

Yukon Legislative Assembly
Whitehorse, Yukon
Wednesday, November 13, 2013 — 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.

Are there any returns or documents for tabling?

Are there any reports of committees?

Are there any petitions?

Are there any bills to be introduced?

Are there any notices of motion?

NOTICES OF MOTIONS

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

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to ensure expansion of the Whitehorse General Hospital:

(1) does not cause any interruption to the operation of the Riverdale ambulance station; and

(2) does not require the use of temporary facilities for ambulances and staff during the construction of the hospital expansion.

Ms. White: I rise to give notice of the following motion:

THAT it is the opinion of this House that with the introduction of amendments to the *Territorial Lands (Yukon) Act* as its only action to date, the Government of Yukon has not treated the safe use and operation of off-road vehicles with the urgency and attention it deserves or that the public expects; and

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to implement all 14 recommendations of the Select Committee on the Safe Operation and Use of Off-road Vehicles, which reported over two and a half years ago.

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

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to follow the Alaska-Yukon Intergovernmental Relations Accord as a framework for cooperative work on both sides of the border, to work diligently and proactively with the private sector and in response to private sector requests to ensure Air North is able to fly directly between Fairbanks, Alaska, and Dawson City, Yukon, by the start of the 2014 tourist season.

Speaker: Is there a statement by a minister?
 This brings us to Question Period.

QUESTION PERIOD

Question re: **Coroner's report re death at Watson Lake hospital**

Ms. Hanson: Yesterday, the Official Opposition tabled in this House two coroner's judgments of inquiry into the death of Teresa Ann Scheunert. The original report was issued to the family, the Yukon Hospital Corporation and the Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board on June 14, 2013. The second report was issued on July 9 and released to the media.

The issuing of two judgments of inquiry for the same death is unusual, perhaps even unprecedented, and it raises questions and doubts about due process.

Can the minister tell this House what legislation or regulation allows for the coroner to issue a signed final judgment of inquiry and then issue a second substantively changed judgment on the same death?

Hon. Mr. Nixon: We've looked at a number of things in the coroner's department. We've looked at the job description for the chief coroner and have made significant changes. The new job description acknowledges that the chief coroner's role in managing the coroner's service and elaborates on the duties in the *Coroners Act*. For instance, one of the duties of the chief coroner is to communicate the recommendations from inquests to the appropriate agencies.

Following the recruitment for the position, a new chief coroner has recently been appointed and I'd like to welcome her to her role.

Once the chief coroner has been operating under a new job description for some time, we will look again at any legislative changes that may be required, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Hanson: This question is about process — about the legality of issuing two substantively different judgments on the same death. It's not about a job description.

I'm not a lawyer and unlike the ministers, I do not have access to legal counsel. However, legal professionals have suggested that options for a coroner to change a judgment after it is issued are limited. For example, the coroner could make amendments to the original judgment as an addendum or if a coroner wanted to rescind the final signed judgment, that should be by a court order. Yukoners want to know if due process is being followed.

Mr. Speaker, what due process of law did the coroner follow to issue a second judgment of inquiry into the death of Teresa Scheunert of mixed-drug toxicity at the Watson Lake Hospital?

Hon. Mr. Nixon: I thank the member opposite for her question. Mr. Speaker, all reports of major inquiries and inquests, including the recommendations, are now being published on the coroner's website. This will improve the transparency and accessibility of the coroner's office.

As always, if an interested member of the public would like to request a report occurring prior to the new policy of publicly posting, a request can be made to the chief coroner.

Mr. Speaker, in this case, after the first report had been issued to the family, new facts came to light. The new facts

necessitated an amended report so that the public record would be accurate. The family was immediately advised of the error and that the original report had indeed been retracted. The new facts did not change the toxicological findings nor the cause or manner of death.

Ms. Hanson: The fact is that two judgments of inquiry into the death of Teresa Scheunert are significantly different. The coroner said in the media that new information came to light and that work that took her a year to complete, and I quote: “The first one was inaccurate. It’s just as simple as that.”

Nothing about this process has been simple for the family. The death of their mother and their sister Teresa Scheunert was not simple. Getting an autopsy was not simple. Getting clarity about how the system failed and how it will be fixed has been anything but simple for the family.

The coroner’s second judgment of inquiry into Teresa Scheunert’s death by mixed-drug toxicity in the Watson Lake hospital eliminates numerous points and two recommendations from the original judgment. By what legal mechanism can the coroner declare the June 14 judgment that she signed null and void?

Hon. Mr. Nixon: As I mentioned to the member opposite, we have had a number of changes within the coroner’s office. We’ve looked at policy. We have a new coroner who has just accepted her new role at the office. There have been a number of changes, as I have mentioned.

This is quite a circumstance and my sincere condolences go to the family. We have confidence that the hospital staff are doing everything that is required and that the coroner is doing everything that is required. In fact, she has retracted the initial report and has put forward an amended report. I’m satisfied with the work that was being done, even though the situation — again, my condolences go to the family.

Question re: Coroner’s report re death at Watson Lake hospital

Ms. Stick: The family of Ms. Scheunert received the original coroner’s decision on June 14, 2013. The coroner indicated to the family that she would also send the report to the Yukon Hospital Corporation and to the Workers’ Compensation Health and Safety Board that day. Less than five hours later, the family was told that a point was not entirely accurate and that the coroner would have to amend the report. The family was not told that, in the end, several points including recommendations would be changed. Mr. Speaker, in those few hours after signing and issuing the original report, what happened to prompt the coroner to not just correct a point, but to make several substantive changes and issue a completely new judgment?

Some Hon. Member: (inaudible)

Speaker: Nobody’s rising.

Ms. Stick: I’ll move on to my second question. Close to a year after the death of Teresa Scheunert by mixed drug toxicity in the Watson Lake hospital, the coroner’s original judgment of inquiry was signed and distributed to the family, to the Yukon Hospital Corporation and to the Workers’

Compensation and Health and Safety Board. It was a new judgment — completely different — three weeks later.

Mr. Speaker, the coroner researched Ms. Scheunert’s death for almost a full year and wrote and signed a comprehensive report on it. Yukoners are being asked to believe that within hours of issuing the original report, suddenly the coroner found a mistake without talking to anyone.

Who brought this new information forward after a year that caused the coroner to issue a new judgment of inquiry? Could we have an answer?

Hon. Mr. Graham: This government respects the coroner’s office and respects the fact that the coroner has a duty and a responsibility to fulfill under the applicable legislation. We’re confident in the coroner’s independence to act in an independent quasi-judicial manner, and we are convinced that in this case what the coroner did was appropriate. I’m not, of course, certain of exactly what facts came to light nor what cause her to change her report, but we are quite confident that she did it in a completely above-board manner and, as she said in her report, new facts came to light. It’s as simple as that.

Ms. Stick: We’re not convinced that issuing two reports is appropriate. A year is a long time for this family to wait to learn what happened to their mother and how future tragedies are going to be prevented. Having to wait so long for the coroner’s report has had consequences. They worked very hard to get legal representation but were repeatedly told to wait for the coroner’s report. There are statutes of limitations on actions the family could have taken. These were compromised by the length of time the coroner took to complete her judgment. Doors were closed on this family. When they finally got the report, within hours they were told it had to be changed. This raises many questions and flags, such as: What was this new information? Who sent it to the coroner? Why such substantive changes?

How can the family feel confident in the second coroner’s judgment of inquiry since it was changed so dramatically from the original judgment of inquiry?

Hon. Mr. Graham: Mr. Speaker, I’m very sorry, but I don’t have that information available to me at this time. Within the bounds of the applicable legislation, I’ll ask my colleague, the Minister of Justice, to review the Blues and ask his department for a report — again, within the bounds of the applicable legislation — and we would be happy to bring an answer back to the Legislature.

Question re: Economic outlook

Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Economic Development. Earlier this summer, the minister told Yukoners that the numbers don’t matter. He was speaking about the Peel watershed, of course. I disagreed with him at the time and I still do. It appears that the minister’s way of thinking extends to the Yukon economic outlook. This is an annual preview of what the minister’s economists see on the horizon.

It is usually released in April or in May, but this year it was not made public until late September. Other than the fact that the numbers don't matter, can the minister explain why this report was delayed for so long?

Hon. Mr. Dixon: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is quite simple: we have changed some of the ways that we plan on doing economic reporting and forecasting in the territory. This is under the advice of our economists in the Department of Economic Development, who suggested that it may make more sense to table an economic outlook in the late summer/early fall and then have an updated outlook come forward in the winter of early next year. So we're in the process of switching to a once-a-year economic forecast to a twice-a-year economic forecast, and that's the reason why we have had some changes in the timing and nature of reporting that we are experiencing.

Mr. Silver: If they're switching to a biannual report, they missed a complete season. A really good reason why this report was held back was that the numbers were horrible, so the government delayed releasing them, hoping that they would improve over the course of the summer. The numbers show Yukon will be 11th out of 13 jurisdictions when it comes to GDP growth this year. We are near the bottom of the barrel.

In the letters to the editor this summer, the minister boasted, "We have not only weathered the storm better than most, we have flourished through it."

Our GDP growth this year will be less than one percent. We are certainly not flourishing. The Yukon Party likes to take credit when things are going good, but it seems like they have a problem taking responsibility when our economy stalls.

Is the Yukon government willing to take responsibility for the Yukon having the third lowest economic development in the country this year?

Hon. Mr. Dixon: Obviously I disagree with the member opposite's speculation as to the timing of our releasing of the economic forecast. As I said before, we've switched to a new system of reporting and that's the explanation for why we are reporting now in the fall instead of the spring with our economic forecast.

I also disagree with his interpretation of what that forecast says. What the forecast says is that even in a climate of weak mineral prices and of soft markets for investment — a very challenging market on the whole for the junior mining sector in particular — our economy is still growing this year. That's a positive sign. What the forecast says as well is that next year it is anticipated to rebound to a higher level.

I am the first admit that economic forecasts are just that — forecasts — and they are not written in stone, but what they do point to is a direction — direction of growth and what we hope to be further prosperity for this territory.

I know we've got more work to do but we are committed to doing it and I look forward to reporting back in the spring with a new update on the forecast. We will have I'm sure some conversations about it then.

Mr. Silver: Mr. Speaker, we've seen countless examples of Yukon Party ministers taking credit for the Yukon's economy in the past. In 2007, we heard: "I will take

credit for becoming the hotspot in Canada." In 2010, we heard: "We, the Yukon Party, made the Yukon an attractive place to live." In 2011, we heard: "It is everything to do with us, this government." Now it's 2013 and our GDP growth for this year is almost the lowest in Canada and this government won't take any responsibility for this poor showing.

Here is a previous Yukon Party economic development minister — and I quote: "Certainly it is not world mineral prices that are responsible for the economic boom that we are seeing today."

Mr. Speaker, will the current Yukon Party accept responsibility for our poor showing for this year?

Hon. Mr. Dixon: With regard to the member opposite's quote, I would have to disagree of course that mineral prices have nothing to do with our economy. Of course world markets affect our economy. Yukon, most certainly is not an island. We are affected by global economic trends and conditions and in this current situation where we have weak mineral prices and a soft investment climate — a situation that is, as I said, generally very challenging for the mining industry across the country and across the world.

These challenges aren't unique to Yukon. They affect other parts of Canada as well. But, as I've said, let's focus on what's happening right now. We're seeing positive signs about next year. We hope that 2014 will be a strong year. Of course, Yukon government's economic forecast suggests economic growth of 8.8-percent GDP growth. The Conference Board of Canada predicts close to six.

