

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Tuesday, March 22, 2011 — 1:00 p.m.

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

Prayers

DAILY ROUTINE

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

Tributes.

Introduction of visitors.

Returns or documents for tabling.

TABLING RETURNS AND DOCUMENTS

Hon. Mr. Rouble: I have for tabling the 2010 annual report of the Yukon Minerals Advisory Board.

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

Reports of committees.

Any petitions?

Any bills to be introduced?

Any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr. Fairclough: I give notice of the following motion:
 THAT this House urges the Minister of Education to immediately table the *Education Act* review, completed between 2002 and 2004, according to the minister's own strategic plan, as required by law under section 205(3) of the *Education Act*.

Mr. Inverarity: I give notice of the following motion:
 THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to table outstanding legislative changes to the Yukon *Human Rights Act* before the end of this 2011 spring sitting.

Ms. Hanson: I give notice of the following motion:
 THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to show the respect and courtesy due to colleagues in the Legislature by advising them through a ministerial statement or other accepted legislative process prior to advising the media when announcing major new policy or budgets.

I further give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that on World Water Day we must:

(1) commit to a new relationship with water, whereby water is declared a common heritage and protected as a human right;

(2) employ water management practices that focus on conservation, restoring watersheds and protecting source water from pollution;

(3) work together locally and globally to address the dire situation whereby:

(i) 884 million people, including some people within Canada, do not have access to safe water; and

(ii) every 20 seconds a child dies from diseases associated with lack of clean water.

I give further notice of motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that, in light of today being World Water Day, a Yukon water strategy currently being worked on by the Yukon government must:

(1) create financial penalties for those who pollute our water and violate water licences;

(2) improve our water inspections and monitoring regime to ensure transparency and independence from influence;

(3) address growing public concerns that our water could, under international trade agreements, become commodified and delivered on a for-profit basis by the private sector.

Speaker: Are there further notices of motion?

Is there a statement by a minister?

This then brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: Yukon Housing Corporation mortgage portfolio

Mr. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, we have given this government ample opportunity to come clean. We have repeatedly asked this government for information about questionable contracts, questionable policy and questionable decisions, to no avail, Mr. Speaker. The minister responsible for the Housing Corporation, when asked about selling Yukoners mortgages, replied, "It is absolutely not true."

Mr. Speaker, in response to an ATIPP request, we have received a schedule of 10 meetings the minister had with the president of the Yukon Housing Corporation. The subject of these meetings was the Housing Corporation's Management Board submission on the mortgage portfolio.

Will the minister finally come clean with Yukoners on this issue?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: For the member opposite, he can revise that to at least 11, because we discussed it yesterday in our daily briefing.

All subjects are debated in — not debated, but discussed — in these meetings and there are discussions on the mortgage portfolio. The member opposite should put what he is referring to on the table, because it doesn't say "discussion of selling the mortgage portfolio"; it said — I am suspicious — that it was discussing the mortgage thing. That's discussed at every point in time. But again, for the member opposite, what he refers to is an application to Management Board Secretariat for analysis. Now, that has been presented before by the Member for Kluane who still labours, after all of his years in the House. He can't tell the difference between the Management Board Secretariat — a division of the Department of Finance — and Management Board, which is a subset of Cabinet. The member opposite should really get his facts a little bit straighter.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, Mr. Speaker, this minister is adrift on the waves on this one. I quote from the minister:

“There is no plan to do this. I think if the member opposite continues to claim this, he should put the evidence on the table.”

Those are the words of the minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation. The minister wants proof. Very well, Mr. Speaker, here is the proof: January 20, 2009, agenda item 12; February 12, 2009, agenda item 6; February 12, 2009, agenda item 4 — and the list goes on.

Ten meetings — the minister met with the Housing Corporation president 10 times over the course of the year to discuss the privatization of the Housing Corporation’s mortgage portfolio. The minister needs to come clean here. We’ve asked about this and the minister has denied it the whole time. The minister denies he ever saw the Management Board submission. He doesn’t read, he doesn’t know, and he doesn’t want to.

What did the minister talk about during these 10 different mortgage portfolio meetings with officials?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: What was discussed was a wide range of things at every meeting. During most of the year, we have weekly briefings, and during session, daily briefings. What we primarily discussed was the building of social housing — a 40-percent increase in social housing, compared to the very short-lived Liberal government, which built not a single, solitary unit — not one.

The Leader of the Liberal Party should stand in this House and explain why part of his platform in the coming election will be no more social housing, we ain’t gonna build it. That’s what is discussed in these weekly and, often, daily meetings. The member opposite again has to get out a little bit more.

Mr. Mitchell: The minister has no answer for these questions because he knows what the answer is. The gig is up.

He can no longer deny that he’s blissfully innocent here.

March 10, 2009, agenda item 9 — Housing Corporation Management Board submission on the mortgage portfolio. The minister talked about something with the president. The meeting agenda says the discussion was about the corporation’s mortgage portfolio.

May 7, 2009, agenda item 1 — the Housing Corporation’s mortgage portfolio is number one on the agenda and the minister is on record claiming that it is absolutely not true. He doesn’t read, doesn’t know and doesn’t want to. That’s what this minister keeps telling Yukoners. The minister had 10 meetings with officials about the mortgage portfolio but he has denied it. When will the minister come clean?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Again, for the member opposite, things are discussed at every one of these meetings — weekly meetings during the year, daily meetings during the session. The submission that he refers to — and I’ll read from the submission: “Request: As a first step in reducing Yukon Housing Corporation’s loan portfolio, Yukon Housing Corporation is seeking approval to remove any prepayment penalties on the Yukon Housing Corporation home mortgage loans.” That’s a very reasonable thing — for people to change their mortgages over to banks, where they have access to capital, often much cheaper mortgages, and to lines of credit.

But I have to go back to a letter that the Leader of the Liberal Party wrote some time ago on December — well, my date

is December 12, 2007, but I think it actually goes back to October 10 — asking me, as minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation — quote: “I am asking you to intervene...”

Again, the Liberals will intervene and interfere with boards and committees. That’s the first thing they’re out of the gate stating as their policy for an upcoming election. They’ll get in there and they’ll stir the pot every single time. We don’t. We don’t. For the members opposite, I think is giving a good example of the Liberal way of “Don’t attack policy, attack individuals” — not something that we want to get into.

Speaker’s statement

Speaker: This is Question Period. It’s not call-and-response, so when a member answers, then the other members, I presume, are going to listen.

The Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor, please.

Question re: Business nominee program

Mr. Mitchell: Let’s ask more questions of this minister. For the last few days we’ve questioned the Economic Development minister about his political interference with the nominee program. We haven’t gotten any decent answers. This is because this minister has no way to explain his actions. Yukoners see a pattern of political interference that this minister engages in and while explanations are owed, no explanations can excuse this pattern of behaviour. This minister should apologize for pressuring the officials responsible for the nominee program, pure and simple. As we all remember, he has issued apologies for this kind of behaviour in the past when the Premier demanded it. These government officials deserve the same respect. When can government officials expect an apology from the Premier on behalf of this minister?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Again, I go back to the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors minutes in 2000, August 24, a letter to the then Liberal minister of housing, and I quote: “At our recent planning session, you asked the board of directors to review Mountainview Place with the intent of developing new options.” Giving direct instructions — again, is giving instructions asking the minister to intervene? That came from the Member for Copperbelt.

I do have to go back and refer to a comment by the Member for Kluane, since the member opposite likes going back, and I quote from *Hansard*: “When you vote Liberal, you are prepared to throw your values out the window. You are prepared to forget everything you’ve heard and hang on for the ride and expect darn near anything...”

I think the Liberal Party is showing that right now.

Mr. Mitchell: Really, really shameful. We asked this minister to explain his actions as a minister, and he refers to old quotes, different portfolios and letters on behalf of constituents.

The minister says he feels attacked — he shouldn’t take this so personally, unless he’s involved in a personal way. We’re just holding him to account. After all, ministers are supposed to be accountable for their actions.

It wasn’t that long ago that the Economic Development minister interfered with the Department of Education. In a public apology to YTG employees, the minister referred to a

statement he gave to media where he had indicated that: "... the premier and my caucus colleagues supported the criticism of the department and its officials ..." then he went on to apologize by saying: "... that's not completely the case. They do, however, support the apology today."

Will the Premier or this minister's caucus colleagues once again support an apology to government officials from this minister?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: Again, what the member opposite refers to was finally settled by a letter from the conflicts commissioner which did give me the opportunity to place the seat of the former Liberal leader in question; I chose not to do that at the time and it's something not reasonable.

But I do go back again to a quotation dating back in *Hansard*, November 16, 2000: "...the poor performance of this Liberal government rubs off on us all." This is a direct quote: "It's like the behaviour in this Legislature — they raise the expectations of Yukoners that there will be better decorum in this Legislature, but they're the worst offenders, Mr. Speaker."

I think decorum in this House could be raised if the member opposite would go back and review his notes; the calligraphy is beautiful; unfortunately, the facts simply aren't there.

Mr. Mitchell: You know, Mr. Speaker, we don't need old quotes; we've got plenty of quotes from this minister. Now the Premier has no problem stepping in on behalf of his ministers and speaking for them when they get themselves into hot water. We keep waiting for the Premier to pop up as he does when he knows that we have no more chance to rebut, but perhaps he only engages in debates that he knows he has a chance of winning. This issue with the nominee program that the minister has created for himself doesn't seem to be an issue that the minister can dig himself out of. Based on the Premier's reluctance to enter this debate, it's obvious that the Premier doesn't want to volunteer to go up the creek without a paddle on behalf of this minister, yet again.

Is the Premier unable to explain the actions of this minister or is he just unwilling to defend the actions of a minister who he has lost confidence in?

Hon. Mr. Kenyon: What the member is referring to, of course, is the fact that someone asked a question, it was answered by e-mail, by giving the website and some basic information about the program, and it was sent to the deputy minister and to the director of business and trade for their information. What this is all about was the provincial nominee program, which actually resides in the Department of Education, the investment nominee program which resides in the Province of Quebec and with the federal government. There are a number of different programs, so if someone has a specific question on that, put it out; otherwise talk to the department.

Again, I go back to *Hansard* of October 25, 2000, and again the Member for Kluane said, and I quote: "He is waiting for the day the Liberal government says something intelligent even. He could be waiting a long time."

Question re: Boiler and pressure vessel standards

Mr. Cardiff: Mr. Speaker, it's proving very difficult to work with members of this government. On one hand, they chastise members of the Liberal Party for raising the issue of

YouTube video schoolyard brawls in Question Period, and then on the other hand, when we bring an important matter to the attention of the minister through letters, requests for meetings — I talked to the Premier in the hallway — we are rebuffed by the minister.

On this issue, we have tried to find a real solution for Yukoners, and this is not about scoring cheap political points. I would like to know why — I've tried to meet with the Minister of Community Services since last week — he has refused my request to discuss the concerns that I have raised?

Hon. Mr. Lang: On the issue the member opposite brought up, I sent that letter off to the department, and he will be getting communication back from the department.

Mr. Cardiff: This is an important issue that I requested to meet with the minister on. This is about a national certification for boilers and pressure vessels and our ability in government to live up to that national standard.

