of Yukon schools, especially our rural schools, there are First Nation language programs that provide exposure and language education to all students. But the Champagne and Aishihik bicultural program is a bit more of a deep immersion-type of program. The Government of Yukon has a significant history of providing different approaches and innovative approaches for language education.

On the French side, for example, we currently have five different French education programs including French first language, French early immersion, late immersion, the intensive French program and the other kind of more regular type of French programs that you and I were probably exposed to in our school days.

Another initiative that I would like to share with members in the Assembly is an education partnership program that we are pursuing with Yukon First Nations and the federal government. The Government of Yukon is committed to eliminating the academic gap that exists between First Nation students and non-First Nation students.

We are currently working with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and a variety of Yukon First Nations in looking at establishing a process and an understanding of how we can increase the educational outcomes for First Nation students. It's important to note that we are working with Indian and Northern Affairs on this. It was identified in the education reform project that the federal government had a significant fiduciary responsibility for some issues in education in Yukon, and it is very rewarding to see that they are at the table, working to increase opportunities and increase successes for Yukon students. Again, this was a recommendation coming out of the education reform document that we engaged in with the federal government, and it is yet another example of how we continue to address many of the interests brought forward in that very important educational study.

Additionally, through resources from the federal government, albeit through a different agency, the northern strategy was created. This was a fund that was established to encourage northern entities, specifically northern Yukon entities, to apply to that fund to receive some funding for specific initiatives that would have targeted success in different Yukon communities.

One of the projects that was funded under this initiative was the Old Crow experiential education program. And in this one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Department of Education is working with the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation to help implement the Old Crow northern strategy experiential project. This is a three-year project to develop a rural First Nation experiential education model for kindergarten to grade 9. This will be a collaborative process involving the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, their heritage, cultural and land resources and the Department of Education, along with the Chief Zzeh Gittlit school staff, students and Old Crow community members.

I am very excited about this project. The Chief of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation certainly is, and I expect the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin is also excited about this very innovative program.

I don't have the statistics right at hand, but I do note that I was recently advised that the enrolment at Chief Zzeh Gittlit School has increased and that some of the students who had disengaged in the past from the school had been re-engaged. As long as we're moving in a positive direction, it's important that we work with all members of the community to do this. The Department of Education is working to re-engage students. Additionally, when we get into further budget debate, I will have additional information about other ways that the Department of Education will be working to re-engage some of the students, especially the Whitehorse area students of First Nation ancestry who have disengaged from our public school system.

Another project that has been supported through the northern strategy is the Revitalizing Culture through Story and Technology. The First Nation Program and Partnership unit, in partnership with the Council of Yukon First Nations, is engaged in the northern strategies funding Revitalizing Culture through Story and Technology project. Knowledge and experience from elders will be transmitted to youth through the production of an interactive DVD, featuring Yukon First Nation languages and culture.

The project invests in the art of storytelling and will create an educational resource responsive to community needs. The DVD will be produced for use in Yukon First Nation language classes. The project will also develop a protocol for the collection, ownership and use of traditional knowledge as it relates to the creation of a First Nations' teaching resource.

The project not only creates a model for incorporating Yukon First Nation content and perspectives in all Yukon schools, but also a strategy for preserving Yukon First Nation languages in the most authentic way possible through technology that captures the elders' voices.

There are a couple of other initiatives that I'm going to describe to members, but I do want to go back to the themes that were conveyed about aboriginal languages through the Assembly of First Nations, and they recognize that a broad group of tools were needed — different approaches — and I went through the whole list of them, whether it was trainer certification or using technology or incorporating youth or incorporating on-the-land techniques. I want to note for members these different initiatives and these projects that we have in

place that I've been describing do fit with their mix of recommendations. There have been a significant number of recommendations made about these issues. We are taking them seriously and putting in place specific projects to address them.

Another northern strategy project that I would like to inform members of is the Walking Together to Revitalize and Perpetuate Yukon First Nation Languages. The First Nations Programs and Partnerships unit, along with the Council of Yukon First Nations, are engaged in a project entitled, "Walking Together to Revitalize and Perpetuate Yukon First Nation Languages". Again, this project will be built upon and will strengthen existing language efforts to governments and organizations in the Yukon Territory by aligning work to reduce duplication and maximizing efforts to better meet locally determined First Nation goals and priorities for the languages. As the member opposite indicated in his debate earlier today, we do have to be careful with the allocation of resources and we have to ensure that the resources are being used wisely. I think this is an important project that will reduce the duplication and maximize the local efforts.

Also, it does bring home the point that many of these issues need to be championed and brought forward by the local community group and that the people involved — the community, the traditional language speakers — have to be involved and engaged in order to determine their specific goals and their priorities for their language programs.

Also, another important area in the Department of Education that we continue to work with and work through and include in consideration is the First Nations Education Advisory Committee. This organization has the mandate to work in partnership with various stakeholders in education to improve the results and experiences of First Nations students in kindergarten through grade 12. The First Nations Programs and Partnerships Unit works very closely with the committee to ensure that Yukon First Nations perspective, contents and practices are appropriately and accurately reflected in Public Schools branch programming.

A new program that being this school year by the Department of Education is a Yukon First Nations experiential program. This program will be open to all Yukon students and it will integrate and focus on Yukon First Nation content and perspectives throughout the curriculum. The program is an opportunity for the department to enhance opportunities for First Nations in the secondary system and to meet the recommendations put forth in the education reform project report, the secondary school programming review report and the Yukon First Nations Education Advisory Committee's strategic plan. The first component, a Whitehorse-based experiential program with a First Nations' perspective will be ready to implement in the 2010-11 school year for grade 9 students. Even though this is a Whitehorse-based program, there will be field trips to Yukon communities and the possibility of outreach programs offered to rural schools.

As I mentioned earlier, Mr. Speaker, the government is committed to supporting Yukon First Nation language programs in our schools. One of the ways that we do that is with Yukon First Nation language teachers and trainees.

We understand there are a declining number of people with these skills — either with the educational component or the language skills — and we're working very closely with the Yukon Native Language Centre and Simon Fraser University to deliver a professional development program for language proficiency.

This also highlights another area that I would like to provide a bit of emphasis on. The Yukon Native Language Centre is a very strong and vibrant organization. They have excellent ties with Yukon College and other institutions, whether it's the University of Alaska Fairbanks or with organizations such as Simon Fraser University. Another organization some of their students work through is the Vancouver Community College with the B.C. provincial instructors diploma program. Through that program, they can gain pedagogical practices and expand their teaching capacities.

Also through the Department of Education, with our First Nation Programs and Partnerships Unit, it is responsible for facilitating and developing appropriate First Nation curriculum and supporting resource materials. The unit works in partnership with the Yukon First Nation curriculum working group, which is a subset of the Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee, and they ensure validity, accuracy and authentic voices in all materials developed. The working group is representative of each language group in the Yukon.

The Department of Education consults extensively with First Nations at all levels and works in partnership with Yukon First Nations to develop curriculum materials and resources. Using Yukon-based materials is essential to ensuring all students learn about the history, cultural traditions, and important role of Yukon First Nations.

Cultural inclusion funding has been made available to all Yukon schools for the development and implementation of cultural activities, projects and programs.

On the issue of curriculum material and classroom material, I would like to acknowledge the significant efforts of the Carcross-Tagish First Nation. This First Nation has made education a very high priority and has worked with their own resources to produce curriculum and educational materials that they have shared with the Ghùch Tlâ Community School in Carcross. I would like to thank the Carcross-Tagish First Nation for their incredible contribution. They are the owners and the keepers of the content and we cannot incorporate that into the public education system unless we have some mechanism through which to have it communicated to us.

We do that by having the Department of Education's officials work with people in the different communities, but it's very gratifying to see the First Nation take the initiative in their community to record many of the stories, to write down the practices, to provide materials about things like the clan structures or the governance structures, and then share that with the Department of Education so that we can then work to incorporate it into the classroom.

Mr. Speaker, just to further qualify — 20 Yukon First Nation language programs are offered in 17 Yukon schools. Yukon First Nation language programs are offered for seven of the eight Yukon First Nation language groups.