So you generally see a positive outlook and a positive trend going forward. I know the member opposite doesn't like to acknowledge the good work done by economic forecasters like those in the department or in the Conference Board of Canada, but of course we respect the role that those economic forecasters play and the important contribution they make to understanding our economy here in the territory.

Question re: F.H. Collins Secondary School reconstruction

Ms. Moorcroft: Mr. Speaker, last week I raised the issue of the design of F.H. Collins and the City of Whitehorse's requirements for building insulation. All the public got was the Minister of Highways and Public Works explaining that it's not easy building a school.

The City of Whitehorse's Building and Plumbing Bylaw 99-50 requires a minimum standard of insulation that is suitable for our northern climate. While the minister referenced an exception for some insulation through computer modelling, the requirements for doors, windows and exterior walls insulation are not exempt from the bylaw. The bylaw is clear; it cannot be varied.

Will the Minister of Highways and Public Works explain to this House why the tendered design for F.H. Collins does not meet the City of Whitehorse's bylaw requirements for insulation of windows and exterior walls?

Hon. Mr. Istchenko: I said it in the House before and I guess I will say it again. In order to get into a building, whether you're a private person or a student, the building has

to be built to code. Whether you're in Haines Junction or whether you're in Whitehorse, it has to be built to the code of the community. The City of Whitehorse has a code. This building will be built to City of Whitehorse's code. The new F.H. Collins is being designed to meet LEED silver energy efficient standards. This is LEED standards for leadership in energy and environmental design and sets a benchmark for design construction and operation of high-performance green buildings.

I look forward to this project going forward. I look forward to a great new place for students to go learn.

Ms. Moorcroft: It would seem that the minister needs to understand the bylaw. In this specific case, the modelling exception in subsection 84(3) of the City of Whitehorse's Building and Plumbing Bylaw only applies to some criteria, which are set out in subsection 84(2). The modelling exception does not apply to doors, windows and exterior walls, which are sub-sections 84(4), 84(5) and 84(6). For the record, the windows and exterior wall insulation must comply with the city's minimum standards. Those standards cannot be modeled or varied. The minister says that he is going to build to code, but he's not.

Again, will the minister explain to this House why the tender design does not meet the City of Whitehorse bylaw requirements for windows and exterior wall insulation?

Hon. Mr. Pasloski: I believe that the minister has been very articulate in the fact that we will build all buildings to code. That's the expectation whether it's the private sector or it's the public sector. When you build something, there will be inspections. Everything needs to be built to code, and I am confident that we will be doing that.

What we hear from both parties on the other side is their low opinion of government employees, implying that they are not going to live up to their professional obligations and do the job to the higher standards and to the expectations that are expected of them on behalf of all Yukoners. For them to again come out as they have — for example, with employees from the Department of Health and Social Services, employees from Energy, Mines and Resources, and on infrastructure projects — here we go again hearing the opposition with their assessment, their low opinion of government employees.

This government stands up for their government employees. In fact, I was proud to be at the Long Service Awards last Friday, recognizing the professional service and the long-standing impact for all Yukoners made by our public service employees every day.

Ms. Moorcroft: It would appear that the Premier or the ministers opposite have a low regard for the recommendations of the building advisory committee, which they chose to regard, and that they have a low regard for the City of Whitehorse bylaws, which they've chosen to ignore.

We're hearing the government say, besides the refrain that building a school isn't easy, that it's all right to ignore city bylaws, especially when you sole source a contract to an outside company for \$1 million. That's an interesting message to send to builders, homeowners and tax payers. The Yukon Party's message is not fiscal responsibility, it is not good

government, and it's definitely not something that this side of the House can support. This government has already had to go back to the drawing board on F.H. Collins once, and now when they're rushed to get a school built for the next election, they are willing to cut corners and ignore city bylaws. I have a low regard for that.

Is this any way to run a government?

Hon. Mr. Istchenko: Thank you member opposite for the question or whatever that was. I don't dabble in the finer points, like the Premier spoke to, of contracting. I don't design it.

I heard the member opposite say "tender design". It's not a tender design; it's a design/build. Section 84.(3) of the City of Whitehorse bylaw clearly states that alternatives to insulation requirements "...may be determined through the use of energy computer modelling resulting in an equivalent performance." That modelling is underway. That's for the department to do.

I'm not sure what I hear all the time in this House, but before the House sat I listened to the media. I listened to the Leader of the Official Opposition talk about a school of 450 and the tender not coming out until next year. The tender is out — get your facts straight.

That's all I have.

Question re: Highway signage

Mr. Tredger: Winter is now here and the growing hours of darkness make highway travel much more difficult. Throughout my riding of Mayo-Tatchun, the inadequate highway lighting and signage approaching Carmacks, Pelly, Stewart and the sight-see entrance at Mayo is a concern for residents and travellers. The highway approaches to Faro and Ross River are also inadequately lit and signed.

When I raised this issue back in May, the Minister of Highways and Public Works said the issue was near and dear to his heart, that he had tasked the department, that it's a priority and that he was committed to safety for the travelling public — lots of words but no action.

This is a safety issue. When can the residents of Carmacks, Pelly Crossing, Stewart Crossing, Mayo, Faro and Ross River expect to see proper highway lighting and signage in and around their communities?

Hon. Mr. Istchenko: It is near and dear to my heart. I have to drive through rural Yukon too, so it's very important. I've heard from the residents of Pelly, as well as the residents of Haines Junction — I've heard from the residents of Beaver Creek on signage and lighting. I tasked the department to come forward. Through development and a good Yukon economy — that I'd like to say we can take credit for on this side of the House — it has created some development and some challenges to meet on a daily basis.

The department is out there. I have full confidence in the department to make sure that our roads are safe. They are safe and we look at ongoing issues as they come forward. I've tasked the department now to look at new flashing signs such as we've seen on southern parts of the Alaska Highway and within the city limits of Whitehorse and look at these issues.

Mr. Tredger: We'd been raising this issue for years without any action from the Yukon Party government. It should not take years to get basic, safe and proper lighting and signage in our rural communities and highways.

I want to tell the minister about a couple of problem spots on the North Klondike Highway. The narrow Pelly River bridge, which is used by pedestrians, is at the bottom of a long hill. There is inadequate warning signage and poor lighting — an accident waiting to happen. The site-see entrance to a major subdivision near Mayo also has inadequate approach signs, no lights and no turning lane. The cruel irony for my constituents, when they navigate in the darkness to Whitehorse, is the bright orange lights and carefully plowed roads to the relatively unoccupied Grizzly Valley subdivision. These priorities are out of whack.

Can rural Yukoners expect improvements to our highway signage and lighting or will the minister continue to leave them in the dark?

Hon. Mr. Istchenko: Absolutely you can, Mr. Speaker. Capital improvements to roads, bridges and airports totalling \$55.3 million with an additional \$2.9 million spent on planning, engineering equipment upgrades — and that engineering and planning is looking at lights and signage.

Question re: Garbage burning

Mr. Barr: In the minister's many years at the Yukon Party Cabinet table, he will recall that it was not long ago that all manner of garbage, tires, plastic, hazardous materials and materials that could be recycled were burned at rural dumps. With the *Solid Waste Action Plan*, the government made a significant step forward and in 2011 the Premier made an election promise to target 50-percent waste diversion by 2015.

Can the minister provide a progress report on whether the minister's promise will be met by 2015?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I thank the member for the question. As the member acknowledged — and I appreciate that he did acknowledge the fact that it was in fact during our time in government that the move was made toward ending the burning of garbage at dumps. That had been an issue for Yukoners in communities, including my own constituents, who were not happy with having smoke that contained known toxins within their communities. The government did take the steps to implement a transfer station at our waste facilities and to move to the point where only clean brush and clean wood is burned at facilities.

We are as well — in terms of the diversion part of it — continuing to work with partners in that. An important thing that the member should note is it is not just the Yukon government that has a role in this; the City of Whitehorse is the single-largest player in waste diversion and reducing, recycling and reusing. Every Yukon municipality that manages dumps also has a role to play and of course the Yukon government does with the unincorporated communities.

We will continue to strive toward the goal that we committed to endeavouring to meet, but we will do so in a

manner that respects the realities of all areas and all Yukon communities and we will work with our partners in doing so.

Mr. Barr: When residents of Tagish, Marsh Lake, Carcross, Pelly Crossing and Beaver Creek — to name a few — make their regular trip to the solid-waste facility, they are met with overflowing bins of recycling materials like cardboard and plastics. This has been ongoing since spring. The people are frustrated. On many days there is absolutely no room in the bins for recyclables. The hardworking staff shrug and say there's no choice but to throw the recyclables in compactors bound for the Whitehorse landfill. Can the minister who is ultimately responsible for the management of these facilities explain why recyclables in rural dumps are ending up in the landfill?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: What I would note to the member is the simple answer to his question — moving away from what was a very cheap solution for Yukon government and Yukon municipalities of throwing a match to garbage and lighting it is the cheapest way for governments to deal with solid waste. It is not one that is most environmentally responsible or the most health responsible, which is why we've moved away from it. Significant changes in the volume of garbage being dealt with and being shipped and transferred — as well as increased success in diversion efforts and increased volumes of recyclables being dealt with — has resulted in significant changes to the operational model for both the Department of Community Services and Yukon municipalities.

It has created some bumps in contracting in the flow of this. That is one of the issues that I discussed with Yukon municipalities, sitting down with mayors and councillors and officials during my tour of Yukon communities this fall. We're working with them on ensuring that we operate the garbage system collectively effectively now, as well as taking steps to increase diversion, increase recycling and reduce the amount of garbage that's going into landfills.

Mr. Barr: The bumps the minister opposite is speaking about have been going on for the last couple of years. I understand he has just taken over this department and I hope we can get some results. The Yukon Party mothballed the solid waste advisory committee; they ignored all sorts of problems with contracting. Instead of clear year-long contracts, transporting solid waste and recyclables have been handled in an ad hoc, one-off approach, called convenience contracts. There have been late payments to contractors for essential work and the public has been given confusing directions about what can and cannot be dumped. We are seeing the results of the lack of leadership. Facilities are filling up and recyclables are ending up in the landfill.

I've been to these landfills out and around the Southern Lakes and it's not a pretty sight. After taking one step forward in territorial solid-waste management, why is the Yukon Party taking two steps backward?

Hon. Mr. Cathers: It's really unfortunate to hear the characterization the member is making. In fact, there were significant changes to the operational volumes and the way garbage is being handled as a result of moving away from

burning and increased efforts to increase the amount of recycling and waste diversion. That caused challenges both for the Department of Community Services and for municipalities. We have worked with them through the “Our Towns, Our Future” approach, which came in after the solid waste advisory committee. These discussions have occurred; they have been achieving results.

I would point to the agreement the Yukon government struck with the Town of the City of Dawson around cost-sharing for operation of their facility, recognizing the contribution of placer miners and others in the rural area of Dawson to that facility.

As I noted, I myself sat down during my early days as Minister of Community Services with Yukon municipalities and municipal staff to discuss where things were working well and where there was opportunity for improvement. What I can assure the member of is that the focus of myself and staff is in working with our partners in this area to ensure that we have effective operation of our solid-waste system today, and that we continue to take the steps to reduce the amount that is being put into household garbage by improving recycling and other diversion efforts. That is exactly what we’re going to continue to do.