This is not unlike the National Safety Code for highways and the rules around that. There is a national standard. The public has brought to my attention that there are some serious concerns about the government's ability to live up to those national standards. Can the minister ensure that the government has the capacity to provide those certificates to that national standard?

Hon. Mr. Lang: Again, we're talking about a personnel issue — an internal personality issue or a personal issue of staffing. I have great confidence in the staff we have in place in the government. We have an inspection service through qualified staff inspectors and we also have qualified private contractors, so we do our job. There are some vacancies that are being advertised at the moment, but overall, the department does a fairly good job or an above-average job, considering the responsibility they have out in the Yukon at the moment.

Mr. Cardiff: For the minister's information, we're being watched by national organizations that provide the certification. What the problem is — and this isn't a personnel issue; this is about a public safety issue and here are a couple of things that are really important.

What is being done — not just at a Yukon level, but at a national level — is the validity of the certificates on boilers and pressure vessels, the validity of power engineer certificates and their written exams, the validity of certificates signed off by this government without the appropriate qualifications for pressure welders. This is a big issue. There's a liability issue for the government, there's a liability issue for private individuals, there's a question of the validity of insurance. Can the minister provide absolute assurance that the government can provide the required services?

Hon. Mr. Lang: For the member opposite, the answer is yes, we can supply that service.

Question re: Whistle Bend contract award

Mr. McRobb: I have more questions for the minister responsible for the delay in awarding the Whistle Bend contract and how this jeopardizes the whole construction schedule. Yesterday the minister failed to recognize that time is of the essence, so here's some information to help demonstrate the ur-

gency. This contract requires the transport of 150,000 cubic metres or 17,000 truckloads of gravel to the Whistle Bend site.

It also requires the excavation of 330,000 cubic metres of material at the site, 70 percent of which must be hauled away somewhere, and it requires 37 kilometres of pipe to be laid. A contract of these proportions would normally require five years to complete, but this government has rushed it to one and a half years and, for some reason, is delaying the job from starting. Why the delay in awarding the tender?

Hon. Mr. Lang: There is a 60-day period of time that we as a government can sign the contract off. There have been some engineering issues that have been brought forward, so the department is doing their good work at the moment. They have assured me that this contract will not be affected by the timelines.

Mr. McRobb: The minister fails to appreciate that time is of the essence. These contracts are usually awarded within a week. It has now been three weeks and counting. Contractors say that the schedule set out by this government can only be met if work starts on about May 1. After the government awards the contract, it'll take two weeks to receive the detailed designs and six more weeks to order in the pipe, so this job is already weeks behind before it has even started.

Hauling gravel to the site will require 17,000 truckloads. Disposing material from the site will require even more truckloads. In total, there are over half a million cubic metres of material to be moved. Can the minister tell us the reason for delaying the start of this work?

Hon. Mr. Lang: I'm very impressed with the figures that the member opposite puts on the floor this afternoon. Maybe we'll get time this afternoon to debate those figures. The project is going ahead. The timelines will be met. This project will be in full swing this summer. We're working through the issues that we find ourselves in today. The project will go ahead and the project will be on time.

Mr. McRobb: Well, it's already late. The minister still fails to appreciate that time is of the essence, so let's go over this some more. The immensity of this contract calls for the hauling of gravel in quantities greater than all the gravel hauled a decade ago from the Burns Road gravel pit to Argus Properties, where Wal-Mart and other businesses are now located. Furthermore, the material that needs to be hauled away from the site is an even greater amount. In order to meet the government's completion date, contractors are forced to run gravel trucks around the clock starting May 1. For some reason, this government is pressuring the contractors to do only day hauls, which further indicates that it doesn't appreciate the tremendous logistical and scheduling demands within its own contract tender.

Does the minister now appreciate that time is of the essence, and what's he prepared to do about it?

Hon. Mr. Lang: In addressing the member opposite, this project, according to the briefings I have had, will be on time and on schedule this summer. Regardless of what figures the member opposite puts on the floor here, I'll leave that in the capable hands of the department and the contractor to do just that. This is a contract.

Question re: Government accountability

Mr. Mitchell: As we reach the end of this government's time in office, Yukoners are sizing up the alternatives. They have to, because they no longer trust the current government. The Premier wants to hear more about the Liberal plan, so I'll tell him. Let us start with legislation. The Liberal government would bring forward a Yukon ethics and accountability act. We would amend the *Municipal Act*, and we would bring forward a Yukon energy protection act to ensure no government could privatize our energy future. We would bring forward whistle-blower legislation to protect workers, and we would amend the housing act to protect home owners from privatization of their mortgages. We would also fix the *Cooperation in Governance Act* and bring forward amendments to the *Human Rights Act*. We have laid out these plans over the last four years, and the Yukon Party has opposed them all.

The question is: why?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is quite a refreshing switch — now we at least know some of the things that the Liberals are going to go work on, like whistle-blower legislation, where the gates of the Assembly have been beaten down over the last nine years by the public calling for whistle-blower legislation. By the way, I think whistle-blower legislation is good legislation for the Liberals to bring in, considering they Google officials; they actually infer that the Department of Finance officials put incorrect numbers in budgets; they misinterpret what witnesses say here in this Assembly; they misinterpret what the Auditor General says; and the Liberal leader quits on the Public Accounts Committee. So whistle-blower legislation certainly would fit with how the Liberals conduct themselves.

The Yukon Party government — I think our track record speaks for itself. The Yukon is one of the shining lights in this country. Its population is growing. We have the lowest unemployment rate. We have vastly strengthened our ability to conserve and protect our environment. We have strengthened our health care system. We have reformed corrections. We have reformed our education system. These are the things we have done and much more to come.

Mr. Mitchell: We wonder why the Premier is so ambivalent about whistle-blower legislation when they had it in their platform and struck a committee to do it.

Over the last four years, we've laid out some of our legislative agenda, and this government has opposed every single bill. Let's move on to the "what we wouldn't do" part of the Liberal platform. We would not tie up \$36 million in bad investments. If you follow the *Financial Administration Act* — and a Liberal government would — you don't run into this problem and you don't have to write memos to yourself to remind you.

We would not try to privatize Yukon's energy future. We would not try to sell Yukoners' mortgages out from under them. We would not tell officials which people to accept under the Yukon nominee program. We would not intervene in Justice matters to release people's tow trucks, either. We would not make irate phone calls to officials and tell them to suppress documents, like the Premier did.

These are all Yukon Party priorities, not Liberal Party priorities. Can the Premier see the difference?

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Before the Hon. Premier answers, the Chair has trouble with the terminology "suppressing documents". From the Chair's perspective, it seems like you're indicating that somebody is breaking the law. Just be careful in the future. I'm not trying to limit your questions. Hon. Premier, please.

Hon. Mr. Fentie: Yes, the Premier and the government side certainly see the difference. We see the difference in the fact that, under a Liberal Party government, there wouldn't be any finances to invest.

We see the fact that, under a Liberal Party government, there wouldn't be a private sector economy. We see the fact that a Liberal Party government would certainly compromise industry in its position on such things as following due process and land use planning. We see the difference that the Liberal Party government doesn't even understand. You can't sell all or substantially all of the Energy Corporation's assets without board approval. We see the fact that the Liberal Party — and we see the difference — would not support delivery of health care in communities like Dawson City and Watson Lake. We see a lot of difference; so do Yukoners. That's why the Liberals are in such desperate straits: they have to go to the public with an empty hand.

Mr. Mitchell: I don't know why the Premier's so worried about the next election. He hasn't even said if he's running.

We have a legislative agenda. We have a long list of things we would not do, such as tying up \$36 million in bad investments. We also have a long list of things we would do and we've been saying that over the last four years. We would protect the Peel. We would build a shelter. We would build a new school in Burwash Landing and we would build a school at F.H. Collins. We would improve graduation rates for students.

We would have a real climate change action plan. We would improve the devolution deal with Ottawa. We would implement the recommendations of the task force on acutely intoxicated persons at risk. We would establish a dedicated industrial development fund from which resource industry participants could apply and receive funding for infrastructure-related expenses. A Liberal government would act on these issues. The Yukon Party has had nine years and has not. Why not?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: This is comforting. I'm sure Yukoners will sleep warmly and snuggly in their beds tonight — because all we've heard is idle conversation about what the Liberals would do. Here's what the Liberals won't do: they won't deliver on what they say they'll do. They never have. If that's the Liberal plan, please take it to the public while the Yukon Party goes about its business of representing the public interest and focusing on building Yukon's future, not dismantling the past.

Question re: Land-based healing initiative

Ms. Hanson: We were pleased when this Yukon Party government finally listened to the years of questions and recommendations from this side of the House to establish a land-based addictions treatment facility. Many of those questions were from the member opposite, who is now the Minister of Environment. Funnily enough, those questions stopped after he travelled the distance from here to over there on the opposite side of the House.

It is well-known that, for many people, being on the land and relearning traditional skills helps to build sober and self-confident citizens. No doubt associating with respected elders has a strong bearing on the results of this work. The Jackson Lake project appears to have all the elements necessary for success. Can this Yukon Party government tell us what criteria are being used to evaluate this pilot project?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: First, I want to acknowledge the Third Party leader for actually referencing something where the Yukon Party has, once again, shown an example of delivery. The land-based treatment project that we worked in unison with Kwanlin Dun First Nation and, indeed, the Government of Canada, proved to be quite successful last summer. However, there is still more work to do ahead of us and that's exactly what the government is doing today.

We see the value and the merit in land-based treatment, as do others. As we speak, we are putting together the necessary elements of a business case because we don't think the federal government should be void of this process. Much of what is done here in regard to the treatment of First Nation people who are dealing with the challenges of substance abuse and alcoholism can be attached or related to the issue of residential schools. So our work is always focused on ensuring that all the responsible parties and governments are involved in these processes as we proceed.

Ms. Hanson: The New Democratic Party has expressed strong support for this initiative and we want to see it succeed in the future. To succeed, it's going to need investments of time and money over several years — time and money from all governments. So it's surprising to us that funding for the project does not appear in the 2011-12 budget. It will be extremely unfortunate if this project comes to an end because you're not able to make a business case for ongoing funding. This is an important project for all Yukoners, in particular for all Yukon First Nation citizens.

We are dismayed to see that this valuable project appears to be just another example of the lack of planning and oversight in this government's health and social policies. Will this Yukon Party government assure the House that they will support the Jackson Lake project to meet the government's objectives into the future by providing the necessary planning and financial assistance?

Hon. Mr. Fentie: This is somewhat confusing. Here we have the Third Party leader, the Leader of the NDP, suggesting that this is a lack of planning, when we've actually already delivered land-based treatment.

I'm sure the parties who did the hard work out there at Jackson Lake delivering this treatment program are listening to this intently, because the NDP leader has now criticized members of the Kwanlin Dun First Nation, has criticized members of the federal government and Health Canada, has criticized members and officials in Alcohol and Drug Services, has criticized anybody who saw the values and the merits of this program. As we actually deliver land-based treatment, which we have, and are working on the necessary processes to continue it, we have the NDP leader criticizing all those individuals who are actually doing the work.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

Notice of government private members' business

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Pursuant to Standing Order 14.2(7), I would like to inform the House that the government private member does not wish to identify any items to be called on Wednesday, March 23, 2011, under the heading Government Private Members' Business. I think we all know that, with four days left in this particular spring sitting, and in light of the fact that we have well over 10 departments, we wish to forego the day.