The department has a First Nation languages program and curriculum consultant position. This position provides support to First Nations that wish to engage in developing local culture and language curriculum while incorporating the knowledge of local elders as the foundation. This position also provides culture and language curriculum delivery support to all Yukon First Nation communities, the Simon Fraser University language development program and the development of language resources.

Some of the areas that they also work on are: the Simon Fraser University certificate in First Nation language proficiency; the master apprentice program — and that's one-to-one training to enhance teaching and language skills; and the AIM or accelerated integrated method. Also, the folks in Nunavut aren't the only ones — we in Yukon have also developed font and keyboard usage and application. So there are many of the resource materials that are being produced for use in our schools and with our communities.

Mr. Speaker, those are just some of the programs that we have going on in Yukon's public school system.

Additionally, there are initiatives through the Department of Heritage with Tourism and Culture. I expect the minister responsible for Tourism and Culture will be able to expand on some of those. There are initiatives underway with Yukon College in addition to the Yukon Native Language Centre, and additionally through the Yukon Forum. I've identified some of the projects that have been specific to Yukon's education system, but other programs certainly have been funded through that.

Many of the members in the Yukon Forum are also working on the northern strategy, and it is the northern strategy that has had the resources allocated to it from the federal government, and they include representation from the Government of Yukon and also Yukon First Nations. The Yukon strategy fund has also supported a wide range of programs throughout the territory, specific to some Yukon First Nations that have provided additional aboriginal language education and retention programs.

This is just to highlight some of the current initiatives that are underway with the Department of Education. If I may, I'll just send over, for the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, one of the brochures from the Yukon First Nation language proficiency certificate program. This is a program that's offered in partnership with Yukon Education and Simon Fraser University. This is to provide education-language certification. I appreciate the member's patience in going through that quite extensive list of programs. The Government of Yukon has certainly recognized that this is an important issue, and in recent years has increased the allocation of resources in all sectors to address many of the concerns. As members can recognize from the different programs that I discussed, they certainly do build upon the priority areas that were identified by the Assembly of First Nations when they established their national First Nation language implementation plan.

There has been a tremendous amount of work in these areas by international, national and Yukon organizations. We continue to build upon their recommendations, their ideas and

their concerns. We continue to utilize the most up-to-date research that is available to us. We continue to work with Yukon stats and also StatsCan, our national statistical agency, in order to collect the data. They do provide a significant amount of information coming from the regular censuses, which provide some detail about language spoken in the home, language of mother tongue and language spoken in the workplace. Also, there have been some changes in how some programming is provided in Yukon.

The Member for Vuntut Gwitchin indicated that there was a closure of the Aboriginal Languages Secretariat. I want to visit that issue, because there might be some information about that that he wasn't aware of. In April of 2008, many Yukon self-governing First Nations assumed responsibility for Yukon aboriginal languages as provided for in section 17 of their self-government agreement. As a result of that, federal funding that was available to the Yukon government for language preservation, protection and enhancement was transferred directly to self-governing First Nations and through CYFN for non-self-governing First Nations.

That's an important step and I think a strong step for Yukon self-governing First Nations. There is the power to draw down responsibilities and services that were put into the self-government agreements, and I believe they were put in there for important reasons.

I am encouraged when I see these responsible orders of government declaring that they do want to maintain jurisdiction over a specific area or a specific topic. And it is exciting to see the growth of these governments and their willingness to accept the responsibilities that go along with these agreements.

It was a strong step, I think, for aboriginal languages in the territory when these self-governing First Nations decided that they did not want the activities coordinated through Yukon government's aboriginal languages secretariat, and they decided that they wanted to put on their own programming. That gave them the opportunity then to address the specific language for their specific community, to address their specific community's needs and concerns and, as well, their ability to take action on issues that were very important to them, that being the issue of language.

This followed a 2004 evaluation of the Yukon languages agreement and Yukon First Nations determined that they would rather address this issue on their own rather than work collectively with the Government of Yukon. That's an important area to consider, especially when we look at this motion, and that is: what are the desires and the concerns of the self-governing First Nations with respect to this?

I recognize that the Government of Yukon, as a responsible order of government in the territory, has a responsibility for the language of its speakers and I certainly highlighted many of those different initiatives and ways that we are living up to our responsibilities in the territory. We will continue to work collectively with other First Nation governments, whether they be self-governing or non-self-governing. I know the First Nation language centre works very closely with First Nations across the territory, as does the Department of Education; and the Ex-

ecutive Council Office certainly works closely with First Nation governments throughout the territory as well.

We are going through a bit of transition now, I believe, with the Council of Yukon First Nations. I would like to get their perspective on some of these issues too and how we can collectively work together to implement and address some of these concerns.

Government of Yukon strongly believes in the valuable aboriginal First Nation languages that we have. It strongly believes that they are worth protecting. That is, in part, why we allocate so many of the resources that we do. We will certainly work with all Yukon First Nations in their efforts to protect the language for which they also have a responsibility.

I am concerned when I look at some motions like this. My personal perspective is that I would often like to put money into programming initiatives, on-the-ground activities, when the research is there, when we have much of the information, when we have gone out to people for their considerations. We've certainly seen that in the Yukon where we have gone out and worked with our partners on things like the post-secondary review or education reform, and we're now seeing significant investments in the programming going on in the classrooms, in the schools and in our communities.

There are a large number of national bodies that have provided input on this issue, and also territorial bodies. I could have gone on all day going through some of the recommendations from many of these different organizations, but really what I wanted to do was to go through many of the different programming initiatives that we currently have in place. I think those are some of the very valuable steps of where we actually implement the recommendations we've been receiving from others.

The Council of Ministers of Education, for example, has identified these are priority areas for all Canadians, and now we're seeing those translate into an initiative in Yukon schools. The member opposite didn't mention — perhaps he or one of his colleagues could go over that in more detail — about support for this initiative from other people and whether it has the endorsement of other First Nation orders of government. We didn't hear a whole lot of that in his discussion.

I agree, we are all very passionate about this issue and want to see progress made on it. However, the motion is calling for some very specific organization in a specific direction. I'm wondering what consultation has occurred on this initiative with the other orders of government that also have a responsibility in this area, and whether they endorse this concept or not.

We continue to work in collaboration with Yukon First Nations. In some instances, there are opportunities to work collectively with all, through organizations such as the Council of Yukon First Nations — and even then I shouldn't say "through all" because there are several Yukon First Nations that do not belong to the Council of Yukon First Nations. In other instances, First Nation orders of government have approached us or we have approached them on a bilateral relationship. Really, what we want to do is try to find the best solution for the situation. Sometimes that results in a program that

can be developed and provided territory-wide and in other cases, we have to do specific things for specific communities.

Part of the challenge of being in government is recognizing that we need to provide equity in the services we provide to all people, but sometimes that equity means that we do different things for different people.

I would like to hear more about that type of issue and any other background on this topic that wasn't provided in the opening presentation. It's quite a long motion and I appreciate that we didn't have the opportunity to go through it earlier today, as this is a continuation of the debate that started some time ago.

I would like to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for bringing forward the issue. It is an important issue, not only in his constituency and my constituency, but throughout the territory. There are a broad number of governments and organizations that have a responsibility to address this. Today I discussed a few of the federal government programs in this area, some of the territorial initiatives, and some of the federally sponsored First Nation initiatives, but by no means has it been an exhaustive list of the initiatives that are currently underway.

I would like this opportunity to also thank the elders, the teachers, the mentors and the people who are passionate about language, the people who volunteer and come into our schools, whether it's through the elders in the school program or elders who come in of their own accord in order to help share their knowledge, their passion and their ability to speak the language with our young people.

I have had the opportunity on a number of occasions to meet some of the language practitioners in the communities as well as at the First Nation language centre, and they are a very optimistic and caring group of people. They are committed to their culture and committed to ensuring that their language lives on and that it will continue to be a tool for their communities to use to pass on their information, their beliefs and their values to the next generation. I support the idea of providing additional protection and energy to the issue of languages in Yukon. I am looking forward to additional debate on this so that we can hear some of the concerns that have been raised about some of the specific areas of the motion.

I would also like to hear about other ideas and other programs that we could put in place in order to address this important topic here in Yukon and how we can share that information then with our partners in other jurisdictions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cardiff: I'm pleased today to be able to speak to this motion. I'd like to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for bringing forward this motion. I believe it is an important motion. This is an important issue for Yukoners.