Speaker: The time for Question Period has now elapsed.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Speaker: Hon. Premier on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Pasloski: I just would like your indulgence to recognize a couple of people in the gallery today. Darren Parsons, someone who is known by all members of this Legislative Assembly — and Red Grossinger is also here — a veteran, Legion member — and I want to personally thank him for the large role that he plays every year in the Remembrance Day ceremony that occurs here in Whitehorse. I invite all members of the Legislative Assembly to welcome them today.

Applause

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

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

MOTIONS OTHER THAN GOVERNMENT MOTIONS

Motion No. 509

Clerk: Motion No. 509, standing in the name of Mr. Elias.

Speaker: It is moved by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to respect the service and sacrifices of Canada’s veterans by working with organizations representing veterans to enhance services and improve service delivery to Canadian veterans.

Mr. Elias: Mr. Speaker, it’s an honour and a privilege to rise today and represent the motion I signed and dated, which is No. 509:

THAT this House urges the Government of Canada to respect the service and sacrifices of Canada’s veterans by working with organizations representing veterans to enhance services and improve service delivery to Canadian veterans.

It is clear from the Remembrance Day ceremonies held throughout the territory on Monday and throughout the weekend that Yukoners recognize and respect the service and sacrifice made by Canada’s veterans throughout our nation’s history.

Canada, and Yukon in particular, has a rich history of military service and sacrifice that is a source of immense pride to all Canadians. This history is full of examples of both individual and collective dedication and heroism on the part of the brave men and women who serve and have served in our armed forces, not to mention our history of kindness and giving to war-ravaged areas around the world.

I believe we in this House all agree that our nation that sends its men and women in uniform into harm’s way must also stand and support them when their service is complete. That is the purpose of my representing this motion in the House today, Mr. Speaker. There is no service award or accolade sufficient to reconcile the debt Canada owes its men and women in uniform. We in government cannot claim to match the nobility of the nature of their service to this country nor should we try.

Yet we can and should express our gratitude to them in words, as many of us did on Remembrance Day. More importantly, we must express our gratitude in action and ensure that the services available to those veterans, and the respect we show them, is equal to their heroism. This is our national pledge to our Armed Forces. Upholding this pledge in policy is the responsibility of government. Upholding it in our day-to-day lives is the responsibility of all Canadians.

While many veterans return home without any direct need for Veterans Affairs, not all veterans are able to make a smooth transition. Some become at-risk or homeless. Many are unaware of the support that is available through Veterans Affairs Canada and now Service Canada. We must work to change that.

The federal government has invested almost \$4.7 billion in new funding to enhance veterans’ benefits, programs and services since forming government. That includes \$1 billion in investments since last November. In addition, the federal government has made a series of improvements to the *Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act*, which provides a comprehensive suite of tools, including income replacement that ensures their annual income does not fall below 75 percent of their pre-release military salary, with a minimum pre-tax salary being set at \$42,426.

There is an additional monthly financial benefit of up to \$1,709.27 for those who suffer from lost job opportunities because of permanent and severe injuries. In the event that a veteran has been severely injured in the service of Canada and cannot find suitable employment on a permanent basis

because of those injuries, an additional monthly support of \$1,047.53 is available.

Those who have completed rehabilitation and are able to work, but have not been able to find a job or have a low-paying job may also receive a tax-free monthly payment of up to \$2,593.32, plus an additional \$328.64 per dependent child.

A one-time tax-free award for injuries up to a maximum of \$298,583.97 is also available. Up to \$194.47 per month for wear and tear on specially maintained clothing to support a disability is also available. In addition, veterans and their families may benefit from a range of programs offered by Veterans Affairs and the Department of National Defence.

The *Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act* includes several other provisions. One of the most important of these is regarding career transition services. One of the most important things veterans seek upon release from service is a quality job. Veterans Affairs can help veterans find civilian employment by reimbursing eligible individuals for career services such as aptitude tests, job market analysis, résumé writing, career counselling and interview techniques.

Such services enable veterans to move forward with their lives and careers after release from service and allow them to continue to contribute to our country as members of the work force.

Another service available through the *Enhanced New Veterans Charter Act* is case management. This service is offered to veterans, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and their families who may be finding it difficult to navigate a transition or change in their lives. These transitions can include such things as a loss of a job or even a loss of a loved one.

Detention benefits are another benefit offered to veterans who were in the appalling situation of having been detained by the enemy, opposing force, or person or group carrying out terrorist activities. Disability pensions, meanwhile, provide monthly tax-free payments to eligible war service veterans of the Second World War and Korean War, civilians who served in close support of the armed forces during wartime, current and former members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and many members and veterans of the Canadian forces, who, in many cases, may be eligible to receive a disability award through the *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act*, in addition to this pension.

A suite of other financial benefits is available to veterans through the enhanced charter including earnings, loss benefits, permanent impairment allowances, supplementary retirement benefits and Canadian forces income support. The veterans charter, which describes these services, is a living document, Mr. Speaker. The federal Minister of Veterans Affairs has stated that the government is willing to revisit the charter to address gaps and ensure that services to the veterans are improved.

This motion lends support to that endeavour, yet while services and service delivery make a significant impact on our veterans, equally important is the action Canadians take to honour our veterans. This year, 2013, was dedicated to the

Korean War veteran. A new memorial for the Republic of Korea was dedicated to the Canadians who helped give that country the chance to become the free and prosperous country it is today.

On another continent, Canada is helping to construct a memorial centre at Vimy Ridge, where the heroism of Canadian soldiers demonstrated Canada's coming of age at the beginning of the 20th century.

Last year, Canada marked the bicentennial of the War of 1812, the war that guaranteed Canada's independence and shaped our national trajectory. Canada has also unveiled the travelling Afghanistan memorial, first displayed in Parliament's Hall of Honour before travelling across Canada.

A few months ago, veterans of the Canadian Dahmer Command of the Second World War were finally awarded long-overdue recognition for their heroic service to this country in one of the most dangerous, albeit controversial, campaigns of that war.

I am encouraged by the federal government's commitment to ensure that services and service delivery to veterans do not suffer regardless of structural or policy changes.

As civilians, our job is to never forget what our armed forces who are still active and our veterans have pledged in that covenant to us, and our job is to pledge our unwavering gratitude and support in return. It is with this view to upholding this pledge that I urge the members of this House to support this motion, Motion No. 509.

Ms. White: I want to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for his intent in calling this motion forward. I appreciate his feelings toward veterans, but he and I, however, will have a difference of opinion regarding the treatment of veterans by the federal government and Veterans Affairs.

Last week in a tribute to our veterans, I quoted Conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden. I believe, though, that the quote is as relevant to this discussion today as it was last week, so I ask your indulgence. In 1917, just prior to the Battle of Vimy Ridge, he had this to say to the servicemen ready to be deployed: "You can go into this action feeling assured of this, and as the head of the government I give you this assurance: That you need not fear that the government and the country will fail to show just appreciation of your service to the country and empire in what you are about to do and what you have already done. The government and the country will consider it their first duty to see that a proper appreciation of your effort and of your courage is brought to the notice of people at home... That no man, whether he goes back or whether he remains in Flanders, will have just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith with the men who won and the men who died."

There are many organizations in Canada that are in existence to pick up where the government has left off or where they have dropped the ball completely when it comes to dealing with veterans and veterans' issues. Physical injuries are much easier to deal with than those that are hidden. When a veteran leaves service, sometimes mental conditions are not

yet diagnosed. Many veterans struggle to ask for the help that they need and with the acknowledgement and acceptance of their injury, they have a hard time moving forward, especially when that injury is invisible.

Due to past, present and historical experiences with Veterans Affairs, many veterans have a fear of government organizations and this is where non-governmental organizations play such an important role. These places are where veterans hear from other veterans that help is available and that they are not alone. In many respects, Veterans Affairs needs to come out of its bureaucratic box and offer more support to these valuable resources.

During my tribute last week, I spoke of the Veterans Transition Network. The Veterans Transition Network is a national non-profit initiative created to help reintegrate Canadian veterans with their families and their communities. Their mission statement reads as follows: “For many veterans coming back from battle, including the 40,000 Canadian men and woman recently returned from Afghanistan, it is difficult to reconnect with the lives they left behind or find a meaningful way to move forward. When this results in isolation from family and community members, it can lead to depression, substance abuse, or even suicide. In our one-of-a-kind program, veterans are helped by other vets and specially trained psychologists to work through their experiences and reorient themselves towards a fulfilling future.

“The Veterans Transition Program (VTP) is the first group-based program for veterans transitioning from military to civilian life. For three months, participants in each program spend 80 hours over three weekends living with and helping each other identifying and potentially removing barriers that hinder their transition. Sessions take place in a completely confidential environment facilitated by clinicians and paraprofessionals, focusing on the transition process, the effects of trauma on the person, building skills for self-regulation, communication skills, and completing ‘unfinished business.’”

I know that there are two people in this room who have been very affected by the work of the Veterans Transition Network, and for me that means that this service is invaluable and that more people should have access, so I’m grateful that they exist.

Another organization of interest is Wounded Warriors Canada. Founded in 2006, Wounded Warriors Canada is a non-profit organization that helps Canadian Forces members, be they full-time reservists who have been wounded or injured in their service to Canada. Through a wide range of programs and services, they help find solutions where gaps have left soldiers in need. Currently their primary focus is on mental health — in particular, the staggering impact of PTSD perpetrated by operational stress injuries. Overall, their mandate is to help any veteran in need as they transition to civilian life. What caught my eye about this organization is their establishment of a hand-up program — so it’s not a handout; it’s a hand-up — and their outreach programs to homeless veterans.

Much of the money our Royal Canadian Legion collects while selling poppies goes to help fund Honour House Society in Vancouver. Honour House Society is a refuge — a home away from home for Canadian Forces personnel, emergency services personnel and their families to stay while they are receiving medical care and treatment in the metro Vancouver area.

I believe a poem by New Westminster poet Sue McLeod best describes what Honour House does and she wrote this when she realized that it was going to be on St. George Street. It’s called *Honour House*:

“Defenders will battle ‘til weary and wanting,
And often their wounds will be hidden away.
And even when healing their struggles are daunting,
Continuing on while the memories stay.
The horrors that weaken restorative waters,
The nightmares that menace the calm of the night.
Distorted deceptions of horrible slaughters,
The longing and prayers for return of the light.
A refuge was needed to clear the confusions,
A harbour of safety to weather the storm.
Support to relinquish the shadow illusions,
Restorative peace for returning the norm.
With patience and courage the aid will be given,
With comfort, the healing advantage is clear.
With knowledge and kindness the helpers are driven,
And pleasures are welcomed when loved ones are near.
St. George fought the dragon, was pierced but was
healed,
And so can our heroes reclaim what was dear.
Removing the burdens ‘til love is revealed,
Suppressing return of the things that they fear.
We value those choosing an arduous vocation,
Who bravely respond when the dangers are clear.
We honour their valour and strong dedication,
And offer a solace in Honour House here.”

I’ve heard about this place. This sums it up beautifully. It sounds like a safe refuge in the storm.

These three organizations are only an example of the supports that Canadians know their veterans need. These are Canadians who sometimes are directly affected, and sometimes indirectly affected and sometimes Canadians who don’t even know a veteran by name. But what these people share is a respect and honour of the contributions of veterans who have given so much.

My problem is: where is the federal government? Tax credits are not enough. The federal government has cut programs for veterans and continues to cut programs and services that directly affect the day-to-day life of veterans.