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

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

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

Motion agreed to

Speaker leaves the Chair

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chair (Mr. Nordick): Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is *Bill No. 24, First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*. We will now resume general debate in Vote 51, Department of Community Services.

Do members wish a brief recess?

All Hon. Members: Agreed.

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

Recess

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

Bill No. 24: *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12* — continued

Chair: The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 24, *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*. We will now continue with general debate in Vote 51, Department of Community Services.

Department of Community Services — continued

Mr. Cardiff: I'd like to begin by saying thanks again to the officials from Community Services for being here this afternoon to provide the necessary assistance to the minister to answer all of the in-depth questions we have for the minister.

As I said earlier yesterday, the more the minister speaks, the more questions it brings up sometimes. But what we were talking about yesterday was about the Protective Services branch, and the minister had mentioned there was \$500,000 in the budget for a truck bay addition to the Mount Lorne fire hall. Once again, I'd like to say thanks to all the hard-working volunteers in the Mount Lorne volunteer fire department, and the Golden Horn volunteer fire department, and all volunteer firefighters across the territory. I would again acknowledge the mutual aid agreements between all those departments that ensure the protection of residences and the residents in all of those communities because it's important that they are willing and able to come to the assistance of their brothers and sisters in other volunteer fire departments, should the need arise.

With respect to the \$500,000 in the budget, this is a welcome addition, and I'd like to thank the Protective Services branch for recognizing that. This has been an issue at many volunteer fire departments — space requirements in order to house the necessary equipment to provide the level of service that's needed in rural Yukon. It also provides for the safety of the volunteers, so that they have room to move around the equipment and to get into their turnout gear and roll on a moment's notice when the need arises.

As I said yesterday as well, I think we only need to look up the hill at the protective services building that the City of Whitehorse constructed to see what a state-of-the-art design that building is and how it meets the needs — and they are specific needs — of the fire service. It has become, over the years, more technical and there is much more equipment required; there is need for training so that all firefighters, regardless of whether they are paid or volunteer, stay up to date and keep their skill level at a level where they can provide service and where they feel comfortable doing that. There were a couple of questions around that.

As well, the minister was talking about new vehicles being provided in Ross River and Marsh Lake. Much like with Emergency Medical Services, when new vehicles arrive they are tested here in Whitehorse and they're on the ground for a year.

That's not the case necessarily with fire service vehicles. But when they do roll out to those communities, oftentimes there is other equipment that is surplus off. So the question around that is, what is going to be done with the equipment that is being replaced, both in Marsh Lake and in Ross River? Where will those pieces of equipment be moving so that other

volunteer fire departments throughout the territory also receive a modest upgrade in their equipment? That's one question.

The other question is around the addition to the Mount Lorne volunteer fire hall — the \$500,000. What we've seen at the protective services building, what we saw at Golden Horn was — through the input of both the professional fire service in the case of Whitehorse and through volunteers who are providing that service in Golden Horn — that the design of the building and the design of the additions that have been put on some of these buildings actually meet the needs.

What's needed is the involvement of those volunteers — the volunteer chief, the volunteer deputy chief and all the volunteer firefighters who are on strength in those volunteer fire halls can lend a lot of good advice about what their needs are with respect to that fire hall.

One other question that I'd be remiss if I didn't ask is with regard to the Mount Lorne volunteer fire department and the situation with the tanker there. I know that over the years it has been a source of frustration for the volunteers at the Mount Lorne volunteer fire department. The unit is, I believe, an old tanker truck that was pulled out of service from the Department of Highways and Public Works. There have been numerous difficulties with it over the years. It's underpowered. The problem is that when the volunteer fire department rolls out to respond to a fire, when they get there they have the pumper truck and they have the water on the pumper truck, but that is time-limited and then they run out of water.

That's why they need the tanker truck to come to assist and provide those additional resources so that lives can be saved and buildings as well.

I've rolled up a number of questions there for the minister regarding the tanker truck at Mount Lorne, the design of the building at Mount Lorne and what is going to be done with the equipment that is being replaced at Marsh Lake and Ross River.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Addressing the member opposite about the expansion on the Mount Lorne fire hall, we certainly — through the capable hands of the fire marshal's office — work with the volunteer fire department, the fire chief in Mount Lorne to make sure that whatever we build fits the needs of the community and the volunteer fire department. It's a \$500,000 investment.

Yesterday in debate — I would like to clarify some points made by the opposition — I'm not quite sure it was this member or another member. The comment was that these dollars were for design only and that's not factual.

The \$500,000 investment is allocated for 2011-12. This means design and construction will take place this year. The building itself will be constructed; it is not just the design resources. The fire marshal's office is in regular contact with the Mount Lorne fire chief. The Mount Lorne volunteer fire department and the fire marshal work hand in hand with all our departments under our administration. The project will be led by the fire marshal's office, who will work closely with the local fire department, as always, on this project and on similar projects across the Yukon.

Not only do we support the local fire departments, but I applaud them for the work that they do to safeguard their communities throughout the territory. I also support the good work of the Association of Yukon Fire Chiefs and want to acknowledge Yukon's fire chiefs' office for the great relationship and support they have fostered throughout the Yukon.

In regard to the fire trucks and equipment, the fire marshal's office works hand in hand with the department — 17 across the Yukon — to identify equipment needs and provide equipment as required. This government has provided trucks and I am confident in our fire marshal's office to make decisions as necessary. In other words, answering about the management of the equipment on the ground — that is done through the fire marshal's office, not through my office, not through my office and it works in conjunction with the 17 volunteer fire departments we have throughout the territory. Any equipment we have — I imagine once a decision is made, we would maximize the use of that equipment. Again, that's not done through my office; it's done through the fire marshal's office, in conjunction with the 17 volunteer fire departments we have throughout the Yukon.

The fire marshal program objectives — just to remind members — is to support health, safety and public protection through the administration and enforcement of the fire prevention and protection program, along with other safety-related programs, like fuel storage and vehicle extraction response. They have quite a large responsibility.

The highlights would include major facility maintenance budget is \$688,000 and consists of two projects: \$500,000 for building an additional fire truck bay at the Mount Lorne fire hall, and \$188,000 for facility maintenance — in other words, money to be spent throughout the territory.

Fire protection is at \$405,000 and consists of six projects: \$50,000 for new or replacement firefighting equipment, some of which may be for Wildland Fire Management; \$30,000 for turnout gear replacement; \$20,000 for communication radios and pagers; \$35,000 for breathing apparatuses; \$230,000 for a new pumper tanker and \$40,000 for breathing apparatus fill stations.

So, as you can see, we have a varied responsibility. Of course, the resources that we put in on a yearly basis are well-used by the department itself.

In 2010-11, we are introducing a budget, which is the budget we're introducing today — or the last couple of days — that will support vibrant, healthy and sustainable Yukon communities. Of course, the fire marshal's office is all part of that. It is a privilege to represent the department here and the people of the Yukon — once again to present a budget that will bring widespread benefits to Yukon citizens and, of course, our communities. This budget provides significant contributions toward improvements in community infrastructure, drinking water, waste water and solid-waste management. Yukon's planned investment in community infrastructure demonstrates this government's determination to provide long-term benefits to our economy and will contribute significantly to the health of our local economy for several years to come.

It is a budget that ensures public safety programs and services and maintains this government's commitment to protect life and property from human and natural cause threats. Community Services continues to invest in strong local governance, consumer protection, corporate services, building safety and inspection services, public libraries, sports and recreation, and active living.

Of course, some of the highlights of this year's budget are more than \$56.13 million for infrastructure development across the territory; \$4.83 million for the Whitehorse waterfront wharf construction, parking lot and trail development; improving Whitehorse's waterfront from Rotary Park to Shipyards Park, including funding toward the completion of the Kwanlin Dun cultural centre and, of course, the new Whitehorse Public Library.

This government is particularly proud of the Whitehorse wharf, which is sure to become a vital and important feature of our capital city. Our investment in the waterfront is transforming the river's edge from Shipyards Park to Rotary Peace Park into a community space for all Yukoners to enjoy, and is a prime example of this government's commitment to maximize benefits for Yukon through strategic investment in community infrastructure, in partnership with Canada and, of course, our local governments.

There is \$21.768 million for continued construction on mechanical sewer treatment plant and district biomass heating system in Dawson City. Again, Mr. Chair, I remind the members in the House today that's mostly driven by a court order, so that is another project that is going forward.

Drinking water — which we have, in the last couple of years, invested in. Of course, I am pleased that this year's budget also renews our commitment in improving public drinking water systems in our Yukon communities. \$8.5 million is being invested to improve drinking water throughout the Yukon. Projects include improvements in the water treatment plants and, of course, the systems, extensions to the water systems, arsenic treatment, new pumphouses, wells, and additional reservoirs.

In 2011-12, work will be underway to upgrade drinking water systems in the following communities: Carcross, Teslin, Haines Junction, Ross River, Mayo, Rock Creek, Deep Creek, Horse Creek, Burwash Landing, Mendenhall, Faro, Watson Lake, Dawson City, and in partnership with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. There are not many communities that aren't touched by the investments in our drinking water quality and potable water issue throughout the territory.

Land development remains a top priority and a key goal for the Community Services budget for 2011-12.

Working with our municipal partners, we are working to maintain a supply of building lots to meet the demand of a territory that continues to grow as Yukon prospers under this Yukon Party government. \$41.8 million is budgeted for land development projects across the Yukon Territory, including important projects in the City of Dawson, Haines Junction, Mayo, Grizzly Valley and the City of Whitehorse.

Completion of the following land development projects include the following: the Callison industrial subdivision in the

City of Dawson; Haines Junction urban residential and Willow Acres subdivision; and Grizzly Valley. There was a \$31.1-million investment to continue with stage 2 of the Whistle Bend development and begin steps 3 and 4. Steps 1 and 2 of the Whistle Bend subdivision will provide more than 194 single-family lots, 48 townhouse lots, 34 duplex lots and 17 multiple-family lots by 2012. Together with the City of Whitehorse and other Yukon municipal governments, we are working hard to make the land available.

Community development is another responsibility of Community Services. We continue to foster strong local governance and promote healthy, active communities. In this year's budget, we will provide a \$150,000 contribution toward the Arctic Winter Games hosted in Whitehorse in 2012, and a \$130,000 contribution toward the hosting of the women's fast pitch world championship in the year 2012-13.

We continue to support Yukon's elite athletes and Team Yukon participation in the Canadian Senior Games, Western Canadian Games and the North American Indigenous Games.

This government recognizes that municipalities make a major contribution to improving the quality of life of Yukoners and will provide more than \$21.3 million directly to support those local governments.