Just for the record, the minister in his remarks cited the fact that this debate started some time ago and to be precise, it started on December 9, 2009, and the debate was adjourned with the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin beginning speaking a little after 5:00 p.m.

One of the most powerful things or pieces of this debate was actually the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin's opening re-

marks in his native language, which is Gwich'in. It's one of the things about this place where we are today, in the Legislative Assembly, that I really feel strongly about and I'm really proud to be a part of.

Having sat with the former Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, I remember her words when she spoken her native tongue and how moving that was for me. How moving it is whenever we hear other languages spoke here in the Legislative Assembly.

The motion talks about creating a commission to receive the views and opinions of Yukoners. The minister talked about all kinds of reports and studies and initiatives, and he went on for a long time.

I know that I don't have as much time as the minister had, so I'm going to try and be a little briefer about some of these topics.

The reports and the studies and the initiatives that the minister talked about — while they're important and they're valuable — the concept behind this is hearing the views of Yukon people — the interested groups, the stakeholders — on what "legislative amendments to the Yukon *Languages Act* should be made and including granting the rights in respect of, or providing services in any Yukon aboriginal language in addition to the rights and services provided in the act, as well as other matters."

The concept, as relayed by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin back in December, was that the commission would, in its role, talk to Yukoners and interested parties and talk to people in other jurisdictions as well about their experiences. I note last evening I was watching *Northbeat*. Yesterday and today — and I'm not sure of the exact length of the conference — but there's a rather large conference going on in the Northwest Territories that is actually looking at discussing these issues of aboriginal languages in the Northwest Territories as we speak here today. In the Northwest Territories there are, in fact, 11 official languages. So the commission would conduct, in the words of the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, research, analysis and a public consultation campaign about the revitalization, the promotion and preservation and the protection of our aboriginal languages. I believe that is something that is worth doing; therefore, I would indicate at this time our support for this motion.

Earlier today we heard tributes and it is very fitting, in fact, that we are in here today debating this motion on National Aboriginal Languages Day. We all heard the words of the members in this House, including the Premier, about how important language is to our society, and how important those first languages of our country are to our culture. We heard the Premier say that; now we're hoping he will put his support behind this motion and truly endeavour to do something to improve the situation as it is today.

We heard the minister talk about initiatives and all the things that are going on — and there are some good things going on, and there have been for many years — but the reality is, as I was saying earlier today during those tributes, a lot of languages around the world are disappearing. That rate of decline is accelerating, and part of that is due to the society we live in.

The media, the way we communicate — I remember, as a teenager, when the debate in this country was about English and French. It took a lot of discussion in this country, and it took commissions to arrive and entrench the fact that we have more than one language in this country. That's why we have services in French, and it's mandatory, because it's one of our national languages as well.

It's about how we communicate. As I was growing up as a teenager in Powell River and hanging out at the airport, learning how to fly, one of the big debates in the country was whether or not air traffic control should be in English or French, depending on where you were in the country. It's those types of things that led to the decline of the use of languages. That's why people speak out so strongly, because we are losing a lot of those languages because of the way we communicate and the way that we're forced to communicate. Some languages become more dominant than others and we end up losing those other languages.

It's important because language defines the culture of the people. Language is culture. As I said earlier today, it's about the expression of how people communicate. It's about how they think. It's about their values. It's about their actions. You can't necessarily translate that. I heard the minister talking about that earlier today, that there aren't necessarily translations for everything. You hear that many times if you watch some of the programming on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, that there aren't translations. And you'll hear other languages like English or French intermixed with those native languages because the expressions aren't there.

Like I said earlier today as well, a lot of these languages are oral; they're not written down. They're not — we don't have a written record of them. We don't have a written record of the stories, the history and the songs, but we don't have a written record of the knowledge, of the history of the land that we live in because it's oral, and we need to preserve that in order to eventually, hopefully, have that knowledge and have it available to all Yukoners and to all Canadians.

It's the knowledge about how we interact in society as different cultures. It's about how we live on the land and our uses of the land. I believe that it's about the knowledge — the traditional knowledge, the ancient knowledge of where we live.

When I was in Copenhagen, I listened to an elder from Carcross, actually, talk about this — about how for a generation First Nations have known about climate change. It only seems that in the near past this has become a big issue, but First Nations have known about it for a long time. They've been watching it. They've seen the changes.

In order for us to understand that, we need to have that communicated, all that history, in that first language, in order to get the context and the meaning of what it was that was happening many years ago. I think that's important. We need that context; we need to have that understanding.

The minister talked about some of the good work that is going on here in the Yukon, and there is much of it. A lot of it is taking place in our elementary schools, in our high schools and the colleges. The Yukon Native Language Centre, which began back in the late '70s, was actually a Yukon native lan-

guages project. It was begun by what was then called the Council for Yukon Indians.

This has been an important issue for a long time. In 1985, the Yukon native language project was renamed the Yukon Native Language Centre. It became housed at Yukon College. It offers a lot of training.

I've had the opportunity to participate in one of my former roles on the College Board of Governors in some of the celebrations that happen there around graduations and some of the initiatives that are offered there.

One of the things that is essential to preserving these languages is the training and certification of Yukon aboriginal teachers and the fact that they work closely with other jurisdictions — with the University of Alaska in Fairbanks — and working with other educational organizations in British Columbia and Northwest Territories. This is very important.

It's amazing how fast the time goes, Mr. Speaker; there is much we could say about this. One of the things I would like to touch on as well is some of the other good things that have happened over time that have helped me realize just how important this is. Recently, I know a lot of people watched the Olympics with great interest. We're all proud of Vancouver, of British Columbia, and of the athletes — the Canadian athletes and all athletes from around the world who participated there and put on a great show and a great show of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

Where I live, out on the Carcross Road, I don't have cable or satellite, so I wasn't able to watch it on the national network that was providing coverage. I watched it on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. It really touched me, and I felt inspired by the coverage that was there because they covered the Olympics in eight different languages — eight different languages. You don't need the play-by-play. You don't need the commentary about what you're watching on TV.

It was great to hear the voices of aboriginal Canadians providing that play-by-play, whether you could understand it or not, because it was about communicating and being role models for the people back in their communities — for the children — and to encourage those people in the communities to continue to speak their language and to teach others to teach their language. It's about the preservation of culture; it's about the preservation of knowledge. I know I could say a lot more here today on this matter, but much has been said already. I do support the motion. I feel that it is an important issue. I think that these are important questions that Yukoners need to hear and Yukoners need to provide the answers. I think this is a very worthwhile endeavour and will be voting in favor of the motion. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Edzerza: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Without a doubt, language is important. Part of my traditional teaching is one must learn one's language because, when you pass on into the spirit world, the Creator will talk to you in your own language. Having said that, as an elder I believe that the responsibility rests with the individual.

I was not taught my Tahltan language because of rules and laws that prohibited it. However, it became my responsibility

when I was old enough to make my own decisions. I do not speak today, because I have not pursued it, but it is not too late. There's still time for me to learn and understand the Tahltan language. Ironically, I was forced to take French in grade 9 and I still remember some of it today; it has never left me.

Today I am going to throw my support behind the Yukon Native Language Centre and what it has to offer. In my heart, I believe that they are on the right path and this is a process that will strongly support the preservation of native languages, especially in the Yukon Territory.

When we talk about the Yukon Native Language Centre, some of their guiding principles, the centre promotes an awareness of the richness and beauty of the Yukon First Nations languages and an appreciation of the fundamental role they play in the transmission of culture and values from one generation to another.

The Yukon Native Language Centre recognizes and relies upon the essential contributions made by elders and traditional bearers in all phases of cultural education. Elders in each language group provide vision, wisdom and guidance that inform and direct all activities. The Yukon Native Language Centre works in partnership with First Nation communities and individuals to provide training, research and program support that will assist them in implementing their self-determined goals for preserving and enhancing their ancestral languages. The Yukon Native Language Centre recognizes the intrinsic positive values of First Nation languages in contemporary education for both native and non-native students at all levels, from preschool to adult education.

The Yukon Native Language Centre delivers services in an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration since sharing is the basis for cultural survival.