Excuse me, I didn’t know this was going to happen. I’m sorry, Mr. Speaker, it turns out that veterans’ issues are very near and dear to my heart. Two years ago, I never would have guessed that this is where I would be.

To fill this increasing gap in programs and services caused by the federal cuts and changes, non-profits like those I mentioned have stepped forward to fill these gaps. Not only does the federal government need to revise the changes they

made to the veterans charter, but they must also support the good work of these non-profits by more than just tax cuts to people who make donations. Government alone cannot support our veterans. They need groups like these to complement their services. Instead we see the government increasingly turning their back on veterans and leaving it to these groups. This is not acceptable.

With the changes to the veterans charter in 2006, the Government of Canada has created a two-tier system of veterans. Even the Veterans Ombudsman has weighed in on the poor treatment our veterans are receiving. Guy Parent, the Veterans Ombudsman, has stated that the federal government's new veterans charter is putting the most severely wounded veterans at risk of hardship and poverty. He has called on the federal government to fix this problem.

It's never easy to be a veteran, but never before have we seen the number of veterans suing the Canadian government like we do today. For years, veterans have raised concerns about the programs and compensation under the veterans charter. Under the legislation, ex-soldiers saw the decades-old pension-for-life system replaced with a workers-compensation-style approach of lump sum awards and allowances. Imagine being told that your security is being taken away. Imagine being told that the life sacrifice that you made for your country is only worth a one-time payout.

Worse yet, nine Veterans Affairs offices are set to be closed by February 2014, and that means that veterans in these nine jurisdictions will no longer have face-to-face access to the services that they need or that they deserve. This only adds to the current environment that Canada's veterans are finding themselves in, an environment that can only be categorized as confusing, challenging, complicated and disappointing.

As I noted last week, it is challenging for veterans and their families to navigate through the various systems and structures.

The amount of paperwork involved in the process to obtain benefits is extremely complex. Now two government departments are involved. There are two rehabilitation programs, and the application, as I mentioned, is 18 pages long. Applying for a gun licence is easier than applying for this. This paperwork decides a veteran's future.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Veterans Affairs is on record for saying that no veteran will ever be forced out of service before their 10 years is up, as long as they wish to stay. We know now that that is a lie. Unfortunately, there are many cases of just this happening, including for veterans who have lost limbs but can still do other work, veterans who are facing troubles with PTSD and so on. Because they are no longer battlefield-ready, they are being asked to leave the service. Again the system and our federal government are letting them down.

Mr. Speaker, the role of the federal government in honouring, respecting and meeting our social obligations to veterans cannot be understated. Sadly, as I have noted, our federal government has turned its back on the men and women who have given and who still give so much. We cannot allow

this to happen, and our backs should never be turned on those we ask to risk life, limb, soul and spirit.

A good-faith move in this direction would be to reverse the decision to close nine district Veterans Affairs offices.

Amendment proposed

Ms. White: I move:

THAT Motion No. 509 be amended by adding after the phrase "Canadian veterans" the following: "and reversing the decision to close nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada."

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT Motion No. 509 be amended by adding after the phrase "Canadian veterans" the following: "and reversing the decision to close nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada."

Ms. White: In speaking to the amendment, I believe that asking our federal government to reverse their decision to close the nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada is a much more doable than asking them to revise the veterans charter. I believe that this strengthens our motion and our dedication toward veterans, and I hope that everyone will support the amendment.

Hon. Mr. Pasloski: I rise on the amendment to the motion. First, I want to acknowledge the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for putting forward this motion. I also want to acknowledge people like Mr. Grossinger, who is the gallery today, and the work of the Royal Canadian Legion and other organizations who have provided incredible support for the thousands of veterans we do have among us today — not only those who have served in the past, but those who continue to serve on behalf of all Canadians today, either in the military or with the RCMP.

I also acknowledged in my tribute last week just some of the sheer numbers when it comes to people who have in fact put their life on the line for us. I mentioned that in World War I, 30 million soldiers were either killed or injured in that war. I mentioned 117,000 Canadians have died in those wars or other wars such as the Korean War, which has been recognized this year as well.

It's certainly something that is very near and dear to us. I think the House also knows that one of those small gestures that this government could do was recognize the veterans with the renaming of the Yukon portion of the Alaska Highway to commemorate the work and the sacrifice of those veterans both today and in the past, and those who will serve us as well in the future.

With regard to the amendment, last week we were quite excited when the NDP put forward their motions that they wished to debate on last Wednesday that we were going to see a motion on veterans because it was Veterans' Week. We thought it was very appropriate. However, there were two motions and unfortunately the motion brought forward by the

Leader of the NDP proceeded to filibuster her own motion for almost three —

Some Hon. Member: (inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Member for Takhini-Kopper King, on a point of order.

Ms. White: Sorry, 19(g) — imputes false or unavowed motives to another member.

Speaker: In what way?

Ms. White: By using the word “filibuster,” the Premier’s inferring that the Leader of the Official Opposition purposely wasted time; she did not.

Speaker: Government House Leader, on the point of order.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I believe the Premier was simply using a common turn of phrase that is used when a member spends nearly three hours talking to a motion.

Unparliamentary language

Speaker: The word “filibuster” is used a lot, and generally it does infer that a long and unnecessary presentation was done. Having been here and listened intently to the Leader of the Official Opposition as she spoke to a rather long and complicated motion, I’d have to say that it was long, but it did cover all the subjects within the motion that she put forward. It wasn’t an intentional filibuster to waste the time of the Legislature; it was in fact just a long and complicated motion.

In this case, I would ask the Premier to apologize for the intent of implying that the member was wasting time.

Withdrawal of remark

Hon. Mr. Pasloski: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will retract the intention, or the means by which you define filibuster as wasting time. I will rephrase to say that the Leader of the NDP did bring forward a motion on the economy and then spent almost the entire afternoon speaking to it.

Unfortunately, it was a motion which did not even get to a vote. Unfortunately, we are not able to bring forward the second motion, which certainly the government’s side of the House was very excited and interested in debating.

I think what we have heard is that there has been some concern by some of the veterans across this country about the proposed changes that the federal government has been bringing forward. I believe that such concerns need to be considered seriously when it affects the potential service delivery to seniors. We’ve also heard from some seniors that they feel that this new service model will provide better access or service to veterans through the Service Canada model simply because there will be — I believe over 600-more locations will be available.

We won’t be supporting this amendment to the motion because what we feel this is really doing is making this issue political. We believe on the government’s side that we want to show the Government of Canada our concern for this issue,

but not make it a partisan statement. What is important to all of us here is that we ensure that the government works with the veterans and works with those organizations to ensure that we not only meet those expectations but improve those outcomes for seniors right across — I’m sorry, for veterans — right across this country. I think that’s really what speaks to the intent of our motion. We can express our concern.

We want to ensure that however this is moving forward, the outcome for veterans is that there is an enhancement to the delivery of service for all veterans across this country. We hope that what we will see is unanimous support for our motion, which says that it urges the government of Canada to respect the service and sacrifice of Canada’s veterans by working with organizations representing veterans to enhance services and improve service delivery to Canadian veterans.

Mr. Silver: I appreciate the opportunity to get up and to speak to the amendment. I will be brief.

How we treat our veterans is how we should be treated as a nation. When you sign on the dotted line to serve your country, you commit your life to protecting our nation and every living soul in it.

The words that the member from Takini-Kopper King spoke about — conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden making prior to the battle of Vimy Ridge in 1917 and making a pledge to our soldiers — I don’t need to put it back on record. It’s been put on the record a couple times here now. I think what does need to be reiterated is the point of those now famous words. If you pledge your service and if you are willing to give your life to your country, you should have faith in your government to take care of you. Yet here we are in 2013 cutting servicemen out of pensions. Canada’s last three defence ministers promised that this would never happen.

Canadian soldiers are supposed to qualify for a full pension after 10 years of service, as mentioned here, yet the federal government has found loopholes to deny soldiers their pensions because they are no longer eligible to serve. Why can’t they serve? It is because of injuries that they sustained while fighting for their country.

Less than 100 years later, Prime Minister Borden’s promise has been all but forgotten. Here we are under the current federal government closing Veteran Affairs offices — from the frontlines to waiting in lines at Service Canada offices. Yes, there are a lot of Service Canada offices, but this isn’t the type of service and the type of giving back that’s deserved by our soldiers. I personally don’t mind waiting a couple of days to get my passport renewed, but I don’t suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Now what the NDP have done with this amendment is to change this motion from the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin’s to basically the motion that they tabled last week, but didn’t get to. Friendly amendment or not, this needs to get passed today. We need to put aside our political and partisan views and we need to embrace the fact that this government should be urging the federal government to do all they can for our veterans.

The Premier mentioned last week during his Remembrance Day tribute that we need to show actions when we're talking about remembrance and I really, honestly hope that we can all look past our partisan views, past our words used here, and rally behind an action. You can guarantee that this motion will not be laid to rest. I will keep this government to keeping this promise and I will be enquiring as to how they will lobby their federal counterparts.

We need actions. Pass these motions, otherwise our efforts here will indeed be wasted. I am in support of the amendment. I am in support of the motion. That is all I have to say.

Ms. Hanson: Sometimes I'm surprised, but I'm rarely appalled by what I hear in this Assembly. I am appalled by the comments made by the member opposite. The decisions about whether and how to deploy veterans are in their essence political. To suggest that it is a partisan motion to support the work of the federal department that was established by the Government of Canada for the covenant that the member for Takhini-Kopper King referenced, that the member for Klondike referenced — that I heard Mr. Grossinger from the legion reference again last week — the solemn covenant made by the Government of Canada in the second-last year of the First World War — and to suggest that that covenant can be broken, or should be replaced — by what? You know, Mr. Speaker, as much as we honour and respect the work that is done by the many non-government organizations and charities to raise money and enhance the services and improve service delivery for Canadian veterans — people like the Royal Canadian Legion and the War Amps and many other organizations do amazing work.

But the language that this government was pushing forward this afternoon without this amendment is not a very subtle way to escape the fact that the federal government has reneged on a solemn promise.

The Premier may not be paying attention to the media; the Premier may not be listening or reading what the Veterans Ombudsman has said in his damning report in October; the Premier may not care what people say — respected veterans who have dealt with post-traumatic stress disorder like Senator Roméo Dallaire and what he has said about the impacts of these cuts — and they are cuts, Mr. Speaker. Make no mistake about it. We are talking about the closure of nine offices. Veterans Affairs is scheduled to eliminate 870 positions. This is equivalent to one-quarter of its staff — one-quarter of its staff. The largest proportional cut will be to the program that supports the disability, death and financial benefits for veterans, where 32 percent of the positions will be cut. The largest absolute cut will be to veterans' health care, where 380 positions will be eliminated, or 20 percent of the program staff.

Mr. Speaker, to suggest that there is no need to urge the federal government to reverse the decision to close these offices is appalling. I cannot understand why the government would not support this friendly amendment. After all, when we ask people to serve us, we recognize and we will say fancy

words, but the reality is they fight for our freedom and they should not have to fight for dignity.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: It's really quite unfortunate to hear the tone we're hearing from the NDP on this. I would remind the members of the facts as we're debating this amendment. A week ago today, when the NDP had identified two motions to be called for debate, I indicated at House Leaders that the government would be providing a friendly amendment to the NDP, which we did later that morning — that we were hopeful the motion would be amended and unanimously passed that day — the Member for Takhini-Kopper King's motion. We did so early in the day. Then, that afternoon, to our intense disappointment, we got to listen to two hours and 50 minutes of the Leader of the NDP talking to her own motion, in what to me appeared to be a lot of unnecessary rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, we would like to move on in a positive manner. I am very disappointed to hear the NDP choosing to misinterpret what the Premier said in speaking to this amendment. The Premier was quite clear in indicating that our net objective is that we believe it is absolutely imperative that any steps the federal government takes in this area result in a net improvement to the delivery of services to veterans.