We remain committed to modernize solid-waste management in Yukon and to implement the *Yukon Solid Waste Action Plan*. 2011-12 will bring enhanced recycling and composting options for waste diversion, improvements to ensure proper handling of hazardous household waste, installation of monitoring wells at remaining solid-waste facilities to meet regulatory compliance and additional regional transfer system set up to help complete a transition toward our commitment of a no-burn at solid-waste facilities in Yukon.

It will be \$900,000 to purchase a more efficient transfer system for the Whitehorse periphery and to set up systems at regional sites to better handle recycling, composting and chipping.

\$500,000 has been allocated to develop a modern solid-waste treatment facility in the Village of Old Crow. There is \$425,000 to improve recycling facilities and arrangements in the City of Whitehorse in order to better serve the entire territory.

Protective Services works to ensure public safety programs and services and maintains this government's commitment to protect life and property from human and naturally caused threats.

\$500,000 is invested for an addition to the fire hall in Mount Lorne. An additional bay will be provided, as we went through earlier. \$3.2 million is for the development of an integrated emergency response facility to serve as a second ambulance station, which will be located at the top of the Two Mile Hill. It will help reduce response times and better protect the citizens of the Whitehorse area.

Mr. Chair, as we go through this afternoon, and through the highlights of the department, I'd like to thank the individuals who are here with me today to assist me with answering the questions brought forward by the members opposite. They have

busy schedules, and I would like to thank them for making time to come into the House.

I would sit down now and entertain any questions the members opposite have of the department.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, once again the minister either didn't answer the question or ducked the question. For the benefit of *Hansard* staff and those of us in here and those listening, it is the same list he has been reading for the last three days, and I'm sure Yukoners are impressed with the ability of the minister to do that. Hopefully, they will be more impressed if he answers some of the questions.

I asked the minister about where the equipment that was being replaced in Ross River and Marsh Lake would be moving to, and I understand that it is managed by the fire marshal's office. The minister is ultimately responsible for the fire marshal's office and, if he doesn't have that information at hand, I would hope that he would endeavour to get back to me on that.

I thank him for the answers with regard to the Mount Lorne volunteer fire department and that it's not just for design, but I believe that the money hasn't been spent yet and that the design work has only begun in the last month or two. I'm just asking that there be some involvement. I believe that the minister provided the assurance that that would happen.

I didn't hear him respond to what the long-range plans are with regard to rectifying the situation regarding the tanker at Mount Lorne and the fact that it has been something that has needed to be replaced for many, many years. We're going to build a new truck bay to house the tired old tanker and it would be a good thing to ensure that an adequate piece of equipment fills that bay, even before it's constructed.

I'm going to go on a little bit of a new — I'm still on the same topic — direction and that is another reason why that tanker is required.

In communities around the Yukon, volunteer fire departments are often the first line of defence. They're the first responders in many cases in the event of wildfires. They're very talented individuals and they've received a lot of training on how to set up temporary water reservoirs and keep them filled. That's why we need those tankers, to be able to cycle that water back and forth from the water sources to where that water is needed.

In past years during periods where the fire hazard is either high or extreme, volunteer firefighters have been put on call, on standby. I'm wondering if the Department of Community Services intends to do that once again.

I think it's a valuable service to Yukoners when the fire hazard is extreme that those first lines of defence in communities are there. Maybe the minister can respond to some of the other questions around the fire tanker again and whether or not volunteer firefighters will again be on standby for this wildfire season.

Hon. Mr. Lang: In talking about the equipment or specific fire halls in the territory, I remind the member opposite that the fire marshal and his crew, working with the volunteer fire departments, have 17 volunteer fire departments, so it's more than one specific fire station. There is a bit of a manage-

ment tool there. Certainly I leave that in the hands of the capable fire marshal to make those calls.

The fire marshal's office supports 17 volunteer fire departments throughout the territory in unincorporated communities with infrastructure. We equip them in training — of course, training has been beefed-up, Mr. Chair — and provide all fire and life safety inspections.

It's a fairly large responsibility for the fire marshal. The fire marshal's office works with incorporated communities to provide proper firefighter training. In other words, the fire marshal is responsible for the training when required and performs fire and life safety inspections. In other words, again, the fire marshal's office is fairly busy. If you were to look at last year, 2010, the Yukon fire department responded to 810 incidents and situations, based on the current statistics, of which 243 were fire-related. The fire marshal's office provided 102 fire and life safety inspections throughout the territory. Also, the fire marshal's office inspected 75 residential storage tanks and issued 35 commercial storage tank permits. In other words, they have quite a large responsibility. The fire marshal's office has delivered 44 firefighter training courses — 44 training courses throughout the Yukon, which represented over 1,056 hours of volunteer and staff time above regular training. Again, the fire marshal's office is fairly busy.

As far as integrating or working with our Wildland Fire Management crew — we have a very effective protocol between Wildland Fire Management and our community fire departments. These protocols have proven successful throughout the territory and we don't see any changes or anything — we don't envision any changes being needed, so we do have effective protocol with Wildland Fire Management.

Power outage

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will recess.

Extended recess due to power outage

Chair: Order please. Committee of the Whole will now come to order. The matter before the Committee is Bill No. 24, *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*. We will now continue with general debate in Vote 51, Department of Community Services.

Hon. Mr. Lang: I'll welcome my learned friends from the department. When we were rudely interrupted by the lack of power, we were discussing issues around Wildland Fire Management and, of course, the fire marshal's office and our volunteer fire departments throughout the territory. As I said to the members today, the fire marshal's office oversees 17 volunteer fire departments. I'm very pleased to announce that all of them are active, including Old Crow, which is putting together a fire component of their own, and we're working with them on training. So that's good news. All of our communities will be covered by volunteer firefighters.

I want to make it very clear in our address to the House today that Wildland Fire Management and the fire marshal's of-

fice work very closely together and, in turn, our volunteer fire departments not only work in relation to fires, which of course is their main focus, but they work in conjunction with floods and other situations that arise in the community where volunteers are needed. Again, the volunteer fire departments have done a fabulous job in protecting their communities from fire, floods or other issues that arise in the communities.

Wildland Fire management is a very important component to the department, as we all understand and talked about over the last couple of days. The situation we found ourselves in last year in May, when our fire season started a month early, was a very stressful period for Wildland Fire Management because, again, if those fires had continued through the season, it would have made a very busy season for Wildland Fire Management. But as you see in the assessment through the year, we had the Carmacks fire, which was a Minto fire, which affected the Minto mine for a period of time. It was the largest, most significant fire in the territory, and it cost roughly \$900,000 to put to sleep, so it was an extensive investment. This fire threat, of course, in both the mine and our historical site, which is Fort Selkirk, burned 5,257 hectares. That's quite an extensive burn.

But the next biggest obligation we took on as Wildland Fire Management was the partnership with the B.C. government in the situation that B.C. found itself in down on the border, which was just outside our community of Watson Lake and, of course, Upper Liard and Highway 37. It was a huge fire and, in partnership with the B.C. government, our fire crews and resources assisted B.C. on this very large fire, which reached 35,000 hectares. It was six times larger than the Minto mine fire. It did affect the forest within 20 kilometres outside of Watson Lake and smoke was a major issue in the communities of Upper Liard and Watson Lake. It affected the community for several weeks. Obviously by the hectares that it burned, it was a very large fire. It was extensively fought by our wildland fire crews in conjunction with the B.C. government crews — a job well done by our crews.

In 2010 there were 28 active FireSmart projects — another project that we started. When this government came into power in 2002, that had been cancelled and we started the FireSmart project up again, which was a very well-received reinstatement of a very popular program.

There were 28 active FireSmart projects throughout the territory. They employed roughly 150 people. But again, I remind the members in the House that this is a very important component to safety in our communities, whether it's around the City of Whitehorse, our smaller communities — White River area — Haines Junction has taken full advantage of it — and places like Watson Lake and Teslin. You only have to drive through these communities to realize the benefit of these FireSmart projects over the last eight to nine years. It treated approximately — this is just a ballpark figure — 100 hectares in total. It cost upward of \$820,000. These are well-spent resources in our communities. Of course, it did employ 150 people and it did do the job it was set out to do. Our communities are a little safer because of it.

Wildland Fire Management — I think we tend to think in our discussions or when we discuss these different aspects of

the department, whether it's the fire marshal's office, the volunteer fire department, Wildland Fire Management or all these different responsibilities — but they all work in conjunction when disasters or other situations arise in our communities.

Wildland Fire Management responded to the Upper Liard flood — and that, of course, affected the community of Upper Liard quite extensively — and one in the Mayo area, so they are utilized wherever they're needed. Again, it's a great component of the department, but also for all of our communities.

As we go through this afternoon — and we only have a few more minutes — as we talk about this department, the department itself and the fire marshal's office, this annual report — and I think I did table this report — was in 2009. Some of the questions the members opposite asked in the last couple of days during our debate — the fire marshal's office is a branch within the Protective Services division, obviously, and responsible to the Department of Community Services. The fire marshal's office is primarily responsible for life safety, fire safety, education, fire service training, and fire and life safety inspection.

As I said earlier, it covers quite a gamut of responsibilities. The fire marshal administers the *Fire Prevention Act* and regulations. In addition, the office administers permits and inspections for above- and below-ground storage tanks for petroleum products, pursuant to the storage tank regulation of the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*. This is another responsibility the fire marshal's office oversees.

I won't go through the whole thing, because it has been available and it has been tabled in the House. It is an interesting thing and I remind members that, when the government tables documents like this, I really impress on people that we should read it because it does cover a large gamut of the fire marshal's annual report. Those kinds of things are things we do in the department.

When we talk about the investment we make in our volunteer fire departments, I was very clear on how we manage or how the department or the fire marshal manages the 17 fire departments, equipment and other necessities these volunteer fire departments need to do their job.

It's very clear that they, in conjunction with a needs review — which we do on a yearly basis — is how the equipment is managed and farmed out to these different fire departments. For any excess equipment that has extra life in it, a needs assessment is done on a yearly basis, and that is how the fire marshal's office does its good work.

If we were to look at other aspects of the department, as you can see, Mr. Chair, in the last couple of days, as we went through some of the responsibilities that Community Services has, it's interesting to hear the questions in the House. I represent the department in the House and answer those questions. I would like to thank the individuals who give me the answers on a daily basis, because, of course, the people who work in the department itself do the actual footwork when it comes to managing or doing the day-to-day operations.

The subdivision in Haines Junction is being finalized right now. It's an extensive investment by the Yukon government. There are 27 country residential lots and 49 single family and

three multi-family and two commercial lots. This is a large investment in the community of Haines Junction, and it has certainly been needed over a period of time.

The one thing that I recommend all the members in the House take advantage of is to drive to Carcross and see the improvements over the last couple of years that this government, in partnership with the First Nation and the federal government, has invested on the ground on the Carcross waterfront. Seven waterfront projects in Carcross are finished, including the most recent project, the *SS Tutshi* memorial. That was brought forward by Tourism — the need to do something to recognize the *SS Tutshi*. I am very impressed with how that has turned out in the conceptual plan for the *SS Tutshi*. You have to see it to really appreciate the work that was done on the ground there. There is a little bit more work to do, but it's very impressive.