In 1977, the Yukon native language project was begun by the Council of Yukon Indians and now the Council for Yukon First Nations. The council saw a need for systematic surveys and development work on Yukon languages and lobbied successfully for funding from the federal and territorial governments. Requests for native language teaching in the schools began to increase and the Yukon native language program began to train native language teachers and to develop curriculum materials. The number of language teachers and trainees grew steadily during the first year of the project's operation.

In 1985, the Yukon native language program was renamed the Yukon Native Language Centre. Today, the centre's staff is actively teaching, documenting and promoting Yukon native languages. The Yukon Native Language Centre offers training and certification for Yukon aboriginal teachers. The Yukon Native Language Centre staff and elders have developed and now teach this three-year certificate and follow-up diploma two-year courses for native language instructors at the Yukon College. The Yukon Native Language Centre also works closely with the University of Alaska Fairbanks in implementing a jointly-established associate of applied science degree program in native language education. The graduates and students currently enrolled in these programs serve as teachers in many communities of the Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories and Alaska. The Yukon Native Language Centre

developed teaching and learning materials for all the Yukon aboriginal languages. These include a curriculum guide, language lessons, notebooks and tapes, dictionaries and reference materials, and most recently, a range of interactive computer materials such as talking books and a CD-ROM devoted to Southern Tutchone place names and geography.

The Yukon Native Language Centre works with First Nation elders to document Yukon native traditions, oral history, personal names and place names. Yukon Native Language Centre also assists First Nations and other organizations with translations, transcriptions and signage.

The Yukon Native Language Centre provides information and materials on Yukon languages to First Nation governments and educational organizations, researchers, media outlets, and the many interested individuals who regularly visit and phone the centre.

The Yukon Native Language Centre also plays an important role as a regional and international centre. It organized and co-sponsored the first Canadian-Alaska Institute of Northern Native Languages held in the summer of 1988, which attracted students from the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Alaska and the Yukon.

In recent years, the Yukon Native Language Centre has worked closely with the University of Alaska Fairbanks to offer a joint degree in native language education. The Yukon Native Language Centre also maintains relationships with such organizations as the Gwich'in Social and Cultural Institute, the Tanana Chiefs Conference, the Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium, the Tok Branch of Interior Campus and with individual school districts in British Columbia, Northwest Territories and Alaska.

I would also like to put on record that the Yukon Party government has contributed millions of dollars toward preserving First Nation languages in the Yukon. It is important to note that the funds are used to train the First Nation language instructors. I have had the privilege to meet some of these who have completed a three-year certificate program and a follow-up of a two-year diploma course to become a qualified native language instructor. What impressed me as an elder First Nation person is the fact that some of the graduates were very young people. I congratulate those young and old today for their achievements. It is success like this that will preserve our First Nation languages in the Yukon. Each First Nation in Canada must take it upon themselves to make the preservation of their language a priority.

On April 1, 2008, a majority of Yukon self-governing First Nations assumed responsibility for Yukon aboriginal languages as provided for in section 17 of their self-government agreements. Federal funding that was available to the Yukon government for language preservation, protection and enhancement was transferred directly to self-governing First Nations and through the Council of Yukon First Nations for non-self-governing First Nations.

We must not lose sight of the fact that I believe if First Nations were not consulted about this move that's requested within this motion, there may be a real backlash from First Na-

tions on just how, once again, they were not consulted on such an important issue as the preservation of their languages.

Having said that, I started out by saying that it's up to First Nations. I'm going to put on record just a little bit of what I mean about this. Even the Tahltan Nation, which I belong to, or am a descendent of — in March of 2006, the Tahltan Nation developed a Tahltan language and cultural strategic plan. This plan describes the Tahltan Nation's visions, goals and priorities for the revitalization and preservation of the Tahltan language and culture. This is exactly the action that has to take place by every First Nation.

Some of the purposes they name include that our culture is not dying, but there are some missing pieces. The purpose of the cultural gatherings and other cultural activities is to find these missing pieces through documentation and participation in the Tahltan language and cultural practices. It is talking to the youth to get the will exposed to the Tahltan youth and get them interested in the language and the culture. We practice our language and culture for future generations so we'll know who we are. We need to do more for the young people. They are watching and listening. We also need to show we can have fun without drugs and alcohol. An area of concern for the Tahltan language and culture is that the number of fluent speakers is decreasing. The youth attending school are not able to practice Tahltan language at home or in the community, and the number of hours per week the Tahltan students are being taught language in the schools is very limited.

Having said that, it goes on to talk about a vision — to develop a vision to deal with the concerns of the Tahltan Nation, and they did exactly that. They wrote down something that they see as a vision.

The Tahltan language will be spoken in our communities, in our schools, in all government, in our businesses and in our homes. Maintaining the speaking of the Tahltan language will ensure the web of creation is maintained. The Tahltan language and culture are important components and a part of creation, like all other beings. The Tahltan will ensure our beliefs and values are practised, sharing of Tahltan language and culture to pass on Tahltan language and culture to future Tahltans and the sharing of our language and culture with the rest of the world. Education of our language and culture is vital. Caring for each other — people need to start caring for each other. That's all part of learning who you are and it's also a part of learning about the language.

Having identified their vision, the Tahltan Nation has set out priorities now, and these are important. This is what has to happen with every First Nation that wants to preserve their language.

That is to document our language focusing on the following methods: resource materials, including children's workbooks, expanding Tahltan atlas and family album, recording Tahltan songs and stories about how to respect; language camps — upgrading languages; committees — committee meetings to build capacity in the communities through expansion of local human and technical resources and through the creative partnership with existing international, national, provincial and local language organizations; language teacher

training — open house at schools to help native teachers; resource libraries — access to workshops and training sessions; and organize local language conferences and workshops to develop working partnerships with existing aboriginals, aboriginal language organizations and post-secondary institutions.

As I stated earlier, Mr. Speaker, every First Nation across Canada must go through this exercise and take control of preserving their own language. It's always very difficult when other governments get involved with First Nation initiatives because often they lose control of what they're doing.

I'm now going to talk a little bit about what was something that was out of the Assembly of First Nations — a national First Nation language strategy.

In the document, which was produced in July of 2007, it states, "Through our consultations, we have observed that the loss of language and culture has more often been contributed to by residential schools. We are at a crossroads on language. We must revitalize our languages and help our young people learn and take pride in their traditional languages and culture. To keep alive, our languages must be used daily. Our elders call upon us to not forget our languages, speak and write our languages, teach and learn our languages, respect each other's dialects, focus on young people, start in the home to strengthen the will of the people to revitalize and bring back our language, work together to build a foundation for our people."

I did not read this before I stated, as an elder, that we need to strengthen the will of our young people to learn it. If we can't do that, then I don't think there's any process that will save the languages. I don't believe any legislation or anything would ever preserve the language.

I'll go on to 1989 and this same document that the Assembly of First Nations produced. It says, "A private member's bill, Bill C-269 'An Act to Establish an Aboriginal Languages Foundation' was introduced by Ethel Blondin based on the 'Kirkness Report.' The bill was not introduced to Parliament."

Again, we go to another bill: "Secretary of State included aboriginal languages in Bill C-37, 'An Act to Establish a Heritage Language Institute.' First Nations opposed inclusion in Bill C-37 on the grounds that First Nation languages are unique as languages of the founding nations protected under treaty and federal legislation."

There is evidence out there that the responsibility lies with the individual First Nations. It's up to the individual person. I would even go further to say that it's up to the individual person to muster up that will, however it's done, and develop and harness the interest of being able to talk your own language.

I know that's missing in my life today; that's one thing that is missing. I know a little bit of my language, but not enough to really carry on a conversation. Just recently, I uncovered a tape that was produced by my father, who is now deceased, teaching the Tahltan language. So now I do have another avenue that will help me to learn the Tahltan language.

In closing, I would encourage all of the First Nations who read the Blues and who are listening to this presentation to get out there and find the will to learn your own language. Thank you.

Mr. Mitchell: It gives me great pleasure and a strong sense of responsibility to rise today to speak to the motion, Motion No. 848, from my colleague, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, "THAT this House establish an independent, non-partisan Commission on Yukon Aboriginal Language Protection."

I'm not going to read all the details of it, although I may during my 20 minutes use some of them, because it is lengthy and detailed. But I think we should focus on what is said right in the beginning: "Commission on Yukon Aboriginal Language Protection."