Nine offices — we understand the concern about the closures. But nine offices are not sufficient to provide that service delivery to Canada's veterans. It has to be delivered through other means — whether it's through regional offices, whether it's through Service Canada, whether it's through working in partnership with veterans organizations or through some other mechanism. There are many different ways that service delivery improvement could be achieved.

We are not fixated on which path the federal government takes. What we are fixated on is encouraging the federal government — hopefully with unanimous support of this Legislature — to treat the concerns of veterans organizations seriously, to hear their concerns about where they think steps the federal government is currently planning to take will result in a reduction of service, to hear those concerns of veterans organizations, to treat those concerns seriously, and to work with veterans organizations to come up with solutions that result in a net improvement to services and service delivery for our veterans.

Our focus is the objective. We felt that the member's specific wording in the amendment, which was the text of her motion last week, is one that the federal government would interpret as being a partisan political statement rather than a strong encouragement to the federal government to focus on the core objectives of hearing from our veterans and the organizations that represent them — hearing from them where they have concerns about the current service delivery model and what they think is the best path forward to improve that service delivery to veterans and to improve the accessibility of that service to veterans.

I hope that that has clarified it for the NDP. I am very disappointed by the partisan tone that their leader has chosen

to take in this because our objective, as we indicated, is to pass what we hope will be a unanimous and clear statement.

It is very simple. It leaves flexibility for both Canada and veterans organizations to determine what the solutions are. Again, the motion as tabled by my colleague, the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, urges the Government of Canada to respect the service and sacrifices of Canada's veterans by working with organizations representing veterans to enhance services and improve service delivery to Canadian veterans.

Within that statement, we think it is evident that one of the things that the federal government should be considering is reconsidering the decision to close the nine offices, as they've heard from veterans organizations, and to determine the steps — and what the various possible solutions are — to come up with ways that improve service delivery to Canada's veterans and give full respect to the strong concerns we've heard from members, including members of our local Royal Canadian Legion, and where they feel that the current path forward is not acceptable and will result in a reduction of service.

We commend those veterans organizations for the work they do in representing our veterans. We support them and want to support them in bringing their concerns forward to the federal government — and for the federal government understand that the Yukon Legislative Assembly also shares those concerns. But we do not want to see a partisan motion. We want to see one that focuses on the objective and that is why we believe that the motion as tabled by my colleague is better than taking the more specific, detail-focused and partisan angle that the NDP has chosen to put on it here.

In closing my comments on the amendment, I hope that the NDP will recognize that in the motion tabled by my colleague — under the broad statements that focus on objectives rather than on specific offices or service delivery mechanisms — we're focusing on the core objective of improving service delivery and respecting veterans in the organization, including treating very seriously the concerns that they have brought forward about current federal plans.

In closing my comments on the amendment, I just want to again thank all of Canada's veterans, both past and present and including those who have fallen in wars overseas. I hope that we will be able to come up with a motion that is unanimously supported, and I hope that members of all parties will temper their language and not use inflammatory language such as that used by the Leader of the NDP. I think it is not a positive inclusion to this debate because again, in closing, I want to emphasize my strong belief that the federal government needs to hear what veterans and the organizations representing them are saying to them and consider what steps and what possible solutions are appropriate and would result in an improvement to the services to our veterans, including appropriate treatment of veterans who have served in terms of the model around the disability pensions and pensions for veterans who have retired.

In closing, I want to reiterate my personal gratitude and the gratitude of the government to all who have served Canada in recent and in past conflicts. Without their service we would

not have the freedoms we enjoy today. I want to acknowledge particularly Canada's war veterans for their service and also those who have served us in peacetime and done their best to avoid Canada being placed into a situation where we would be in a war. As I hope members recognize, it is important for a country to remain peaceful. It's important to have a strong military that defends our national borders and protects our interests overseas.

With that, in opposing the amendment brought forward by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King, I want to again state my personal — and this government's — strong support for our veterans and strong appreciation of their viewpoints and their concerns.

Ms. Stick: I will speak to the amendment. I just want to start off by saying that I am confused because I heard that last week there was going to be a friendly amendment to our motion and that the government hoped it would be passed unanimously. Well, if we look at this amended motion, it's the same, except the two items are reversed. There is no difference; it is the same. By passing that unanimously —

Some Hon. Member: (Inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: The Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I would encourage the member to actually look at the wording that was presented because she just made a factual misstatement.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: Not having seen the amendment to the original one that the NDP had brought forward, I can't give a ruling on this. I don't have the facts in front of me.

Ms. Stick: Mr. Speaker, there's not much difference in this proposed amended motion today. It is the same. By passing it unanimously, it's not partisan. We are urging the government to do exactly what the member opposite said — we are urging them to listen to veterans, to their families and to the public who have demonstrated, marched, written letters, protested, written reports and publicly spoken out against the closure of nine offices. What goes with that? We already heard the statistics about the staff who will be lost.

Veterans in the Yukon have said these cuts — and they have been going on; this isn't new — in the last number of years have resulted in no visits from Veterans Affairs staff, when at one time case workers came to the Yukon a couple of times a year to work with veterans, their families and to give them assistance. This has not happened for over two years. That is not good service.

By asking the government — urging the government, to do this one thing — to keep these nine offices open and what that means in terms of staffing and services to veterans — is not partisan. It is simply listening to what veterans and their families and the public have been asking for, not just last week, but for a long time now. This isn't something to be

debated once a year. This is something that should be in the forefront all the time, year-round.

I support this amendment and I think we could pass it unanimously without it being partisan.

Speaker: Does any other member wish to be heard on the amendment?

Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pasloski: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Disagree.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Graham: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Kent: Disagree.

Ms. McLeod: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Istchenko: Disagree.

Hon. Mr. Dixon: Disagree.

Mr. Hassard: Disagree.

Mr. Elias: Disagree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Ms. Stick: Agree.

Ms. Moorcroft: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Mr. Tredger: Agree

Mr. Barr: Agree.

Mr. Silver: Agree.

Clerk: The results are seven yea, 10 nay.

Speaker: The nays have it. I declare the amendment defeated.

Amendment to Motion No. 509 negatived

Speaker's statement

Speaker: Before returning to debate on the main motion, the Chair would like to make a brief statement.

During her speech to the main motion, the member for Takhini-Kopper King referred to assurances made by the federal Minister of Veterans Affairs as a "lie". While the Standing Orders are designed primarily to protect members of this House during debate, members should also be careful about how they refer to the words or actions of other persons who do not have the ability to defend themselves within this place.

It's something to keep in mind in future please.

Does anybody wish to be heard on the original motion?

Ms. Hanson: With respect to the motion as unamended, I think that it goes without saying that the Official Opposition does very much respect the work that's done by non-government organizations, by the Royal Canadian Legion and others. But I don't think that we can

escape — as I said earlier in speaking to the other motion and I will say again: I don't think we can escape the fact that the primary relationship between those who serve Canada, whether it is a veteran of one of the Armed Forces or the RCMP, is between Canada and that person — the veteran.

So I speak with concern about this motion because it really does skirt around the very real fact — as my colleague from Riverdale South, my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King and the Member for Klondike spoke to — skirt around the fact and the reality that the federal government has systematically moved itself away from delivering on the commitments made, as referenced earlier, by the federal government toward the close of the First World War.

Mr. Speaker, I would urge members to remember that that covenant undertaken by the federal minister of the day was on behalf of all Canadians for all time. It had no best-before date. You didn't say that we might change our minds someday and we won't owe vets as much, or we won't have to do anything for them.

I believe, and I believe many Canadians believe, that that kind of covenant is a solemn covenant and is in behalf of all of us, and that it was for all time. I believe that the primary responsibility and accountability rests with government.

Mr. Speaker, we all have different images that come to mind when we think about the word "veteran". For me, it is an air traffic controller, a public health nurse, a mechanic and a social worker. The air traffic controller was my father. During the Second World War, he served as a flight instructor as part of the Commonwealth air training plan, serving in both Canada and Britain.

The public health nurse was my aunt Maggie who was one of 4,000 or so Canadian nurses who served Canada as a nurse, often in trying and very difficult circumstances. When nurses were deployed, the military hierarchy of the time was uncomfortable — often uncomfortable with the notion of much profile being given to the role played by women in particular in the front lines.

It often went unacknowledged, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my aunt's experience in Europe was often very difficult. The military history and the history of Canada often hide that fact because they believed that we would be uncomfortable with the knowledge that Canadian women were subject to the violence and horrors of war. That was true in the Second World War, and I think sometimes it is equally true of the active duty roles that women play in the Canadian military today.

The mechanic was my uncle. He was a mechanic in civilian life, but during the Second World War he served with the Canadian military and was part of the Aleutian Islands Campaign.

The social worker is a friend who had never talked with me about his military service. He was young. It was the mid-1970s and we were in London at studies at the LSE, and on a walk at Hyde Park there was a loud retort. My friend hit the ground, visibly shaken, and it turned out that although he's a Canadian, he had served in Vietnam and struggled with what we today call PTSD.

I'm reminded that when we ask people, men and women, to fight for our freedom, we ask them to do that on behalf of all of us. We shouldn't ask them to have to fight their own government to ensure that their rights are respected, that they are respected as human beings.

On Monday — on Remembrance Day — I had some people coming over for dinner and, as my want on Remembrance Day, I usually put on a CD by John McDermott. Some of them are kind of sappy songs and some of them are powerful songs. One of the ones that I forgot about and was played that afternoon put it very graphically. It's a song by Eric Bogle. He's an Australian songwriter and you may know it. It's called *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*. It tells the story of a young man in Gallipoli. It's a harsh ballad that reinforces the importance of the covenant made by governments.

In that song, he talks about being a young man who lived the life of a free young man, and then his country said in 1915:

"It's time you stopped rambling, there's work to be done.

So they gave me a tin hat, and they gave me a gun, and they marched me away to war.

... and as the ship pulled away from the quay,

And amidst all the cheers, the flag-waving and tears, we sailed off for Gallipoli."

And he says in that song,

"And how well I remember that terrible day, how our blood stained the sand and the water.

And of how in that hell that they called Suvla Bay, we were butchered like lambs at the slaughter.

Johnny Turk he was waiting, he'd primed himself well. He shower'd us with bullets,

And he rained us with shell. And in five minutes flat, he'd blown us all to hell...

But the band played Waltzing Matilda...

And those that were left, well we tried to survive, in that mad world of blood, death and fire

And for ten weary weeks, I kept myself alive, though around me the corpses piled higher

Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head, and when I woke up in my hospital bed,

And saw what it had done, well I wished I was dead. Never knew there was worse things than dyin'...

So they gathered the crippled, the wounded, the maimed, and they shipped us back home to Australia.

The legless, the armless, the blind, the insane, those proud wounded heroes of Suvla

And as our ship pulled into Circular Quay, I looked at the place where me legs used to be.

And thanked Christ there was nobody waiting for me, to grieve, to mourn, and to pity.

But the band played Waltzing Matilda, as they carried us down the gangway.

But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared..."