Also, the Carcross-Tagish First Nation has done an awful lot of work enhancing their projects. I look at that and think that's a great partnership — the territorial government, in partnership with the federal government and the First Nation government — and Carcross has certainly benefited from that partnership. This year with the investment we made in the washroom facilities and — I'm not sure what they call the building, but it has a conference room in it. It's a gateway pavilion building. That is all being finished. That will make the lives of the individuals on the train and on the buses a lot easier. Obviously, bathrooms and those kinds of things are very necessary if you are going to push that number of people through Carcross.

Of course, we only have to look at our own waterfront to see the projects that this government has done, from Rotary Park right to the Shipyards Park. It's going to be this coming summer — you will see the improvements to this part of our community, which have been lacking for many, many years. Again, I would like to thank the First Nation, because they really went out front and invested a large amount of money in their cultural centre. Also, I would like to thank the department and the individuals who worked with KDFN to put our new public library in the project.

It's going to be quite an improvement to the waterfront, but certainly it will be an improved library for the City of Whitehorse. That will be in a leased space in the actual cultural centre. It's a large investment. Its estimated cost is roughly \$22 million, so it is a large improvement on the waterfront. The Kwanlin Dun has done a very impressive job on that cultural centre. I really look forward to the opening and to seeing the actual finished product. I've gone through it a couple of times, and every time I go through it I'm more impressed than the time I went through it before. I encourage all the members of the House, if they have an opportunity to go through that cultural centre — it's very impressive.

\$177 million in federal and territorial investments have been allotted for Yukon infrastructure improvements from the Building Canada fund. That again is a 75:25 percent partnership — another partnership we have with Canada. A total of 22 projects under the municipal rural infrastructure fund, MRIF, including another partnership on the cultural centre in Haines

Junction with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations — again, another stellar investment by the First Nation.

We're very pleased to partner with them to put the new information centre — and Parks Canada will also benefit from having space in that new cultural centre.

Five communities will receive improved public water treatment — again, I've gone through that — from the Building Canada fund: Ross River, Haines Junction, Teslin, Carcross and Marsh Lake. There's also the investment we're putting on the ground in Carcross.

So, as you see, we have an extensive budget here and will appreciate the questions from the members opposite.

I've gone through the volunteer fire departments and some of the questions there; also how we deal with wildland fire in a partnership and how the fire marshal manages excess equipment we find ourselves having in different fire departments throughout the territory.

Mr. Cardiff: It's amazing that we can actually accomplish anything in the Legislative Assembly sometimes. You ask a fairly reasonably concise question about wildland fire and you get to hear about infrastructure projects in all kinds of different communities. The minister continues to read from a list of projects and initiatives over and over and over again. It's no wonder we need to reform the way we do our work in the Legislative Assembly.

That said, I have lots of questions for the minister, and if he's prepared to stay here until 4:00 next Monday, then I guess maybe we'll get through this, but the more he stands up and just continues to read information on the record, over and over again, we're not going to get through this.

The minister has referred several times, to the Our Towns, Our Future review, and I would like to speak to one aspect of that here today. Hopefully, the minister can respond to that without getting into a litany of projects across the Yukon. My understanding of the Our Towns, Our Future project and consultation was to talk about the fiscal capacity and how the Yukon government can assist municipalities with fiscal capacity.

The City of Whitehorse has tabled a budget with a large tax increase again. The reason they're doing that is because, increasingly, they're having a hard time providing the services that citizens need and require. So there are two pieces to this question. The Mayor of Whitehorse has indicated in the past — and I've heard this discussed at AYC before and the minister has to realize that it's his responsibility to give them the authority under the *Municipal Act* to do this — about looking to own-source revenues, to having other sources of revenue besides property taxes. That could be a hotel tax; it could be a gas tax within the City of Whitehorse. This is done in other jurisdictions. I know in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, they have the ability to do that.

If they had the ability to raise their own-source revenues, that would, in turn, reduce the need to increase property taxes. I might add that it's not just citizens of Whitehorse that would be paying these taxes necessarily. It would be all those who are passing through as well. One of the reasons that I raise this — and this is the second aspect to the question — is that the senior

citizens are having a difficult time staying in their own homes because taxes are going up and fuel is increasing. The seniors homeowners grant used to cover a fairly meaningful percentage of the yearly property taxes, but what seniors in Whitehorse are finding is that taxes have increased so rapidly in the past few years that that amount doesn't barely even cover 20 percent of their total property tax bill.

They are also concerned — I know that the pioneer utility grant was increased, and I believe it was indexed, but with the cost of heating fuel rising rapidly, they are still finding it difficult. The two pieces of the question are, have the minister and his Cabinet colleagues discussed how to respond to the need of municipalities to expand their own-source revenues through the use of taxes or other instruments? And have they looked also at providing further relief to senior citizens who wish to remain in their own home but are having a difficult time due to the increased costs of operating and maintaining their home — largely fuel increases and tax increases? I look forward to a reasonably short answer.

Hon. Mr. Lang: Addressing the member opposite, I certainly realize that the taxes go up every year in Whitehorse. They have for the last whatever. Do I agree with the taxes or do I think that maybe we could look at how we spend the taxes better in the City of Whitehorse?

This government has never raised taxes. To be fair, the territorial government has not raised taxes. Now in saying that, the municipal governments have other issues which, in most cases, are based on recreational facilities and investments like that. But as far as Our Towns, Our Future, this government went out to have the discussion that we've had over the period of time in partnership with the Association of Yukon Communities, which we're doing at the moment. In fact, their report has been brought — it hasn't been tabled yet, so we're still waiting for that.

The Our Towns, Our Future committee considers fiscal capacity. They also considered provisions of local services, revenue generation, municipal grants, lot development and more. Of course, I look forward to the committee tabling that report this spring in Haines Junction during the Association of Yukon Communities general meeting and I will respond at that time. At the moment, as Minister of Community Services, we've tasked that board, that committee to do their good work and I'm not going to presume the outcome of that board at all.

Of course, we will be discussing that report in May 2011 at the Association of Yukon Communities AGM, so those are the kinds of things we are working on at the moment. They are going to table the report, and we are going to have a response to it at the Association of Yukon Communities meeting in Haines Junction.

Remember that there is a definite line of responsibility. The municipalities are a taxing authority and therefore responsible for setting annual tax rates. They are tasked with that. That's part of their responsibilities. Of course, citizens need to work with municipal governments on their tax questions. If any individual has an issue with taxes, they should work with the municipality.

The pioneer utility grant, which is a grant that the government puts out, is under Health and Social Services. I think that is indexed, but I'm not quite sure if it is or not. You could ask that of the minister when the minister is here. I think it's indexed, but I could be wrong on that.

In answer to the member's question regarding the tax system here, the Property Assessment and Taxation branch overview of assessment and taxation has some interesting statistics from 2010-11. Last year, there were 21,420 properties that were assessed for a total assessed value of \$3.59 billion. That was the assessed value of the properties. Last year, homeowners grants were paid to approximately 7,500 households, averaging \$415 each. I think that's what the member opposite was leading on.

The Property Assessment and Taxation branch sits under the Community Development division, along with the branches of Community Affairs, Information and Support Services, Operations and Programs, Public Libraries and Sport and Recreation. The mandate of the Property Assessment and Taxation branch is to provide all Yukon taxing authorities with current, accurate and equitable property assessments and establish the general property tax rates for all areas outside of municipalities. The branch also administers various other Yukon government programs, such as the rural electrification program and the rural well program — which is another program we put in place — seniors' property tax deferral — which is another program that seniors can take advantage of — and the homeowners grant program. Those are responsible to the branch itself.

The accomplishments for 2010-11 — a general reassessment was completed on approximately 8,200 rural Yukon properties. The rural electrification program, another program that we started as a government, continues to provide electricity and telecommunication services to Yukoners in rural areas. In 2010-11, 63 projects are in progress to be completed. The program allows for alternative energy systems, single and multiple on-grid electrical power, and telecommunication connections. Again, it covers a bit more than just electrification.

The rural domestic water program — excuse me, I was incorrect when I said that the government started the rural electrification program. That was started before. But we were the ones who put the rural domestic water program together. It helps to ensure Yukoners have access to safe, potable water. To date, 105 projects have been completed and 42 well projects are in progress or have been completed this year and we processed and paid out over \$3 million in homeowners grants. So that covers the Property Assessment and Taxation branch and how they work, in essence, and what programs are under their responsibility.

I'd like to make it very clear and reinforce one point — the Yukon government has no property tax authority within municipalities. We haven't got any flexibility on that at all. We have no property tax authority within municipalities. In an unincorporated Yukon community, this government has not increased tax rates at any time during our eight-year mandate. We as a government have chosen not to raise taxes.

As we move through the department and the many aspects of the department, you can see it is a very large department and, of course, we see a lot of the resources going into different programs and different aspects of the department. If we are to look at the investments we are making, in the Whitehorse and Carcross waterfronts — the Whitehorse waterfront is \$18.45 million. The roundhouse train shed renovations — \$511,000. That's under construction, with an estimated completion of March 2011. So it is work going on as we speak. The wharf parking lot trail development — \$5.092 million. Portions are under construction with an estimated completion in the fall of 2011; landscaping to be completed in the spring of 2012. The biggest part of it will be completed this summer. Shipyard heritage building renovation — another investment of \$668,000. Estimated completion is this fall, September 2011.

Ogilvie-to-Strickland landscaping — \$1,300,000 — construction in the spring 2011, estimated completion fall 2011. As you can see, the waterfront will be a very busy part of Whitehorse in the oncoming summer months.

The transmission line relocation — and that's a very important part of the Kwanlin Dun cultural centre because that will bury the line that goes across the river — is a \$1,450,000 investment, and there's no timeline on that. There is some question of engineering at this point, I think, but it is in the plans to be buried and put under the river instead of going over the river.

Parking at the Kwanlin Dun First Nation site — \$275,000. It will be constructed this fall, 2011. The Old Fire Hall tower addition — \$110,000. That's another engineering question at the moment. They're looking at the engineering. It is a project that was on the list, but I see that it is not for work this summer. The YESAA assessment — of course, that has to be done — \$13,000. Kishwoot Island bridge — extracting it and pulling it out of its location has been completed.

The Shipyards concession building for \$1.35 million was completed. The First Avenue reconstruction, you just have to go there to see that investment — \$5,260,000; trail construction is completed for \$176,000; the new lighting on the Robert Campbell bridge for \$79,000; landscaping of Shipyards Park for \$700,000 is completed; soil remediation for \$880,000 is completed; Rotary Peace Park expanded parking lot for \$420,000 is completed, and of course there is the Kwanlin Dun First Nation cultural centre. As you can see, on the waterfront in Whitehorse, there are large investments.

I will give an overview of what's happening on the Carcross waterfront. The pedestrian bridge was a \$2-million investment, and that was completed in 2008. The Bennett viewing deck and restroom facility cost \$294,000. That, again, was completed in 2008. As we move through this, you can see the improvements that are made on-site. The visitor base infrastructure, phase 1, power upgrades was a \$90,000 investment completed in 2009.