Now the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin laid out his thoughts very clearly in great detail. I might add that although his voice may be hoarse today, it's certainly a strong voice and it never wavered in making the case — the case for indigenous people, for Yukon indigenous people's languages to be protected and the role for this Assembly.

I have listened with great interest to the members opposite — the Minister of Education, the Minister of Environment and also the Member for Mount Lorne on this side of the House — and they all made many good points. I know that the Minister of Education outlined in a fair bit of detail much of what is being done already and what has been added over the years to address this issue.

Both the Minister of Education and the Minister of Environment emphasized in the end that it's not necessarily the role of this Assembly, but rather the role of individual First Nations — indeed, as the Member for McIntyre-Takhini suggested, individual First Nation people.

Well, I think it's a shared role. I think that it's an important role. One of the things we've heard today that I think we do understand, and I think those of us who live in Yukon perhaps understand this better than most — better than many other people — is that language is essential to culture. In fact, in many ways, language is culture, just as the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin said earlier today, in addressing the ministerial statement on the Porcupine caribou herd and the agreement signed, that the caribou herd was his culture.

Some things are inseparable. That's why people speak French in France and, of course, in Canada. That's why people speak Spanish in Spain, Mexico and many other countries. That's why they speak English in England, and indeed, of course, in Canada.

It would be very convenient to have a universal language. It has been tried. There have been invented languages that were supposed to take aspects of several different languages and become the next universal language. People have over the last couple of millennia fought wars over language and over religion, because that's how close language is tied to culture.

In fact, there are, in most languages, expressions, sayings and words that really aren't even translatable. We try and find a translation for them, and it doesn't have the same meaning once we translate them into another language, once we translate them into English. I think we've all heard those kinds of expressions and seen how meaningless or hollow they sound in the language in which they weren't written.

First Nation people want to ensure that their native culture survives, and indeed thrives. Language is obviously a hugely important aspect of that. It has been pointed out that there are many different programs in the Department of Education, Yukon College, and certainly within First Nations to address this issue — and there are.

We all get a lot of material sent to us. I have the activity report from June 2009 from the Yukon Native Language Centre in front of me. It certainly shows that great strides are being taken by First Nations to not only preserve but re-establish and strengthen the use of their native languages and to try to have the next generation have more native speakers rather than fewer, which is what has been happening over the last three generations.

Indeed, Canada plays a role and so does Yukon. There is funding that comes from Canada toward all of these programs. There is funding that comes from Yukon toward many of these programs. That's as it should be. It is not a question of it being only the responsibility of a First Nation or of all First Nations in Yukon collectively, any more than it is a responsibility of only the Government of Yukon. We share this territory. We all share its culture; we all share the culture that was established in the last 110 or 112 years, the culture of the gold rush. We put it on our licence plate. We put it on logos; we put it on pins that we give out at conferences. We all take pride in it, although none of us were there during the gold rush — but it has become collectively part of Yukon's culture and it did so in only 112 years.

We don't say it's only for people who live in the Klondike, or it's only for people whose grandparents came up the Chilkoot — it's all of us and we're proud of it. It doesn't compete with other aspects of our culture; it simply is one aspect of our culture.

As a Yukoner with adult children who were born and raised in Yukon, I'm proud of our aboriginal culture. I'm proud of the culture of the Tlingit and the Vuntut and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in and the Na Cho Nyäk Dun and the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation, the Selkirk — I'm proud of that because it enriches my life; it enriches all our lives.

When my children were going to school in Atlin, where we lived when they were little, they were studying Tlingit along with every other student in that school. The school was part First Nation — its student body — and part non-First Nation. My kids would come home and say, "Listen to what I learned today, daddy." And they would recite a phrase in Tlingit and say, "Do you know what that means?" I'd say, "No, I don't. I don't know what that means." And they'd tell me. It was something that bonded them to their friends who were Tlingit — who were from the Taku River Tlingit First Nation.

We're all tied together. I find it quite ironic that I came home late last evening, and I had a telephone message to please call an elder in Atlin, whom I hadn't spoken to in probably a couple of years, and I could call up to 10:00 o'clock at night. I phoned him and he wanted my thoughts on the federal government, the Government of Canada, having decided in its budget to end the funding for the CAIRS program and other such programs.

I was tremendously honoured that he would even phone up and ask what my thoughts were because my thoughts are — not having experienced what this person went through, only having lived in the same community with him for some 20 years and heard of the effects of the residential schools. Yet, he wanted to share his thoughts with me and ask me mine, so I think that this isn't only an issue for people who happen to be of First Nation background.

I have a couple of booklets here that I picked up last year at Klukshu, at a general assembly — useful daily phrases of Northern Tutchone dictionary. Certainly not the language for the people of Champagne and Aishihik, but it was at one of the booths there, and I brought it back because I thought it would be of interest to my wife, who is an elementary school teacher, and it was of interest to me. I also thought it has been tremendously difficult for people to put this together and, to me, it's very sad that there are so few people who can really speak comfortably in these languages that express their culture, and so many of us who would have to pick up the dictionary for every word that we wanted to come up with.

When I was growing up, as a little kid, I had grandparents who had come from England and I had grandparents who had come from Russia, or more specifically Belarus, since that was the area.

Obviously I learned to speak the language of my grandparents who came from England. Some might challenge how well I speak my native tongue, but I did learn more than a few words of Russian and, for that matter, another language that was spoken by my grandmother, which was Yiddish. Well, there's a whole culture surrounding that — there is theatre that only works in those languages. We translate them, and somehow you lose the impact. That's my loss.

I speak some French and, as those who have listened in this Assembly know, not very fluently, and that's from years of study in junior secondary and secondary school. But even in French I know there are things that don't translate and make much sense or don't have the same sense of humour in another language.

Here in Yukon, we have a very specific climate. We have — at least in northern Yukon until recent years, we obviously have winter for a big portion of the year — six months of winter.

There are things in languages that speak specifically to the climate and the terrain we live in, that speak specifically to the food that is indigenous to Yukon, whether it be caribou, moose or salmon, or vegetables that are native to this land. When I go to potlatches and general assemblies — when I've had the privilege to attend them across this territory — it has been very moving to me to see people speaking, singing, dancing and chanting in their original languages. We've heard how the actions of the Government of Canada — not the actions of a particular party, but of the Government of Canada — over many years the residential school programs were used to obliterate a language and a culture. I've talked to people of that generation who told me how they were punished and how they were beaten for speaking their native language. We've all seen films about it; we've all met people who talk about it. That was done

for a purpose, to try to supplant one culture with another, and it was by the use of language.

So I think there is a role for this government and this Assembly to play, not only for First Nations, although I will agree with the Member for McIntyre-Takhini that we don't intend to supplant the responsibility that First Nations want to take upon themselves. I noticed in this motion that it says, "THAT the Commission receive the views and opinions of Yukoners, interested groups and stakeholders on legislative amendments to Yukon's *Languages Act* that include granting rights in respect of, or providing services in any Yukon aboriginal language in addition to the rights and services provided in the Act, as well as other matters ..."

Why is there a responsibility here for us? Well, it's because we are the legislators. We have a language act. Individual First Nations can work toward strengthening the use of their languages, but only this Assembly can address issues within an act. That's our role.

So a commission to go forth and hear from Yukoners, hear their views and bring it back — that would seem to be the appropriate role laid out by my colleague, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

There is much I could say about this but I know there are other members who want to speak and my time is running out. One of the books I have is entitled, *Stepping Together Towards Fluency*, and it was from the Council of Yukon First Nations Language Conference, March 13-16, 2000. There is a poem that was read out at that conference that was written by a student. The student is Jessica Lynn Brant and I am not going to try and provide her First Nation name because I wouldn't be able to do it justice.

It is called *Without*:

"My language means everything to me.
Without it I am nothing, you are nothing.
Our languages keep the sun going around the world,
The stars shining bright in the night sky,
The rain and the snow falling.
It keeps me alive.
Without our languages,
We would be lost as an individual and as a nation.
We would not have an inch of land,
No rights, no medicines, no ceremonies, no culture, no people.

NOTHING.

We would be ashamed of who we are.
Yes, they have tried to take it away.
Their attempt was not good enough to fulfill their plan.
They thought they did good, but we know that they thought wrong.