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that war is hell, and we ask people to do it on our behalf. Then when we decide at some point, for some reason, that we're going to, not with thought

or care, make across-the-board cuts to what government looks like, we don't think of the impacts. The reality of the impacts of that is, in the name of budget cuts, the federal government has gutted the federal department charged with serving our veterans.

As I said at the outset, I have great honour and respect for the many non-government organizations and charities and volunteer organizations that also rise to the challenge of providing specialized services and support to veterans in many ways, but the fact of the matter is that the covenant, the relationship between those veterans, is between the federal government and the veteran.

The 2012 federal budget cuts gave assurances that the cuts would only target the back office and avoid cuts to services. Unlike the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin, I do not have any confidence that the federal Conservative Party will ensure that veterans, as human beings and as people who have served this country, will not see cuts to services. As I pointed out earlier, and I'll repeat for the record, the annual reports on plans and priorities, published by federal departments, make it clear that Veterans Affairs — this is the 2012 budget. But as of this year, in addition to the 870 positions that Veterans Affairs is scheduled to eliminate — the initial cut was 24 percent — the government has now decided to transfer the last veterans hospital to the Province of Quebec, which is an overall increase to 1,295 person years, or a cut of 40 percent. I don't understand how that can be justified.

The public servants who work with veterans have been dealing with this and, as good public servants, trying to do their jobs under the stresses of these cuts. They have tried to deliver with decreased resources.

One of the public servants from the Union of Veterans Employees said, and I'll quote: "...employees have 'helplessly watched' as their department has been 'systematically disembodied limb by limb. We used to be a well-oiled machine. We now lack the structure to even be relevant or operate efficiently.'" He also said that those austerity measures weren't supposed to impact client services, but across the country those services are diminishing. He said that, right now, as a department, we are failing the veterans. We are not doing what we've been mandated to do.

Veterans echo the voices of the employees. A veteran named Shane Jones, who lives in Sackville, Nova Scotia, came back from Afghanistan in 2008 — and I'm quoting here — he feels like he's still at war. He said: "We go overseas, we fight for our country, we do what we're asked, and when we come home it's like we've got to start another war all over again just to get the medical help that we need."

Because of cuts, since his release, he's had seven or eight caseworkers, including three since June. Each time a new one is assigned, the family must start over. I'm not sure if anybody in this room has ever had to deal with trauma, but having to restate it repeatedly is very difficult.

The difficulties that that veteran has experienced are repeated time and time again. He said that it's been hell. I'm quoting here: "Jones scoffed at claims by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, made as recently..." — this was done two

weeks ago — "...that the government is providing troops and veterans with the supports they need."

He said, and I quote — because I know the language cannot be unparliamentary — but he said, "I think that's just a baldfaced lie. He's taken everything away from us... Why am I begging for help?"

Some Hon. Member: (inaudible)

Point of order

Speaker: Minister of Community Services, on a point of order.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: You just ruled earlier, reminding a member of the principle around accusations directed at members inside the House, and the principle that members cannot do indirectly what they can't do directly has been ruled on many times in this House. I think the member crossed the line.

Speaker's ruling

Speaker: I deplore the word "lie" or "liar" being used here and it actually upsets me quite a bit. The context in which it is used sometimes might make it allowable and such. In this particular case or in the previous case, the Member for Takhini-Kopper King said that we now know that it's a lie, referring to the fact that we're reading in the paper of the actions or inactions of various people based in the statement.

In the case of the Leader of the Official Opposition here, she was actually quoting somebody verbatim and premised it with the quote. She in fact did not accuse anybody of lying. But at the same time, in any situation like this — whether you're quoting a poem, a quote or a statement by anybody in this House or outside the House — and you have to premise it with, "I'm not making this on my own," I would strongly recommend that you paraphrase it because once you say it in this House, you own it.

I'm not going to ask for any retractions or extraction at this time. I just want to warn everybody that I am getting frustrated with it and the more frustrated I get, the less you are going to like it.

Leader of the Official Opposition, please continue.

Ms. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canada's Veterans Ombudsman, Guy Parent, says the federal government is failing some of the most severely wounded and disabled soldiers and the government must address its urgent shortcomings. His report, issued in October, highlights serious issues about the level of financial support given to veterans, especially those who are permanently disabled in combat. There are many aspects of the Ombudsman's report that are disturbing — and they should be disturbing to us all — as we heard last week from members of the Royal Canadian Legion when they spoke out about the cuts.

The Royal Canadian Legion has said that it has been raising the same issues for years and they are going to actively push the government to try to make changes. We, too, should be supporting those veterans to make those changes. Mr. Speaker, the covenant between those who serve Canada, even

unto death, is first and foremost between veterans and the people of Canada as represented in our parliamentary democracy that many gave their lives to defend.

In closing, I think we would do well to think about and reflect on the words of a well-known Canadian songwriter, Buffy Sainte-Marie, who described what a soldier is. She said,

"He's five foot two and he's six feet four,

He fights with missiles and with spears

He's all of 31 and he's only 17

He's been a soldier for a thousand years

He's a Catholic, a Hindu, an atheist, a Jain,

A Buddhist, a Baptist and a Jew...

He's fighting for Canada...

He's fighting for democracy...

He's the universal soldier...

His orders come from far away no more...

They come from... you and me."

Hon. Mr. Istchenko: I'm honoured to speak today on the motion put forward by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin. I thank him for that. I'm glad that we get to speak to this motion in the House.

I'm probably one of the few people who got the opportunity to spend some time in East Germany and Hungary when they were communist countries and had to worry about making it back to safer ground. When I retired from the military in 1990, the military asked me a few questions. "Do you have a heartbeat?" Check. "Can you see?" Check. "Can you smell that?" Check. "How are your teeth? Do you want more or less, or are you happy with what you've got?" Check — et cetera. "Down the line. Have a nice day."

I've seen many improvements since then. Post-traumatic stress — I don't know what my grandfather went through when he came out of the war, but I know they didn't ask me if I had any issues with what my thoughts were. I know they do that now. Veterans Affairs reviews their records now with them. They do a better job. They check the clarity of it and some of the potential stuff that could happen. But things are still missed.

Quite often a member will be suffering and not be aware or it or understand it or feel that they deserve help — often feelings are interfered with from somebody seeking help. There are members who lose everything. They lose their homes, their families, their self-respect and their self-esteem. They're the ones we call the lost ones.

We have heard much about loss of services with the closing of some offices. Veterans Affairs is not the only organization that is changing their point of access. More and more is going on-line. When I first heard of this — not seeing everything — I was happy to see that there was a Service Canada office here that a veteran could go to.

During the week of remembrance, we remember the deeds and commit to never forget. If we forget the past, the future will not look good. Most are afraid or unsure of how to help when you see someone in need.

Remembrance Day was last Monday. I just want to thank my community and those people and organizers who came

out. We had more wreaths this year than ever before, which is more money that will go into the poppy fund that the Legion and this Branch 254 of the Royal Canadian Legion has the opportunity to administer for us. The Legion is a leader in Canada on helping veterans. Veterans Services is helping veterans. Health and Social Services — the Minister of Health and Social Services sees a lot of that — not personally himself, but in his shop he does.

When I got out of the military, one of the things that helped me was fellow soldiers. I got the opportunity to become a Canadian Ranger right after. Meeting the other soldiers was very helpful. When the troops went to Afghanistan and after a couple planes crashed into a couple of big buildings, we saw soldiers coming back from their tours in Afghanistan needing a break and getting the opportunity to go somewhere. They had the opportunity to come north to be ranger instructors. I met quite a few of them and there quite a few of them that I met that had some issues.

I remember talking to one of my friends — and he's still a good friend of mine today and he's doing very well for himself — his wife said: "He never talked to me for a year." He wouldn't talk to his kids. He just sat outside. He came here. Myself and a young man in my community who's just a Canadian Ranger — he was 20 — became good friends with him through conversation and talk. It helped him a lot. There's a lot of stuff out there.

Every year at Christmas time I'm encouraged by the fact that we used to give out baskets and pass on bottles of wine. I'd just send a card to everybody and tell them I'm donating to the Wounded Warriors fund. It's another great organization.

A friend of mine, a fellow veteran, gave me something earlier today and it's something I found quite appropriate. I think it really heeds to what were speaking to today. It's something from the TV show *The West Wing*. A man is walking down the road and he falls in a hole. He tries to get out but he just can't get out of the hole. After some time, he's just exhausted and he can't do anything. Then he sees a preacher and he hollers at the preacher, "Can you help me out?" The preacher looks in the hole, writes out a prayer and throws it to him in the hole and walks on. The man tries again and after great effort he is exhausted and he can't get out of that hole again.

Then he sees a doctor coming out and says, "Hey doctor, can you help me out?" The doctor looks at him and he writes a prescription and throws it in the hole and walks on. The man tries again and again and he fails. After some time, he sees a friend and he asks, "Hey buddy, can you help me out?" The friend looks in the hole and then he jumps in. The man looks at him and says, "What did you do that for? Now we're both stuck down here." The friend says, "Been there before. I know the way out."

We all owe it to ourselves and to each other often just to be that friend. Whether you're a public servant in Health and Social Services or Veterans Affairs or just someone on the street, you owe it to a veteran to help them.

Hon. Mr. Kent: It's indeed a pleasure for me to speak to this motion brought forward by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin today and I thank him for bringing it forward.

I know many who have spoken today have spoken about making sure that we have a net improvement for service delivery for our veterans and that's something that is extremely important to me. There's a respect that I have for those men and women who have fought for us that was really instilled in me by my dad, who was a veteran as well.

Prior to gaining elected office, I would do my part selling poppies for the Legion, buying poppies, wearing poppies, having a beer at the Legion on occasion just to continue to support that organization and ensure that they can continue to do the great work that they have done.

We've seen the local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion make significant donations to local charities, such as the Yukon Hospital Foundation, which I used to be involved in prior to being elected.

Since being elected, I've had the pleasure of being part of a government caucus and Cabinet that has done many things to support our veterans, such as the highway dedication the Minister of Highways and Public Works did recently, dedicating the Yukon portion of the Alaska Highway to all veterans.

Something that was very important to me — my wife and I have frequently travelled to Alaska, driving on the Alaska Highway. As soon as you cross that border, you notice that the Alaska Highway also became the Purple Heart Trail. In the number of travels we did to Alaska, I thought that was something that would be an excellent opportunity for the Yukon to do. Most of those travels were prior to my being elected.

Last summer, I had the privilege of travelling to Nova Scotia for the national Education ministers conference, and my wife and I spent some time in that beautiful part of our country — the first opportunity we ever had to do that. One of the highways — forgive me, but perhaps the Member for Klondike or the Minister of Economic Development who know Nova Scotia a little bit better than I — was dedicated to our veterans. I was able to come back and was advancing the idea to dedicate the Yukon portion of the Alaska Highway to our veterans and was very pleased to know that the Minister of Highways and Public Works had already started work on that important initiative. That's one of the respectful ways that we as a government have been able to honour our veterans.

One of the other aspects has been the support that, as a previous minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation, I was able to give to the Vimy Heritage Housing Society to support their efforts to bring an assisted living facility here to the Yukon, not only for those who are veterans, but for other seniors who require that kind of service. I know the community development fund has allocated just under \$75,000 to advance this project. I'm looking forward at some point to catching up with the proponents of that and getting an assessment of where they're at in advancing that project and making that a reality here. I know that is something that you, Mr. Speaker, advocated a

number of years ago prior to your being elected. I think it would be an important addition to our community.