The Carcross carving shed — a great improvement for the town of Carcross and well-used by the First Nation and other carvers — was a \$472,000 investment in the waterfront in Carcross. The Carcross welcome sign was a very impressive piece of art, actually, when you look at it — more than a sign. That

was a \$40,000 investment and well worth every cent, when you look at the sign itself. It's quite a piece of art when you look at it. The Carcross boat launch dock and parking lot — \$585,000. Again, it's an access for people who boat in there. It has a parking lot for storing boat trailers. The *SS Tutshi* memorial, which I was talking about this afternoon, was \$600,000. It's a timber-frame structure with a viewing deck, interpretive signage and the bow and covered display area. Again, I recommend that everyone should take a walk around Carcross to see the improvements over the last couple of years.

Of course, I did talk about the Carcross gateway pavilion and visitors washroom. That's a very important part of Carcross. That's a \$750,000 project, which is under construction but will be finished, I would say, for this busy summer season.

The visitor infrastructure and Carcross downtown roadwork — \$1.4 million — you only have to drive through Carcross to understand the investment on the ground there from a parking situation, if you were caught at any point when the buses came into the community. Without this kind of roadwork and infrastructure it was, to say the least, a bit chaotic because the buses had no marshalling area and they just stopped wherever they found a spot. But this will certainly mitigate the problem that they've had over the last couple of years. This \$1.4 million will re-grade off-road areas and improve drainage on the high-traffic, high-density Tagish-Bennett-Gideon loop; asphalt pavement, concrete curb, gutters, sidewalks and traffic control. So as you can see, this \$1.4 million addresses the parking issue in the downtown core.

The Carcross landscaping is a \$450,000 project. It will be constructed in 2012. So you can see as we move out: 2011-12, water system upgrade for the construction summer of 2011 is a \$1.5-million investment — upgrades to the water treatment equipment and plant building improvements. That is going to be a massive improvement for the community of Carcross. Eventually we would like to see where Carcross could take advantage of a domestic water system through their community — and waste water — and that would be something that could be addressed with this investment on the ground. This could be the first step in a much bigger project.

There is \$1 million for turning lanes and a tourist pullout. The turning lanes into Carcross is another situation with the large demand that is on the community of Carcross when you look at the parking situation or just getting access and egress from the community of Carcross. This \$1 million will put turning lanes into Carcross and a visitors' pullout for the new welcome sign. That again will take advantage of that investment we have on the ground there in the signage.

It bodes well for the community of Carcross but, in improving Carcross, we improve many aspects of our community because Carcross, as you know, has a large First Nation component to it and also a general population and, over the years, it has become a destination for the White Pass railroad.

As we improve the community of Carcross, and as we do the work on the ground, I imagine, from a tourist point of view, we're going to see an improvement in the numbers in the town of Carcross. So that in itself will create business for the community of Carcross.

With the White Pass extending the rail — which we certainly encouraged when they made the decision to do that — from Bennett to Carcross, it was a large investment for the White Pass corporation itself. It certainly benefited the community of Carcross because — not only with rail coming back to Carcross on a seasonal basis, but the employment opportunities for the community of Carcross were certainly improved. When you think about many years ago, the White Pass was such a large part of the community of Carcross, because they employed a big part of the Carcross population on the rail crews. They had a creosote plant there that worked on a seasonal basis.

That all disappeared with the closing of the railroad. So that is certainly an improvement for the community because the community now has a basis. Now, mind you, it's seasonal work, but it certainly is something that the community has done for many, many years. Talking about Carcross again and the solid-waste situation there — because of the location of Carcross and the burning policy that was in place, it was very much of a deterrent to Carcross and the people living there. So it was one of the first areas we really looked at as to how would we go forward — understanding that we as a government are committed to “no burn” by 2012 — but we sort of fast-tracked Carcross because of the situation Carcross found itself in because of the burning situation and the winds and the valleys. It became quite apparent that we had to do something on the *Yukon Solid Waste Action Plan*. So Carcross benefited from one of our first investments on the ground with our *Yukon Solid Waste Action Plan* for putting in a transfer station, and that certainly has been well received in the community.

I'll sit down and answer any other questions the member opposite has.

Mr. Cardiff: If the minister insists on speaking the full 20 minutes every time I ask him a question — like I said before — we're going to have a hard time getting through all this.

I'm well aware of the projects that have been undertaken and completed in Carcross. I visit there quite regularly, and I think they're all valuable contributions to the community of Carcross. If the minister wants to talk about solid waste, I'm glad that they finally caught on. I asked these questions around solid-waste management, stopping burning, and transfer stations on a loop for years before they finally responded. Even then, they still insisted on dragging their heels and going through a different process.

But, as I said earlier as well, every time the minister speaks, there are more questions. The longer he speaks, the longer this is going to take. So if he would try to confine his answers to the question — answer the questions that are asked — it would be very helpful.

When the minister was responding to the question about municipal taxes, he also raised the issue of assessments. The reality is that it is the territorial government that does property assessments, so there is some flexibility, because the assessments affect the taxes greatly. While it's great that your assessments may be going up and your property may be worth more money, it is, once again, putting seniors into a hardship position when paying their property taxes. If the assessments

go up and the tax rate goes up, the taxes just go up that much more. So there is some flexibility on the part of the government with regard to the assessment side.

If the minister doesn't have the information, I'm sure his officials would be more than happy to send that information to my office later, and that is about the seniors tax deferrals. My question around the homeowners grant — I recognize the pioneer utility grant — I believe it is indexed as well — is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Social Services.

The minister's department is responsible for the homeowners grant. He mentioned that it was 7,500 grants averaging about \$415. There is a seniors component to that where seniors actually qualify for a little bit more of a grant than those of us who aren't quite there yet. My question was more around whether or not they had looked at increasing the homeowners grant, especially on the seniors side, to try to assist seniors with staying in their own homes. The minister failed to answer that question, but hopefully it will be better luck next time and he'll catch that one this time around.

He also went on as well to discuss the rural well program. This has been an issue that I have raised over and over and over again in this Legislative Assembly, and I believe the Member for Lake Laberge has raised this issue a number of times as well.

There are increased country residential lots being developed within the City of Whitehorse. The original reason for bringing in the rural domestic well program — ironically enough, it was because of the National Safety Code, something that we mentioned in Question Period — it was because of the axle loads and the increased cost of water delivery. It was to make water affordable. For the minister's information, it is World Water Day. Water should be a human right. The minister had said on numerous occasions that they're working diligently to provide access to affordable, potable, clean water in various communities. There is a problem, as the minister knows, with the taxation authority being the City of Whitehorse and the administration of the rural well program within a municipality. But I believe there's a willingness on the part of the City of Whitehorse, and other municipalities, as well, probably, to access this program. Despite asking questions year after year after year, the minister has not been able to come up with a solution to see this program delivered within the municipality of Whitehorse.

Yet there are more and more lots that this would affect being developed within municipalities that don't have access to a piped water system. It's probably not just in the City of Whitehorse; it's in other communities as well. The rural domestic well program is one way for this minister to ensure that all Yukoners have access to affordable, potable, clean, domestic water for their use to keep them healthy.

If he wants to respond about the seniors tax deferral plan and maybe looking at some way of increasing the seniors side of the homeowners grant to allow seniors to stay in their homes and be able to pay their taxes, and also give me an update on the progress or lack thereof on seeing the rural domestic well program delivered within municipalities.

Hon. Mr. Lang: The discussion about the municipality and the rural well program — we were the government that instituted the rural well program. We've tried to work with the municipalities. We've opened a dialogue with them on the opportunities for them to enter into this. The municipalities can provide a program similar to the rural domestic water well program and we, as a government, are willing to assist with details of how our program is set up and administered. The Yukon government understands municipalities may incur administrative costs in offering a loan program, but they do have the option of charging an appropriate administrative fee to offset the cost.

Dialogue between Community Services and City of Whitehorse officials last occurred over the summer with city officials indicating they needed to consider this issue further. We will continue to be available to discuss options for delivery of municipal water well programs — so it's not that we're dragging our heels on anything. The City of Whitehorse has gone back to the drawing board and they asked to have more time to consider this issue further.

We are open to discussion with our municipalities on offering this program, and we certainly look forward to any offer by the municipality in a positive way.

To go over the background of our water well program: the rural domestic water well program is available to rural Yukon property owners to assist with funding for domestic water wells. That is what it was set up for. When we had issues, the municipalities had the ability under the *Municipal Act* to provide for similar programming and to recover the capital cost by way of local improvement charges on their property tax bills. Again, Mr. Chair, we do not tax inside the municipality. The Yukon government has discussed and is willing to consider program options that would assist municipalities and property owners.

The Yukon government has no property tax authority within the municipalities; therefore it cannot collect loans through a local improvement charge, nor do we have the legislation to secure a loan in another taxing authority. So, Mr. Chair, our limitations on what we can do with a municipality couldn't be clearer. We have put the offer out to work with our municipalities. Obviously, through the dialogue, they are going to take some more time to consider it.

I certainly encourage them to consider it because it certainly is a benefit to their community, understanding Whitehorse is a large area and this would certainly improve access to potable water in the territory. I hope that that addresses the member opposite. It doesn't have anything to do with this government dragging its feet on anything. The municipal governments have the option. We work with the municipal governments and now it is their decision, and we will help if the decision comes and it is positive. I guess when we talk about Canada Water Week, which the member opposite brought up — at the beginning of Canada Water Week, I announced the 2011-12 annual capital plan for Building Canada with the federal Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. In other words, we made an announcement in our partnership on the beginning of Canada Water Week. Most of the Building Can-

ada projects are related to water and waste water. Displays are up in the Elijah Smith Building to highlight our projects and the Yukon government-wide water projects.

As we move forward, there has been no government in the history of the Yukon that has ever invested the dollars on the ground for waste water and our potable water.

I guess we have to look back so that we can look forward. Over the past four years, Yukon has seen tremendous activity to improve its infrastructure. The benefits are widespread across our territory. Building Canada funds, which is a 75:25 partnership that comes to us under the provincial-territory-based fund, plays a very central role in Yukon government's ability to undertake this work. In 2009, the Department of Community Services met with all our municipalities, First Nation governments, and local advisory councils and held public meetings in every community. We identified community infrastructure priority and built a long-term plan that will account for the changing needs of our Yukon communities.

Priorities were captured in the Yukon infrastructure plan, which is being used to strategically invest Building Canada dollars in Yukon communities. Another thing that I should remind the House of — these dollars have to not only go through the territorial government, but there is a process in how the dollars are okayed by the federal government — that's through Infrastructure Canada.

So any projects we do, or bundle of projects, we have to vet them with Infrastructure Canada. This year's list of projects does a good job of reflecting the priorities we need from the communities — in other words, the money is invested in our communities and recommended by our communities.

Over the next year, we will see a development of waste water and water services in the Town of Mayo, waste-water collection improvements in Destruction Bay and Teslin, water supply upgrades in the community of Old Crow, widespread improvements to the freshwater system in the community of Haines Junction and other water-related projects in the towns of Carcross, Tagish and Ross River. Yukon government is ensuring that Yukoners have access to safe and sustainable drinking water and is investing in waste-water treatment projects that meet or exceed national standards.