We are getting our language back,
But we have to start trying harder.
They are still winning, but not by much and not for long.
We have to start fighting fire with water.
We have to kill their plan and all of their attempts,
To take anything else away from us. No more.
It has got to stop, it will, it is.
We have to get back to the old way,

In a time of the old ways.

When the only language we knew was my own, your own.
We need to get back our self-dignity, culture, peace, land, rights.

I want to go back.

We have to start with the language.

I want to be close to Mother Earth again.

Talk with the animals, the Spirits of the past, present and future,

The sun and the moon again.

It would be nice.

It will be nice.

This is what I want, but we need our language.

What do you want?"

Mr. Speaker, I want this Assembly to play its role — not more than its role, not usurp the role of any First Nation or of any First Nation person, but I want us to do our job to take our responsibility to help to preserve, strengthen and enrich a culture that comes from our First Nations, but in the spirit of living together, belongs to all of us and is part of all of us.

I hope that this Assembly will give full consideration to this motion by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, why he has brought it forward and how important it is to all Yukoners. I hope that we will find a way to strike such a commission.

We have established all-party committees to consider regulating the use of all-terrain vehicles. We have set forth in the past a commission of one person to investigate electoral reform. Where on the list of priorities is our culture? Our First Nations culture — the culture of our fellow Yukoners. It needs to be utmost, so I commend this motion to this House, and I look forward to hearing others speak to it as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ms. Horne: In my response to this motion, I want to focus my comments on two aspects. First, what is the issue that this motion is trying to address? I think it is the recognition that some aboriginal languages are in perilous danger of being lost.

Second, I want to talk about whether or not this motion actually addresses that issue. I want to speak for a little bit about the peril languages face. I'm going to base my comments on meetings I have attended and on my own experience speaking my own language.

That aboriginal languages worldwide are in serious trouble was apparent at a recent conference in Saskatoon to preserve and maintain languages. The First Nation Language Keepers Conference was told that while First Nations languages are at risk, there is a growing awareness about their importance and much work is needed to preserve them. Aboriginal peoples in Canada are defined in the *Constitution Act, 1982* as Indians, Inuit and Métis. The estimated aboriginal population in 1999 was 1,377,900. This figure includes 390,300 status on-reserve Indians, 284,500 status off-reserve Indians, 426,800 non-status Indians, 61,000 Inuit and 215,300 Métis.

I would also like to note that about 25 percent of the Yukon's population is of First Nation ancestry. The majority of this figure represents the eight Yukon First Nation languages

— Gwich'in, Han, Kaska, Northern Tutchone, Southern Tutchone, Tagish, Tlingit and Upper Tanana.

Mr. Speaker, only three Canadian aboriginal languages — Cree, Inuit and Dene — are considered viable in Canada. “Viable” means that these languages are spoken in the home and will be passed along to the next generation. We are the third generation of non-speakers, making it virtually unachievable for the natural transfer from mother to child. The issue is not strictly a local or a Canadian phenomenon, with more than 6,000 languages at risk worldwide. Globalization and modern communications are making the world a monoculture of languages. In the future, spoken language will consist of only a few languages, such as English, Mandarin, French, Spanish and Hindi.

Preserving the world's wide variety of local and indigenous cultures is a serious issue. Without a language to tell stories and pass on history, the indigenous cultures of the world will exist only in glass cases in museums. Without preservation of the language, we cannot fully preserve the culture. Residential schools in Canada are undoubtedly the major cause of the problem. There is no doubt that we children were punished if we were caught speaking our own language. It was one of the worst kinds of culture eradication and it was a reality for our people, myself included.

Even today, I sometimes feel guilty about speaking Tlingit, like I've done something bad, and that is because of what I learned as a youngster. Back then, however, First Nation children learned their language at home, and spoke it when they returned for the summer. As well, as an act of rebellion, we spoke our language among ourselves when we were in residence.

The residential schools damaged our language and culture, but we kept speaking our languages as a way of preserving our language, our culture, and really, ourselves. It was the television set that really was the icing on the cake. When electricity was introduced, First Nation people bought TVs and English quickly became the language of the home.

The children were introduced to English immersion at a very early age, as they sat in front of the TVs. There was no interest in our language when it wasn't on television. It wasn't the language Bugs Bunny or little Beaver spoke.

Now I would like to talk about whether or not this motion accomplishes its goal of revitalizing and preserving our languages. A century ago, it would not have seemed strange to hear Tlingit citizens speaking in Tlingit as they went about their daily chores. Now an endangered language, it is rarely spoken by anyone other than elders or those who have chosen to study and learn Tlingit.

This motion calls for a committee to go out and study the problem. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, the way to preserve a language is by speaking it, not by holding meetings to talk about speaking it. Let me give you some examples. In an effort to revitalize the fading language, Sealaska Heritage Institute has created Tlingit immersion retreats. These retreats allow participants to spend 10 days in a Tlingit-speaking village, learning the language, immersing themselves in the culture and practicing their communication skills with other Tlingit speakers.

The program gives both speakers and learners a habitat where Tlingit can flourish. The immersion approach appears to accelerate the rate at which learners acquire the Tlingit language.

Immersion does work. My youngest daughter went to French immersion when she was three years old and continued until she graduated. She quickly learned the French language. I was delighted she was actually speaking and thinking in French.

In 2002, the first Tlingit immersion retreat was held north of Juneau and lasted for five days. This year's immersion retreats will be held in Sitka from June 19 to 30 and in Hoonah from August 9 to 19. Previous retreats were held in Sitka, Juneau and Glacier Bay.

The main goal with the retreats is to provide language learners the opportunity to learn Tlingit in a natural setting and to recreate what it was like to live in a Tlingit-speaking community. They provide fluent Tlingit speakers, like elders, the chance to tune up their skills as well, since they no longer live in a situation where they get to speak Tlingit every day. This model of teaching through immersion will be both useful and inspirational to native communities throughout the southeast. Other groups like spirit camps and culture camps will see that this is one of the most effective ways of integrating language and culture in a camp setting.

In addition to speaking the language, participants at the retreat learn more about Tlingit culture. Daily activities include gathering and processing First Nations food, while fluent speakers use Tlingit to give directions on what to do. Camp members subsist on halibut, salmon, gumboots, deer, beach asparagus, seaweed and wild celery, and also celebrate their culture through singing, dancing and drumming.

So much of the language is embedded in the culture. A big part of the teaching method is situating students in real life activities and communications. They are not memorizing words off a chalkboard. They are sharing kitchen chore duties while elders supervise and offer instruction. Many of the lessons also take place outside. They take field trips by boat and take hikes through the woods where the elders identify the names of plants and how they are traditionally used.

It has been found that even when the immersion retreat is over, the sharing of the language does not end. The participants still use the language every day. Three former immersion students have started as student language teachers, where they're helping to educate each other about the Tlingit language. They're not only learning the language, but they're taking responsibility for using it and teaching it. As more and more people rediscover the Tlingit language, they may also discover that this ability to converse may lead to creating stronger bonds within the native community.

At Kahnawake in Quebec, the people there are teaching their language to young women, who in turn will pass it along to their children. This was a deliberate strategy. Women will pass a language along to their children because of their role in the home. In many cases, the men are away working and are not able to spend enough time with the children. Women are

the keepers of important aspects of our culture and it is necessary to recognize this if we want to survive as distinct peoples.

There are Tlingit language institutes that didn't exist a few years ago. We have websites, language courses, Tlingit workbooks and dictionaries — all dedicated to preserving the Tlingit language. The Dakota recently held a Scrabble tournament in their language. The Teslin Tlingit have developed a game using the Tlingit language; it is similar to Trivial Pursuit. We are at a crossroads at which if our languages are to thrive, they must be used in the home. The challenge is for parents to speak the language and pass it on to the next generation.

I attended the TTC general council in Teslin last fall. On the last day, a workshop was held. We broke off into five groups, not clan-based, just five groups of citizens. We each set up guidelines of retaining our Tlingit language. Immersion camps turned out to be a big player. With good guidance of our CEO Peter Johnson, Deputy CEO John Peters, Jr., councillors and elders, we will be successful.