Finally, as ministers we often receive cards and letters of congratulations or thanks for many of the things we're able to work on. I thank everyone who sends them. They often end up in a file in my desk drawer, but there's one I keep by my computer. Perhaps if members will indulge me, I'll read it into the record here.

It's dated June 16, 2013 and states: "Dear Minister Kent, thank you for your letter and action on my request to bring the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Mass Atrocities to the attention of students in the Yukon. In my ongoing hopes to engage young people on the prevention and response to mass atrocities, your support this year and in years to come is sincerely appreciated. Best regards," — and it's signed from Senator the Hon. Roméo Dallaire.

Mr. Speaker, I think why this particular card stays by my computer is the respect that I have for the man and the respect that I have for the military. As I mentioned, much of that was garnered when I was young. My dad — it was funny to read the article in last week's *Yukon News* about a young man who signed up as a teenager and ended up as a tail gunner in a Lancaster in, I believe, what was the Royal Air Force. That story could have been written about my father. He signed up at the age of 17. I've seen the photos. I don't know how he passed for even 15 or 14 at the time, but he managed to make it in and ended up as a tail gunner in a Lancaster for the Royal Canadian Air Force — thankfully not seeing any action over the skies in Europe, but nevertheless he was posted overseas and brought back some great wartime stories about his time there and some stories that bring a smile to my face. I certainly respect his commitment at such a young age to the duty that he saw as a young man growing up in a small prairie town.

Perhaps it's his brother, King. These are the nicknames that they had for his brother and his cousin — King served in the infantry and did see action overseas — or his cousin, Hub, who was also in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Or perhaps it's my mom's father, Stanley Tetlock, who served during World War II on the home front, guarding prisoners of war, or my mom's brother Lloyd, who was too young to serve in World War II, but did end up serving in Korea and then made a career in the military until his retirement, where he made a very successful transition into the private sector.

Or perhaps it's my mom's five uncles: Hugh McPherson, Bill McPherson, Mick McPherson, Doug McPherson or Ken McPherson. I can't imagine what it was like for their mother, my great grandmother, to have those five boys serving overseas in World War II.

I remember as a young boy I spent some time on my mom's Uncle Ken's farm just outside of the town in Saskatchewan where my family is from — and maybe it was a little bit of the libations that they were enjoying — but it was the first time I had heard a veteran tell some of the stories of his experience overseas and some of the memorabilia he brought back — and really respecting those stories that he told

as a young man. I believe I was only in grade 1 or 2 at the time and it's a story that has stuck with me to this day.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier my wife and her strong commitment and respect for veterans, and perhaps that came from people like her maternal great-grandfather. His name is John Alexander Smith and he was the youngest captain in the British Army at that time. He left Ireland as a captain for the Boer War and remained in South Africa after the war, where my wife's grandmother and then her mother were born before they immigrated to Canada in the 1950s. I have a great deal of respect for my father-in-law, Tom Van Soldt, who was born in Nazi-occupied Holland. I can't imagine what it was like for his mother and father. They had four boys born there and I know within 10 years of the end of the Second World War he moved his family to Vancouver to get away from ever having to deal with the atrocities of war ever again.

When it comes to services for veterans, I know that my dad, who immediately after the war worked for the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as a grain buyer and worked in an elevator throughout the prairies, before he transitioned into a job with the federal government and was hired by the federal government in large part, I believe, due to his time in military service — he was also able to take advantage later in life of some of the services that Veterans Affairs offered — home care services for him, as he was in his later years before he passed away, that were offered to him as a veteran.

I guess my respect for veterans extends well beyond bloodlines. In talking to my dad's cousin last week — just prior to debate on last Wednesday's private member's motion that we didn't quite get to — from the small town in Saskatchewan just east of Regina on the No. 1 Highway. I asked him if he had any numbers of the individuals who had served in the wars from the Grenfell area, which is the small town I have been referring to. He didn't have the number of those who had served, but he did have the number of casualties. A town that is approximately the size of Haines Junction — maybe a little bit bigger — 1,000 people at the time — in World War I there were 56 casualties; in World War II there were 25 casualties.

In speaking with the Premier on CHON FM on Friday, I was able to relay that story to the listeners. I think that those small towns exist across this country — across the Prairies, British Columbia and into Ontario and Quebec and, of course, the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador, which was not part of Canada at the time.

My respect is not only for my blood relatives and my wife's family, but those individuals from those small towns who fought, and many of whom died, for our freedom. It extends to individuals who live in my riding of Riverdale North, such as Red Grossinger, Ron Fox, Doug Bell — many of the individuals who have served this country. It also extends to my best friend's brother, Gord Cullen, who is currently a member of the military and who has served multiple tours in Afghanistan. He was very close to some action and was very close to harm's way. He served at a time when it was a very difficult operation in Afghanistan for the Canadians when they were on the extreme frontlines.

I will continue to advance the needs of veterans, whether it's at our caucus table, or at our Cabinet table, or wherever I am. Those individuals who have served our country I have the utmost respect for and I too am looking for improvements in the service delivery for those individuals that make sense for them. I'll continue to fight for them just as they fought for us.

Mr. Barr: I'm honoured to speak to this motion put forward today by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin. I'd like to give thanks to those veterans who are with us today and acknowledge their service. I would like to acknowledge Red Grossinger, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, and the Speaker of the House — those I know of, but if there is anyone else in here, my apologies, but those men I mentioned we owe our utmost respect to.

Canada's veterans — I think we are falling short of our duty to honour these veterans from the past and the veterans of now both in government and the public at large on a daily basis. We must do more, and in saying that I do not want to ignore the efforts of those who do recognize the greatness of veterans past and present. It's not all doom and gloom. There are people who are fighting and trying to come together to make sure that the duty served and the duty of gratitude never ends to those who did so.

I think back to when I was a younger man. I had just turned 18 in North Bay, Ontario, and I had worked in restaurants for many years. At that point of 18, I ended up with a dining lounge. It was called the Pepper Pot Dining Lounge, and it was in a hotel. It was one of those hotels that had a rock and roll bar on one side and an old country bar on the other side. You can imagine in a small town — it was generation drinkers in the old country bar and the young rockers next door at night, and they called that "the zoo". If you were around at closing time, you'd know why they called that "the zoo".

Being a young guy already with a couple of children and married, I worked hard and in the morning there would be two elderly gentlemen who would come in there. One's name was Garnet and the other was Henry, or Henri — he was very French Canadian. He carried a picture of his mom in his wallet. She was over 100 years old when she passed. She was in the casket in this picture and he would show that to me. He loved his mother. I had never seen a photo of someone's mom in a casket. This angelic-looking lady was laying there. He would bring that out.

They didn't talk much, but they'd come down every morning for breakfast. Then they'd kind of sit there and motion to me — it wasn't that busy in this place. Long story short, it wasn't long that I had had that place and Remembrance Day was coming around. They both showed up that morning and they were veterans. They were silver-haired grey veterans. Henri was a tall man, Garnet was a short man. They were World War I veterans. They were both quite elderly. They lived in the hotel room. In the countryside, there were hotels up there.

They were proud that morning when they walked in with their medals. Garnet had a cane. Thinking back — this was in

the early 70s; these are memories that just came to me today. I had other things I was going to say, but I'm just kind of winging it right now. When those guys walked in that day, I hadn't known. As I said, they didn't talk much. Certainly one drank a lot. There were always a few — and I don't say that in a derogative way — young guys with one of them who would sit in the room and drink the wine until the money was gone from the pension, then they would come back around next pension pay. That was the life that I saw happen, day after day.

Henri didn't indulge that much — I would often see him just sitting by his window, looking out that window when I was walking down the street.

I saw them alone a lot. In talking with them, I found out what their favourite foods were and I would make it a point. Henri liked pike fish, boiled. So I used to go ice fishing and I would make sure that I would get some pike for Henri and I would boil it. They weren't on the menu. Garnet liked good sausage and he liked steak, so I would make sure I would get him a nice porterhouse steak that wasn't on the menu. I cooked those fellows the food they liked to eat from time to time at no charge.

I think of us as people — human beings who owe our service on a daily basis, and that's what I mean. Not only is it up to us to let the government know specifically at times where they're falling short so they can make informed decisions about what we are doing and what we are not doing for those people we serve, but also to think about the veterans who are looked over. When we're walking down the street, there might be an old person and just look in there and John Prine says, "Hello in there" in some of his songs.

I think of the First Nation vets with Kwanlin Dun when I was about to meet with some of the elders, who have all but given up hope and have never received a pension. They don't really know how to maneuver through those hoops from years past and today, as I understand it, there are many more hoops. I believe we should be making it simpler, not more difficult, and asking how we can help — not just say this is how you must do it now.

I want to acknowledge the comments from my colleague from Takhini-Kopper King earlier and her passion. I hold them in the highest regard. I think we should all take a note from this member and her words earlier and pass them on to those who would listen to make sure that we're not having to be in this Legislature today to pass motions or to talk about amendments to motions of what the government is not doing — and slowly decreasing what they're not doing — but maybe be able to stand up here in the future and say, wow, we're finally getting it right.

Facebook is huge these days, Mr. Speaker. I was looking at all the posts from Facebook and some of the stuff that is going on that honoured people, the veterans — the Remembrance Day parades. There are some things that caused me quite a bit of alarm and there were things that made me feel good. I noticed in one of the ongoing little sagas on Facebook — it's not a little saga really, it's something that people seem to have lots of words for because everybody has

got an opinion — where a native veteran was arrested for trying to carry his native flag in the parade. He was veteran of five years and it was a police officer who — he was arrested — shouldn't do that. The veteran got upset and said some nasty things — and I don't know what came first, the chicken or the egg; however, his flag wasn't allowed to be walked in there. Then I looked at another post and there it was in Timmins, Ontario and there were veterans walking in the parade with Canadian flags, Legion flags, First Nation flags, flags of Canada — not quibbling, not deciding who was right and who was wrong, but just honouring and we honour in the way we do.

A little gal that I met last week said to me, "What are you doing this weekend?" I said, "Well, I'm doing this and that and then Monday I'm going to be presenting a wreath" — which I might add I was very honoured to do so in Carcross on Remembrance Day. I said, "What are you doing?" And she said, "I don't go to those things." I said, "Oh." And sometimes as we do, as human beings, I kind of said, "Hmmm, why not?" — kind of making a little judgment around that. I was quickly relieved or let known my own shortcomings. "I do this in my own way," she said. "I always make time to walk out there and say thank you." She walks in the bush and says a little prayer. So we can be pretty quick to judge.

I, and we, will be supporting this motion today. I would like to say that I look forward to the day when we can all just do the next right thing. We must show leadership, not only in this House, but as human beings on a daily basis of what that next right thing might be. I believe that and this is not about our egos or scoring points. This is about the veterans past and present and future — clear and simple. Lest we forget.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: I'd like to thank the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes for his comments and I appreciate his constructive addition to the discussion this afternoon. I'll give him credit; I think he summed it up quite nicely.

They key point that all members of this House should take in debate this afternoon is that this is not about us. This motion is about veterans. It is not about where one aligns at the federal level, whether they would like to score points against the federal government because of the concerns veterans have had with some of the changes what are being proposed or anything of that type.