Building Canada projects identified in 2011-12 annual capital plan also include improvements to highways, roads and streets, and green energy projects. These projects include geothermal heat recovery as part of the Burwash Landing well project; district biomass heating system for the community of Dawson City; highway improvements on the Atlin Road and the Campbell Highway; also the improvements to the intersection of Two Mile Hill and the Alaska Highway in the City of Whitehorse; upgrades to community streets in Ross River, Burwash Landing and Teslin.

Canada and Yukon's joint investments under Building Canada bring long-term benefits to our communities, local businesses and of course our economy. This is a sound investment that will translate into much broader advantages for our Yukon. Overall, more than \$40.6 million in investments under the 2011-12 Building Canada fund will bring real benefits to Yukon communities, this year and for years to come. In part-

nership with Canada, the Government of Yukon is working to enhance sustainable community infrastructure for a healthy environment and provide safe drinking water, roads and bridges.

You can see where these dollars go on a yearly basis, but \$40.6 million is investment in 2011-12 from Building Canada in partnership with the Canadian government.

One of the commitments under the infrastructure plan is to continue to provide safe and sustainable water and waste-water treatment. A number of water projects — again I will go through them; it's an impressive 2011-12 — Carcross, Teslin, Haines Junction, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Carcross-Tagish First Nation, residents of Taku subdivision in Tagish, Ross River, Mayo, Rock Creek, Deep Creek, Burwash Landing, Mendenhall, Dawson City, Watson Lake, Faro and of course Old Crow. These communities are all being touched with Building Canada resources.

You can see that most of the communities in the territory that have needs will be touched by this investment. This investment is an ongoing investment. It's a seven-year program, and we are going into the fifth year. It's an ongoing investment in our communities. It's quite a lengthy accomplishment and investment in our territory.

The annual plans are really extensive — how we came out with the projects, how the municipalities and unincorporated communities and First Nations put their needs down. The investments have gone through Building Canada and us, but certainly every community is touched by this investment.

Mr. Chair, the investments are needed. When we and our communities, as a group, did the assessments, the total shortfall in the infrastructure in the territory was \$100 million some. It is an ongoing investment, and we look forward to the fall and ongoing years as we see the improvements in our community.

Also, we have to remember our municipalities have large responsibilities just on the day-to-day management of their communities, whether it's Haines Junction or Watson Lake or — I'm just talking about the municipalities outside the City of Whitehorse, which has a paid mayor and other facilities at her disposal. But in the towns of Watson Lake or Dawson City or Haines Junction, Mayo and Teslin — these communities have individuals who virtually volunteer their time to work as mayor and councillors in those communities. So I really have to take my hat off to those individuals. Certainly, I appreciate the work they do for their communities, and I'm sure the community does.

I look forward to investing this money because, again, this is money that would have to be invested and would have to come from the municipalities if, in fact, they had the resources to do it. So, this certainly relieves the municipality of some of the responsibility — the financial responsibility — and makes their decision process a little easier. That certainly covers the Building Canada in Community Services and certainly covers the number of projects we have and the large amount of money that's being invested in the community.

The member opposite was talking about assessments. I am not sure what he was suggesting, but it sounded to me like he wanted some flexibility in how assessments are done and who

they apply to. In other words, an assessment could be a different assessment to different homeowners — however you would pick the winners in that. The assessments are consistent and fair and we take responsibility for doing it very seriously. In one year, the assessors review properties in unincorporated Yukon and in the opposite year, municipalities. Our assessors are professional individuals and are guided by legislation. They don't have the flexibility to do something that would be — I guess maybe he wants to do something that is clever. The process is fair and consistent and has to be that. So, as far as our seniors assessments, we certainly as a government address any shortfalls we find our community in and certainly we take the situation of our seniors very, very seriously. We look at different programs that we have over a period of time and reinvest or reassess as this goes along.

We all understand it's beneficial for seniors to stay as long as they can in their own homes, so anything we can do to encourage that, we certainly do. I hope that answers this question on assessments and it clears up the fact that there isn't the flexibility in assessment that the member opposite alluded to.

Mr. Cardiff: Once again, the minister decided to pretty much talk the clock out and he still failed to talk about the seniors tax deferral or whether or not they were looking at doing something with the seniors portion of the homeowners grant. He can say they care about seniors all he wants, but he still failed to address that question for the third time. I'm sure that it's frustrating for those who are listening, hoping to hear an answer from this minister.

I have a number of other questions that I'd like to ask the minister; they are a little wide-ranging. The minister is responsible, as well, for consumer protection. We have raised the issue of payday loans on a number of occasions, and the high rate of interest that is taken by the loan companies. More often than not, it's the working poor, transient workers, who have difficulty getting banking services and are often living from cheque to cheque and find themselves in a shortfall position, unable to pay the rent or buy food.

We have raised this a number of times. About two years ago, the then Minister of Community Services said that he was looking into it, and they were going to look at the situation, I believe, in Manitoba and they were going to report back to the Legislative Assembly or actually put in place some regulations that regulate those high-interest rates and put a cap on them.

This is an important issue for people with marginal incomes. I think it's an important issue for many Yukoners. I would hope that the minister would take that issue seriously. I'm going to give the minister an opportunity to respond to one question and see how he does with that. Hopefully, we'll get a timely answer.

Hon. Mr. Lang: On the payday loan issue, there are two national payday loan companies in the City of Whitehorse only — the Cash Store and Money Mart. I'm not quite sure if they're both still here. I don't know. We are a member of the national Consumer Measures Committee, which has developed public education materials, including information on payday lending and borrowing. Consumer Services also provides information and advice to people concerned by this issue and we

continue to monitor progress of the payday loan industry within Canada.

It is a service that obviously a community takes advantage of because they're still here. In Canada, they passed Bill C-26, *An Act to Amend the Criminal Code*, which defines the payday loan and provides provinces and territories with the flexibility to regulate the payday lending industry. Larger provinces in Canada are introducing payday lending legislation. We are monitoring that as we move forward and we have The Cash Store and Money Mart here in Whitehorse. So it is something we aren't ignoring. We are monitoring it, and certainly working with Canada as a whole to see what we could do on a national level. I'm sure the federal government is working at it too. In answering the question, it's work-in-progress and is something that a government could look at in the future.

Mr. Cardiff: I thank the minister for addressing the question in a timely manner. It's unfortunate that after two years it basically sounds like we're still in a holding pattern on this one and watching what is going on in other jurisdictions.

Maybe we shouldn't be watching what other jurisdictions are doing; maybe we should be working with them to find the solutions together.

I have a number of areas that I still would like to explore with the minister. An issue that has been raised in the media, on the doorstep and out on the street is the provision of services through EMS and the changes that are being made around staffing and the reduction of overtime. I can understand the need to control the cost of services. This is much like the fire service — an essential service to Yukoners.

It is not easy running a service like this because it is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, and 10 years every decade, 100 years every century. This is something you can't do without, because when the call comes in you need to be able to respond. There have been assurances given by officials that the service won't decrease, but there are some in the community who are really concerned that — I believe that the issue around the ambulances, the actual vehicles that are on the street responding to calls are covered off, but it is in the event of there being a medevac and, if it is an extremely busy day, there might be delays. It's about how EMS prioritizes how to respond to these individuals who are in medical distress.

There has been some concern raised of the possibility that some people in communities, depending on the injuries or their medical situation, might have to wait three or four hours for a plane to be dispatched to their community because of the situation. You actually have to call in another crew on overtime in order to do that medevac flight.

The minister mentioned earlier in his remarks — I think it was yesterday — that there were 683 medevacs last year. That is roughly two a day, and there are probably days when the medevac plane doesn't fly, and I know there are days when they are extremely busy.

The issue becomes how those individuals who are requiring services are prioritized and the ability to respond in a timely manner and not leave people stranded in communities with medical situations where they're not being dealt with in a timely manner.

It has even been suggested to me by some that some individuals have had to wait until the next day — and this not through the fault of the air ambulance. This is around how we staff and fund Emergency Medical Services. One reason I raised this is because when you look at the budget, the actual figures in 2009-10 were almost \$7.5 million. The estimate for 2010-11 was about \$6.9 million. The actuals or the forecast for 2010-11 — so there has more than likely been an increase in the real cost of these services in the last year — is about \$7.85 million. But when I look at the estimate for this year, we're at \$7.35 million, which is below what was actually spent in 2009-10 and substantially below what we were forecast to have spent last year.

I understand that this is a difficult area to manage financially because there are a lot of unknowns. It's much like Wildland Fire Management, where you don't know what the situation is going to bring on an annual basis when it comes to wild-fire. You can make some predictions, but I know that — I think it was back in 2004 — we had an exceptional season for wildland fire and there were millions and millions of dollars spent and projects had to be deferred because of that.

But in this situation, it's people's health and safety and it's people's lives in some instances that are at stake here. So, while it's good to look at how you manage the overall 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week, 365-days-a-year service, you have to ensure that level of service is kept to a certain standard.

As I said, you cannot always predict what's going to happen. You don't know when there's going to be a disaster and there is going to be a requirement. You might have to have four or five crews called out. I would think that two or three of them would probably be on overtime if there was an emergency of that nature. We need to ensure that the level of service is maintained for all Yukoners.

We have seen, in communities, volunteers get stressed out where there has been a lack of services or a reduction in services in some communities here in the Yukon. We need to ensure that that doesn't happen any more and that communities are covered off, one way or the other, and they are not left hanging.

I am hoping that the minister can provide a response to that and give me and other Yukoners some reassurance that they are working diligently to ensure that this indeed doesn't happen.

Hon. Mr. Lang: When we talk about EMS and the ambulance service in the territory, there is another component to this that sometimes people don't realize — that air evac is also dictated by whether there's a bed at the other end. So if there is no bed in Vancouver or Edmonton, they might keep a patient for three or four hours here and stabilize them and then send them down to a hospital that will receive them. It's not just the staff that runs the ambulance; it's also whether we can get the patient into a situation in one of our communities. When we tend to think it's a question about air ambulance, in some cases is timing for, first of all, stabilizing the patient, and second of all, can we get the individual into a hospital situation as quickly as possible — understanding that our air evac crews have to take the patient right to the hospital and they have to stay with that patient until such a time as a person of authority

takes that patient over. So there are steps to be taken with an air evac situation.

Certainly, we as a government have an obligation — and we honour that obligation — to make sure that our air evacs are well-managed and well-staffed for whatever the call is. If you were to look at our 2010 call-out — I guess when you get the statistics here, and every call is important — but if you were to take a look at all of our ambulance stations or communities that have a volunteer ambulance service — in Beaver Creek there were 29 calls last year. That's two a month. Now, it doesn't mean that they're not important and that people don't — they don't happen at 9:00 in the morning, but understand that the volume is a bit less in Beaver Creek than it is in the town of Watson Lake, which is 365 calls a year. If it would average out, it would be one a day. Teslin got 74; Tagish got 56; Ross River is 56 calls; Pelly Crossing was 30 calls; Mayo had 105 calls; Marsh Lake had 24 calls — you would have thought that Marsh Lake would have been busier. Haines Junction had 115 calls — so, again, quite a number.