My point is that the way to preserve aboriginal languages is by speaking them. Here in the Yukon, we have an organization that is committed to doing just that — helping Yukoners to speak the aboriginal languages. I have been very impressed with the work done by the Yukon Native Language Centre. This is a training and research facility that provides a range of linguistic and educational services to Yukon First Nations and to the general public. It is located in Yukon College, here in Whitehorse.

The centre is administrated by the Council of Yukon First Nations with funds provided by the Government of Yukon. The centre came about because, in 1977, the CYI — now CYFN — saw a need for a systemic approach to Yukon native languages. They lobbied successfully for funding from the federal and territorial governments. Requests for native language teaching in the schools began to increase and the YNLP began to train native language teachers and to develop curriculum materials.

The number of language teachers and trainees grew steadily during the first years of the project's operation. In 1985, the Yukon Native Language Centre was named. Today the centre staff is actively teaching, documenting and promoting Yukon native languages.

Let me share with you some of the services that the centre provides. They offer training and certification for Yukon aboriginal teachers. Staff and elders have developed and now teach the three-year certificate and follow-up diploma, which is a two-year course, for native language instructors at Yukon College. We have a Tlingit teacher in Teslin who attended the University of Fairbanks and learned the Tlingit language and now speaks fluently. She is teaching the children at the school in Teslin. We have another teacher who attended the college; she is in the three-year course. Through our program that we offer, she learned to speak Tlingit very effectively and she is now teaching our youngsters at the school in Teslin.

I am really proud of her for learning it, because she had a will and wanted to learn the language.

At the college, they developed teaching and learning materials for all the Yukon aboriginal languages. These include a curriculum guide, language lesson booklets and tapes, diction-

aries and reference materials, and most recently a range of interactive computer materials, such as talking books and a CD-ROM devoted to Southern Tutchone place names and geography.

Bessie Sam, a Tlingit from Teslin, has helped to produce a CD-ROM devoted to Tlingit. It works with First Nation elders to document Yukon native traditions, oral history, personal names and place names. Think about that for a moment — the names of places and people are so important to expressing identity and preserving our legacy and our culture.

Let me ask you a question: when I mentioned the Plains of Abraham, what do you think? My guess is that you, and most Canadians, will think of an important moment in the history of Canada involving the French and the English. But what was the Plains of Abraham called before? What was the First Nation name that was associated with that spot? It has been lost most likely. That is why it's so important to preserve the traditional names. They communicate more than just a location; they communicate history, a culture — our culture.

Yukon Native Language Centre provides information and materials on Yukon languages to First Nations, government and educational organizations, researchers, media outlets and to the many interested individuals who regularly visit and phone the centre.

This government continues to recognize the importance and acknowledge the work of many people and organizations who have strived to revitalize our Yukon aboriginal languages. Yukon First Nations determined that actions within their own individual governments and communities would remove barriers to language programming in the communities and lead to major revitalization of our Yukon First Nation languages.

I see my time is drawing to a close.

First Nations have asked for and received the jurisdiction for this area. I think it would be a grave mistake to take that away from them. Do we need help to preserve our languages when we have our faith, our culture, immersed in that language? We want control of how we learn that language.

Mr. Fairclough: I will be very short in my response to the motion. First of all, I would like to thank my colleague, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, for bringing this forward. I think he has laid out his rationale very well for why he would like the House to support this motion. I noted that members on the opposite benches on the government side have taken note of all the points that have been made by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin and I just want to be very short with this. Of course, we on this side of the House do support this motion. It calls for the government to basically establish a non-partisan commission to go out and examine whether or not Yukon government should have and put in place a Yukon aboriginal language protection.

It is all about that; it's about the protection and whether or not we think it is right or wrong, we are asking that a commission be formed, take its time in asking the general public what their thoughts are of this and bring it forward to the Legislative Assembly. It lays out some of the formation of the commission, in that each one of the leaders of the three parties appoint a

member and a non-partisan member be also appointed by the Standing Committee on Appointments to Major Boards and Committees. I think that is the proper approach to take. There is no rushing into this and I don't think anybody who has spoken to this motion is saying that is what is to take place. It is given a two-year period and, even if we're not sitting, the information is to be released to all the elected members to look over and ponder between sittings so they can bring back their comments at the first available sitting.

I would like to see this get to a vote and that's why I want to be really short. Of course, First Nations have been stressing this point for quite some time — many years now. Many have taken on the task of printing and at least writing down the languages so that the younger people who understand how it's written could learn in the future — languages that they have in their own First Nations. Many of the First Nations have people living here in Whitehorse, and if you're in the schools here, you're learning the language that is here, which is Southern Tutchone most of the time. It makes it a little more difficult to go back home and learn these languages.

Many of them have recorded their elders on videotape over the last, say, 25 years, and a lot of the stories have been laid out and a lot of the language is laid out right on the videotape. It's a matter of putting them together. What we want to do is make sure that the language is protected from being lost, so that does commit government to look at ways for the preservation of the language and ensuring that we have it all the time.

There is a fear among the First Nations that we are slipping away from knowing our language the way it used to be. As a matter of fact, in my own First Nation, I don't even know the language. I can't speak it fluently; I can understand some of it and I can only speak a bit of the words, but they recognize that we're in trouble and they need help. They've looked at and have implemented language lessons in the school and the First Nation made it mandatory for all to take. They're trying their best to ensure that happens, but I think what we do need is a lot more. We need a lot more input from where their understanding is on the preservation and protection of our languages here in the territory.

Part of the problem right now is there's a bit of an urgency to a lot of it. If I can just give my own First Nation experience on this, a lot of our older elders have passed on and they take with them a lot of the language. I say this because recently I have talked to some of the First Nation members there, and they're talking about a word they were trying to get. They know there's a descriptive word that has been out there, but none of our elders that we have today know it and would always revert back to very few elders who really know some of these words and they're gone.

These elders are gone. And Carmacks has probably a handful — or Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation probably has a handful of elders now who are alive today. And once they're gone, the junior elders come in and it's less and less known — the languages.

They have talked with us in the Official Opposition to look at government perhaps working with them to do more, and the set-up of this commission does exactly that. It is talking with

them, having public meetings, town hall discussions, both with First Nation and non-First Nation communities — all the communities around the territory — to do this well, to gather the information, to compile it into a report, to bring it forth to the elected members before a sitting, or even during, so we could have a good, informed debate about exactly what the public is saying with regard to Yukon aboriginal language protection.

I think this is a wise move on behalf of Yukon government.

It gives a two-year window of study to do this and for that report to come back. It may mean down the road some financial allocation toward this and I think there is nothing wrong with that. These are the languages of the first peoples of this land and they are disappearing. We are the public government; we need to do something.

I thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for bringing this motion forward. It's very important. It was brought forward in the last sitting and we would like to bring it to a vote. Let's work together on this, all parties in this Legislature. That's what I ask. Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Hart: I rise today in this House to debate this motion. It gives me great pleasure to do so. I am proud of what our government has done in the area of languages and the discussion, cooperation and consultation with members of the public, as well as municipalities and other First Nation governments.

I will try to respond to this issue that the member opposite raises and this motion. This is an attempt to speak to the issue that the member opposite has brought forward in this motion and we are attempting to do so as a government to foster our relationship with the members of the public, municipalities, and other governments as it comes with regard to language issues.

The Yukon government has participated in negotiations for assumption by Yukon First Nations of responsibility for aboriginal language programming. With the conclusion of those negotiations and the resulting assumption of responsibility agreements with Canada, most self-governing First Nations now receive funds directly from Canada.

Non-settled First Nations receive funds via CYFN. Yukon contributed approximately \$700,000 to CYFN's Yukon's First Nation language trust a number of years ago and we understand that trust — which was administrated by CYFN on behalf of the Elders Council — now has capital in it totalling almost \$1 million. This trust could also perhaps be a source of funding to support the preservation of aboriginal languages now or at a later date.

For its part, the Yukon government, through the Department of Education programs, programs at Yukon College, and the support for the Yukon Native Language Centre, is making significant progress in the delivery of programming and curricula to further the understanding, use and preservation of Yukon's aboriginal languages.

Mr. Speaker, in 2009-10 the Department of Education contributed approximately \$2.8 million to provide the Yukon First Nation second-language programs. This includes a number of components and success stories, including 20 First Nation lan-

guage programs that are offered in 18 Yukon schools. Programs are offered to seven of eight Yukon First Nation language groups.