Faro had 59 calls. Eagle Plains — where we have an ambulance and trained individuals — had no calls. Zero. Destruction Bay had 18 calls. The City of Dawson had 250 calls, which is roughly 100 fewer calls than the Town of Watson Lake. Carmacks had 100 calls. Carcross had 27 calls. Beaver Creek had 29 calls. Again, as the member opposite was talking about, it is a management issue because every one of those calls is as important as the City of Whitehorse calls.

On the air evac, if we were to look at the medevacs, the medevacs are always available 24 hours a day. Given the remote locations throughout the Yukon, it does take time to mobilize and respond. Again, we are dealing with airplanes and staff, but we have made on-the-ground improvements in Dawson, for example. An ambulance is now stored at the airstrip for quicker medevac response — another tool that the department used to better manage the ambulance in Dawson. As the member said, he could appreciate we are looking to continually improve services and remain fiscally responsible. In other words, as you said, we are all talking budgets and how can we best spend Yukon taxpayers' money and give them the maximum service. But again, people's care is paramount, Mr. Chair. EMS provides safe, rapid, highly skilled EMS care and transport. We are committed to service excellence and people's care.

I think sometimes we forget what service we do get — when you go Outside and go into the hospital and see the treatment that Yukon patients get outside of the territory. People come back and they're amazed at the service we get with our partnerships in Vancouver, Edmonton and Calgary — wherever that care is available. We get a very thorough treatment when we leave Yukon.

I know that the new hospital in Dawson is a very contentious issue with the Liberal Party. Of course, that facility will mitigate some of the questions we have in north Yukon and is a needed component for the town of Dawson.

By the way, the improved facility in Watson Lake — the one that the Liberals insinuate on a daily basis doesn't exist — the hospital in Watson Lake has been a big part of our community for many, many years. It has a staff of 40 people today.

The ambulance services in those two bigger centres are quite extensive. Another recommendation we got from the department itself was to put some paramedics in Dawson City and Watson Lake, and that adds to the professional level of the volunteers and has been well-received by the City of Dawson and Watson Lake. There are two individuals in each community, and that component is made up of full-time positions, and that helps to modernize our medevac service in those communities.

Emergency Medical Services provides safe, rapid and highly skilled emergency medical care. I'd like to take a minute to thank those volunteers. There are more than 200 volunteer firefighters in the territory — 270, I think the number is. If we were to lump together the number of volunteers we have in EMS, it would be quite impressive — the number of Yukoners who volunteer on a daily basis.

In the 15 rural communities, this service is delivered by volunteers. Successful volunteer recruitment and retention depends on continued efforts by government and communities alike. In other words, we work with our communities, whether it's our municipalities or unincorporated communities, to make sure that we have a contingent of EMS workers. When I say that, we also have to be prepared for training. We institute a training program for those individuals and encourage them to work on their training as they improve themselves so that they can better serve as volunteers on these ambulances. We look for more ways to increase the number of volunteers. That's always an issue. How do we get more volunteers? Because a volunteer is a volunteer. He might be available and he might not be available, so we have to have a pool of volunteers that are in our communities so that we can either schedule or work with these individuals to make sure that we always have a full complement of volunteers.

The medevac situation and staffing situation is an ongoing process. We certainly have expanded that. We have expanded that to 24 hours a day.

We certainly have manned it. Another thing we did — very important — we re-categorized our employees, so they are now employees — they're not part-time employees or contract individuals. So now the individuals who work full-time for us on EMS and the air evac are full-time employees. So that was an improvement for the employees. Again, I remind the House that as we look at this, and we look at the medevac situation and all the resources this government has put into medevac — 2011 is \$6.6 million and 2010 is \$6.5 million and 2009 is \$5.0 million. There have been improvements in the resources. Community Services acquired the responsibility for EMS just in the last two or three years — 2008, as my learned friend says. Certainly, it's been a growing experience for the department to manage the file. We certainly are very serious about modernizing our facilities.

We have put the money together in the next two-year budget to have a EMS building at the top of the Two Mile Hill. As we know, we only have to drive around the community of Whitehorse — the best location for our EMS ambulance crews is invariably in the new location because in fact that's where the majority of our population is. Certainly that doesn't mean that we would shut down the ambulance facility at the hospital

because, in fact, that is where our air evac ambulance is stationed. Also, it could facilitate the calls in Riverdale and part of downtown Whitehorse. It is not something that would just be there for air evacs.

I think if we were to do anything in our rural communities — I think by the investment we have made in our communities from an education point of view — and certainly another thing we did is to modernize the actual ambulances. That was very important, and also the commitment to replace ambulances as an ongoing investment — and certainly you will see in the budget that there is an ambulance that would be replaced.

These ambulances are a very big part or component to our EMS investment. As we go through and as we replace roughly 10 percent of our ambulances a year, in that investment, we certainly modernize the ambulances. Those modernizations are based on equipment and other improvements — actually every year that the improvements are made, we try to take advantage of those improvements.

Another thing we did as a government was make a conscious decision to not only concentrate on training, so that our individual volunteers are well-trained and continue that training over the year. As you can see by the numbers, a person in Destruction Bay is not going to get the same experience in an ambulance as an individual in Watson Lake, but in truth, he has to be as prepared and as trained as any one of those individual people. Think about Eagle Plains — they got no calls last year. That individual — the EMS individual and the group there trained to get ready for any incident that could happen on the Dempster Highway. So those kinds of investments are very, very important.

The department has done a massively fine job of integrating EMS, EMO and all the departments to make sure we have the services we do have today with the volunteer fire departments. They have had the dialogue. They have sat down with our volunteers and signed a three-year commitment regarding honorariums. That's the first time in the history of the Yukon that those kinds of negotiations were done, and they have been successful, Mr. Chair, and that bodes well for the department.

Protective Services' objectives is to promote and foster emergency preparedness through the provision of guidance, coordination and support for safety of people, mitigating risk, protecting property, providing public information and the continuity of government in the event of a disaster or major emergencies in communities in conjunction with other levels of government.

In our outlying communities — the smaller communities like Haines Junction and Marsh Lake — EMS and volunteer firefighters are looked at in the community as being leaders in most cases and also the better-trained individuals for leadership roles, so they're called on in many cases. I only have to remind the members opposite about the floods in Marsh Lake and how the fire department there rallied around, and the wildland fire group and Department of Highways and Public Works and Community Services.

If you were to take a look at an EMS individual, a volunteer, they respond to people in crisis. It's a very demanding job. Of course, that in itself is training. How do you deal with indi-

viduals in crisis or in a situation where they need the help of EMS? That in itself is part and parcel of the training. Another part of the training is how the individual does after the situation. In the heat of the moment, they react to the situation; they're trained to do that. But how do they individually adjust themselves to some situations that are quite grievous? It's not an easy job and it certainly takes a lot of training. It's a consistent training thing that I appreciate the department doing.

I spoke last year at the annual meeting, when we bring in all the volunteers, or all the volunteers who can come, understanding that volunteers have to be in their communities. So there are always a few who can't make it. It was very apparent in the workshops that they were doing that day how the department interacted with our volunteers. That's important because, at the end of the day, if we don't have that interaction and that acceptance of leadership the department gives, and the training, our EMS would suffer.

The annual event also incorporates a skills competition, so it's a competitive thing. People get to know each other, not just the community that you serve, but there's also the opportunity for individuals to work with other communities. It's well done by the department and it's the kind of thing that builds esprit de corps up for all the teams that we have throughout the territory.

Of course, these skills are practised and it's also on the competitive level — but these people have to be prepared to put those skills to work on a daily basis. It is based on a simulation of a real-life event, so they don't know what the event is going to be. The event is triggered and these teams go together — these teams are put together, it's a mix and match of teams — and it's quite an interesting piece of work when you see it actually happening. I look forward to this year's. At the end of the event, which is a weekend event, we have a banquet. We have awards and people are recognized for their time and service and are also recognized for the competition and the skills that they showed during the weekend project.

The department does a good job when it comes to EMS and air evac. There is always room for improvement, and I certainly encourage people in the department, if they have ideas — we certainly encourage people to bring them forward. Anything we can do from our level to make their jobs easier and, in turn, to make ambulance service better for Yukoners, we are open to discussion. But at this point, I'm very pleased with the department, the individuals in it and look forward to opening the new EMS building at the top of Two Mile Hill and other investments we're going to make throughout the territory.

Mr. Cardiff: Well, once again the minister spoke for 20 minutes and he still didn't answer the question. You know, given that we lost an hour due to the power failure this afternoon, if I thought that it would meet with the acceptance of the members opposite, I would move that we sit for another hour so that we can listen to a couple more speeches by the Minister of Community Services. But I can tell by the reaction on the faces of the members that they wouldn't want to do that.

It's unfortunate that the minister didn't address the question — it's not just a question of people travelling to Vancouver — it's a question of people travelling in from the communities and being left in the lurch because of a problem with the

ability to have an adequately staffed service, to provide that service, and have to wait for them to be called in.

I have some other questions in the same vein about Emergency Measures. There is a lot of confusion in the public and there is concern about the potential impact of radioactive fallout coming from the nuclear failures in Japan after the earthquake and the tsunami. Our hearts go out to all those who have suffered in Japan. We understand that Emergency Measures officials met on Friday and Yukoners would like to know how we are monitoring the radiation levels in the Yukon. I understand that the federal government has put in place nine more monitoring stations. They want to know whether we're getting information from Alaska and the Government of Canada and, importantly, how that information is passed along to the public.

Because of what has transpired in the last week — a little bit more than a week — we'd like to know whether or not EMO officials have looked at what can be done in the event of a subsequent failure like this, where there may be a release of more radioactive material and a large amount, and whether or not there is a plan in place to deal with that, and how they would advise people about their safety and about the availability of medicine, should it be needed.

It also leads us to another important area, and that is about emergency preparedness. My colleague from Whitehorse Centre raised this issue about our dependence on food supplies that largely come from Outside. I've talked before about the just-in-time supply chain that leaves us with limited supplies.

The minister, in his capacity as Minister of Highways and Public Works, has talked about the great highway network and all the Building Canada money that came from the federal government to improve our highways and infrastructure in the Yukon, but should something like that fail — and we've seen that happen in the past: there was a massive failure of the culvert on the Alaska Highway down by Iron Creek and we had to scramble and use the alternate route on Highway 37. But if there is a problem with the transportation supply chain, what are the plans to ensure that Yukon's food supply isn't jeopardized?

We saw some of this on TV around food supplies, given the recent disaster in Japan and what happened there. There are individuals here in Whitehorse — citizens — and throughout the Yukon who share this concern. I'm hoping that the minister can respond to these issues when he returns to the Legislative Assembly tomorrow.

Seeing the time, I move that we report progress.

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

Motion agreed to

Hon. Ms. Taylor: I move that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Chair: It has been moved by Ms. Taylor that the Speaker do now resume the Chair.

Motion agreed to

Speaker resumes the Chair

Speaker: I will now call the House to order. May the House have a report from the Chair of Committee of the Whole?

Chair's report

Mr. Nordick: Mr. Speaker, Committee of the Whole has considered Bill No. 24, *First Appropriation Act, 2011-12*, and directed me to report progress on it.

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

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Speaker: I declare the report carried.

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

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

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Yukon Minerals Advisory Board 2010 Annual Report
(Rouble)