There is \$170,000 for First Nation education support curriculum, classroom support cultural awareness; the salaries of 10 staff at the Yukon Native Language Centre. The Department of Education employs 30 Yukon First Nation language teachers, including on the job training for six First Nation language teachers training through the certificate-granting program with Simon Fraser University.

A language consultant provides professional development and training for Yukon First Nation language teachers and trainees. In addition, \$50,000 for the elders in the school program is being provided by the Department of Education. First Nation language teacher training program is an especially important initiative with the goal of producing language teachers who are able to understand, speak, read and write in their language, as well as having a degree in education with the specialization in a second language acquisition and teaching.

In addition, \$405,000 is transferred directly to the Council of Yukon First Nations for the Yukon Native Language Centre. The Yukon Native Language Centre is a training and research facility that provides a range of linguistic and educational services to Yukon First Nations and the general public.

The new Yukon First Nation experimental program focuses on First Nation content and perspectives throughout the curriculum. Three years of program funding has been approved for this Whitehorse-based project, totalling approximately \$600,000. A similar project is being delivered in Old Crow, funded through the northern strategy.

The northern strategy trust fund approved approximately \$2.5 million in funding for the "Walking Together to Revitalize and Perpetuate Yukon First Nation Languages". The project is being managed by the Self-Government Secretariat of Council of Yukon First Nations. This project will build on the strength of existing language efforts to develop an action plan aimed at the revitalization, maintenance and perpetuation of Yukon First Nation languages.

The northern strategy trust fund approved \$345,000 in funding for the Revitalizing Culture through Story and Technology, a project led by the Yukon First Nation curriculum working group.

In 2004-05, Yukon government supported a pilot project to support Yukon First Nation contributions to the First Voices project. First Voices is a Web-based project providing tools and services to support aboriginal peoples engaged in language archiving, language teaching and cultural revitalization. It is managed by the First Peoples' Cultural Foundation of British Columbia. The Yukon provided \$150,000 in 2004-05 to pilot the program in three communities and two schools: the Han language in Dawson City and Robert Service School and the Southern Tutchone language in Whitehorse and the Elijah Smith Elementary School, and the Tagish language in the communities of Carcross and Tagish. This project was completed in October of 2005.

Yukon government has expressed the willingness to continue to work cooperatively with Yukon First Nations on the

First Voices project with First Nations that express an interest in doing so. In addition to the development of the First Voices language archives, a keyboard specific to the Yukon aboriginal languages was developed as part of the First Voices project. It is currently in use in some schools. The font is available freely.

I think those are just some of the items provided by the Department of Education to assist with bringing aboriginal languages in our schools to our youth to assist them in picking up their language and also assisting them in their culture aspect.

Language is a very important item for all individuals, regardless. I think that picking up a second language is also a very important aspect. Language for me is very important also. I am currently in the process of taking a second language and learning that process.

I think my colleague here has expressed in her Tlingit culture just how important the aspect of immersion really is and I think she gave a very good sample of how it affects her particular culture and how it provides the best way to achieve an individual learning the language. I think also that a very important way of dealing with language is to ensure that the language is tied to the culture. It is very much the same way in which the Province of New Brunswick handles that process.

The Province of New Brunswick is probably the only true bilingual province within Canada. I will say that in my visits to the Province of New Brunswick, it is very interesting to go to their schools and their school system to just see how it is split up. It is very encouraging, in fact, to go anywhere in New Brunswick and be served in either language by the same person. In fact, in almost all places within New Brunswick, you have to be able to serve the client in both languages or you can't get the job.

It is a very important issue for New Brunswick and they take their language very seriously. They take their culture very seriously and I think that is also one reason why I think the two are a good mix.

I also believe that having a forum for immersion is very important and will ensure that those people who want to learn the language will take the effort and time and they will succeed.

It's a very important issue for many local First Nations. I've heard many Members of the Legislative Assembly here today indicate that they have maybe some knowledge of their cultural background, but not enough — not all. I'm also aware, Mr. Speaker, that there are several languages in the Yukon that are very close to being lost. But I will say that we have — as I've indicated earlier — provided many programs for at least seven or eight languages to be held throughout our educational system, which will, we hope, definitely provide some assistance to those wishing to learn their specific language.

I also believe in working with elders to ensure that we have somebody who is aware of their language and to ensure that they can maintain that language.

My grandmother is of Cree descent and we have 13 letters in our alphabet, so it's very limited when it comes to the written context so it, too, is difficult to comprehend at times — especially for me. But I will say there are more people, of

course, who understand that language than maybe some of the smaller dialects that are here in the Yukon.

There is a line in the motion here with regard to a commissioner. Now, the commissioner for languages of Canada has existed for well over 40 years in Canada. I dare say the members opposite, as well as ourselves, have indicated several times throughout our discussions here today that, in fact, we're still suffering from having languages being lost — and we have a national commissioner. He has been there for 40 years. Does the establishment of the commission indicate we're going to save the language?

I think, as I indicated, what we'd like to do is place the emphasis on working with our elders, working with our First Nations, and working with our educational system to ensure that we can cooperate together and have our youth get immersed in their language. That way, they can pick up that process, go forth and pass that language on to their kids as they go through adult life.

I think that providing for a commission doesn't solve the problem. I am concerned, as I just indicated, that the commissioner of language has been in Canada for 40 years. Members opposite, I think, even indicated that, 100 years ago, this would not be a problem. But 100 years ago, there were more people who could speak aboriginal languages than there are today. I think my colleague has also expressed many issues that have affected the children of aboriginal people, and how or why they are not picking up that language and I believe that is a very important issue.

I think that our efforts, quite frankly, should be looked at in continuing with our educational program. I'm looking at small programs here that are being provided by the Education department that are directly related to Yukon events, Yukon individuals, Yukon First Nation peoples, and translated into issues that provide a direct cultural and First Nation content which give many local First Nations an aspect of learning First Nation language.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at providing the NorthWind teacher notes to the companies Eaglecrest and NorthWind Books. These are going to be translated into First Nation languages in the upcoming years. These will prove to be very important documents to assist our aboriginal youth. There are also many non-aboriginal students who take up the aboriginal languages in our schools. There has been a great take-up of non-aboriginal children taking up aboriginal courses.

I believe that continuance, working toward our education process, assisting and cooperating with our First Nation peoples and elders to keep the language alive and working that way will be more productive and will provide us with stronger leverage on our children to ensure that the language can carry on for that particular sector — whether it be Tlingit, Southern Tutchone or Vuntut Gwitchin. So I believe that those are very important issues that must be taken and should be taken to ensure the language gets done.

Simply commissioning and providing a commissioner is not, I believe, the answer. I think we need to carry along with what we're doing. We need to follow up on the programs that have been provided through Education. We need to follow up

with our other First Nations on trying to improve the language and trying to enhance the language for all our youth in our Yukon school system.

In addition, I think there is an opportunity for the possibility of providing post-secondary facilities for adults who wish to take up languages. I think those are issues that will come based on the demand, based on the need, and based on the availability of our First Nation peoples to provide that teaching and to carry forth the cultural aspect of their individual First Nations to ensure that perpetual aspect of moving their language on and into the future years. I'm hoping very much that we can move along that process, advance cooperatively in our educational process, to enhance the ability of all of our children to pick up the aboriginal language of their choice.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nordick: I know my time is limited today, as it's getting close to the end of the day. I'd like to focus my comments on the Han language. The Han language is spoken in two communities: Dawson City, Yukon and Eagle, Alaska. The speakers of the language are called Han, which means "people who live along the Yukon River".

Han is closely related to the Gwich'in and Upper Tanana languages. Some older Han speakers can read the Gwich'in orthography of Robert McLeod and use his prayer book. During the Klondike Gold Rush, a reserve was established for the Han people at Moosehide, a few miles down river from Dawson City. In Dawson City, there are only a handful of fluent speakers remaining. The rapid decline of the language in this region is due in large part to the dramatic changes brought by the flood of outsiders with the gold rush of 1898.

Speaker: Order please. The time being 5:30, this House stands adjourned until 1:00 p.m. tomorrow.

Debate on Motion No. 848 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.