I'd just like to reiterate that our intention in the phrasing in the motion as it was and in not supporting the amendment brought forward by an NDP member was that we think that for this message from the Legislative Assembly to have the best chance of being heard by the federal government and being treated seriously, we need to ensure that they understand that this is not about attacking their intentions. This is not about getting too far into to the details of exactly how the federal government addresses service delivery and responds to concerns from veterans about service delivery. It's focusing on the principles that should apply to it.

First and foremost, it's important to recognize where there have been concerns expressed by veterans and veterans

organizations about the current status of service delivery and about the planned changes in certain areas — to treat those concerns with respect, to work with those organizations, bring them forward and to try in coming together — and in this, the key players would be Veterans Affairs and veterans organizations — to come up with solutions that ensure that whatever path is taken — whether they are services available through a veterans service office or a Service Canada office or through some other form or venue — so that we don't lose sight of the two key objectives: supporting veterans and improving services.

In speaking to this motion, I'd like to just make a few comments personally. I know everyone has their own experience with veterans and most have family members who have served, but although it's the week following Veterans' Week, it still is an appropriate time to commemorate veterans. In fact, as some have said, every day should be Remembrance Day because it's too easy in our society today to see past conflicts as distant. It's too easy to not see them as relevant to people's lives today or to not see the risks as relevant.

Although we have seen an increased awareness among citizens with the number of Canadians who have served in Afghanistan, I think there has been an increased awareness of the role of the military and the role of the men and women — the Canadians who put themselves in harm's way along with our allies to protect our freedoms. I think for many people it's very easy to go about their daily lives and not really understand or think about why we have the freedoms we have now, and who is standing up today to ensure that that our shores remain safe and that our country remains protected.

I would like to acknowledge — as many have and far more eloquently than I — the contribution of veterans in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the peacekeeping engagements in Afghanistan. Those are the ones that commonly come to mind, and all those examples of service and situations are very key and important parts in our country's history and the history of the men and women who have stood in our service and put themselves in harm's way and, in some cases, have paid the ultimate price for defending us and our freedoms.

There are also other cases. I am not going to go through an exhaustive list. I'm sure I would miss significant events. There would be situations, particularly in the context of situations like the Cold War, where significant events are probably not widely known, except to a handful of people who averted a more serious conflict occurring and who kept us safe during that time.

The Cold War is an example where when people give speeches and talk about veterans' service, there's often not a lot of recognition paid to those who served in the Cold War. I think that's something that needs to be corrected. I grew up during the Cold War. As one who started to become aware of events going around them, I — largely through being in a remote location without a lot of friends around of my own age because the closest ones were across the lake — was involved a lot in conversations with my parents and other adults, and

listened to the radio and heard the news and listened to current events on the radio.

Probably at an earlier age than most, I became aware of some of these things. I recall the effect it had on me — hearing about the threat of nuclear war and World War III that existed in the Cold War. That is something that is not an experience unique to me. There are many others who grew up in that time period with that recognition. It's too easy — because that never resulted in World War III, as we all feared it would during the period of the Cold War — to forget about the fact that it really is to the credit not just of the diplomats, but of the soldiers who stood the line each and every day throughout the Cold War and prevented the communist countries from deciding they wanted to expand and stray over to the west.

As I was listening to my colleague, the Minister of Highways and Public Works, the Member for Kluane, talk about his service, it struck me that he doesn't talk about it much. We're all aware that he's a veteran and very proud of his service in the Rangers and others who have served there. I'd like to thank him personally and I'd like to thank others who served during that time.

The fall of 1989, I recall, was a fairly eventful fall. I'd gone down with my mother and sister to Ontario for my grandparents' 50th wedding anniversary. For me it started off as exciting — the first time I'd ever flown across the country. I was down there and during that time period the events around the fall of the Berlin Wall occurred. I recall sitting in the kitchen with my grandparents and listening to this. I know it struck me with disbelief, and I don't think I fully appreciated either what it meant to them and others who had lived through a longer period of the Cold War and all that it meant. It was also that November that seeing my grandfather — the first time I'd been with him since I was quite little — on Remembrance Day as he cried, thinking of friends who had died. Later that month my grandfather passed away, so that was one of the last times that I saw him.

In speaking to this, I think it's important that this has a personal connection to everyone. We all — or most of us — have relatives who have served, have friends who have served. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your service and that of the Member for Kluane. I recall also Red Grossinger coming and visiting us shortly after — if memory serves — he returned from overseas on deployment. He was boating up or down Lake Laberge one day — I can't recall which.

Hearing some of those experiences — and I think also of our former long-time Member of Parliament, the Honourable Erik Nielsen, for his service to the territory and his decorated service for his role in that.

I think of the stories that I've heard of great-uncles and great-great-uncles who served overseas. My mother was talking recently about the time that one of her great-uncles volunteered for World War I. He was overseas. They had him on the front. He was wounded in a battle. That's when they realized that he was significantly underage. From what I understand, it seems that at that point, if they were under the age of 16 — I believe that was the age they were supposed to

serve — that typically at that point, if they were 15 or approaching 16, they probably would keep them somewhere behind the lines and keep them overseas there. It was only if they were under the age of 15 or closer to 14 that they would ship them back home. We're actually not quite sure what age he was, but they shipped him back home to his mother in southern Ontario. That is one specific example, but it is really illustrative of the type of dedication of some of the young Canadian men and women who, in past conflicts — particularly and especially during world wars — took great pains and tried hard to find a way to serve their country.

I recall my great grandfather in World War I went to Owen Sound in southern Ontario where the recruiting office was. He wanted to volunteer, but he owned the only grocery store in town and they sent him back and said it was more important for him to continue to operate the store. I know that was hard for him too, when he saw friends and neighbours and peers going overseas.

Mr. Speaker, I was going to talk about my grandpa again, but I don't think I can get through the example. I just want to talk about my relatives and friends who served; I just want to express the greatest appreciation.

One of my honoured possessions is my grandma gave me the patches from my grandpa's uniform during World War II. I know the difficulty it was for him in serving and in seeing friends come back from the war. He was fortunate and was stationed on the east coast of Canada. He was in active service but not shipped overseas, but I know that he worked hard to support the other service personnel and was proud of his military service. It's just an honour to have those patches.

Pardon me, Mr. Speaker, for choking up.

In closing, I hope that all members will stand in support of this motion and will be united in sending a strong clear statement to the federal government that we've heard the concerns of veterans, we understand that there is room for improvement and that that message needs to be heard loud and clear and needs to be treated with the respect it deserves by the federal government and Veterans Affairs and they need to work together to figure out what the best solutions are to improve service to our veterans.

Ms. Moorcroft: I would like to start by acknowledging the veterans' presence today in the public gallery of the Legislature and the veterans who are present who serve in the Chamber and by thanking all veterans for their service and sacrifice.

This Remembrance Day, November 11, 2013 — two days ago — as Canadian veterans reported feeling abandoned by the Government of Canada, which has announced its plans to close Veterans Affairs offices in nine communities across the country, is an opportune time for this House to urge "...the Government of Canada to respect the service and sacrifices of Canada's veterans by working with organizations representing veterans to enhance services and improve service delivery to Canadian veterans."

I support the motion brought forward by the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin.

Again this year I attended Golden Horn Elementary School's Remembrance Day ceremony with my colleague, the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes. It was the most moving Remembrance Day ceremony I have taken part in. The students had prepared great artwork, which was displayed on the walls of the gymnasium. RCMP Cpl. Dwayne Latham and student flag and wreath bearers were part of the colour board. Five grade 7 students read thoughtful poems they had written. Their poems moved us to tears. Grade 3 students presented an amazing tableau of images of war and peace. We heard a moving choral performance of *One Voice*, with beautiful singing and harmonies by the soloists and the Golden Horn Elementary School choir.

Legion representative Max Fraser presented his short video, *How Michael Got His Medals*, based on a young boy from Canada who joined veterans on a tour of World War II battlefields in Italy and came home with a chest full of medals. Eight-year-old Michael learned about the sacrifices of Canadian soldiers in World War II as he travelled with his dad and a group of veterans who visited battlefields, cemeteries and museums. He also met some of today's soldiers, veterans of the war in Afghanistan. Michael impressed the whole tour group with an impromptu speech at the Moro River Cemetery after a visit to Ortona.

As I said at the Golden Horn Elementary School Remembrance Day ceremony, World War II came to the Yukon. Yukon men and women joined the army, the air force or the navy to fight for peace.

Five regiments of the United States Army Corps of Engineers came north to build the Alaska Highway as part of the war effort, so the highway many of us drive every day was built by U.S. soldiers, two regiments of which were black soldiers. It is fitting that the Yukon portion of the Alaska Highway has been dedicated to all war veterans as a means of remembering soldiers and veterans who served their country.

As the soldiers, pilots, sailors, nurses, cooks and secretaries were sacrificing for the war effort, they were singing about what the world would be like when the war was over and they would have peace. Nobody loves peace as much as those who don't have it. People who are caught up in war are always looking forward to the day they will have peace.

That's how we must remember our Canadian veterans. They were fighting for a safe, peaceful world, believing that we, here, would be able to live our lives in peace. That's everything they were working for and how they want us to remember them. Today, as we remember, we can decide to work for peace.

In the United States, Veterans for Peace calls for the observance of November 11 as a day to be dedicated to the cause of world peace. The ceasefire on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918 along the European western front was such a relief to all those involved, as the world had never seen such horror and carnage as World War I. The horrible conflict that had come to be known as the "war to end war" brought the bulk of humanity to contemplate abolishing war. There is no better way to honour the dead than

to protect the living from the fear, terror and moral deprivation of war.

I would like also to acknowledge some of Canada's international peace efforts. During the first half of 20th century more than 1.5 million Canadians were called upon to defend international peace and freedom in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. More than 110,000 Canadians lost their lives.

Following these terrible conflicts, our country began looking for ways to prevent war. Peacekeeping and other peace support efforts are a natural extension of Canada's longstanding commitment to the principles of peace and freedom. In recent years the role of Canadians in peace support operations has expanded to include the delivery of humanitarian aid, the repatriation of refugees, the disarming of warring factions and the restoration of shattered landscapes through the clearing of mines.

An increasingly important aspect of our peace efforts is helping nurture stable government and human rights, including the organization of electoral systems and the training of police forces and the judiciary. These new international peace support activities now involve many Canadian civilians, in addition to the Canadian forces. Soldiers are still putting their lives on the line to help others achieve peace and freedom. Tens of thousands of Canadians have served in more than 40 international peace support operations, but Canada's contributions have come at a great cost. Canadians have died in such efforts around the world in the post-war years and many more have been wounded, returning home with injuries to body and mind that can last a lifetime.

In 1988, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded collectively to UN peace keepers in recognition of their efforts over the years to curb violence and restore peace. Canadians led the way in promoting peacekeeping as a tool to help end conflicts and Canadians have long had an international reputation for putting their lives on the line to support peace. The veterans of those efforts deserve pensions, medical care and respect from their national government, but what is happening is that the Government of Canada has, and is, cutting services to veterans. That is unfortunate.

The Premier said that the Yukon Party would not support my colleague's amendments to reverse "the decision to close nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada" because it's too political. Mr. Speaker, as elected political representatives, we are employed to engage in public policy debate. That's our job. Where else but in this Chamber should we be debating the matter of respecting the services and sacrifices of Canada's veterans?

My colleague, the Member for Mount-Lorne Southern Lakes, spoke about the contributions of Yukon First Nation veterans who deserve a pension. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Yukon First Nation veterans didn't get a pension without a political struggle and we, as politicians, must engage in the struggle for justice for today's veterans.

As my colleague, the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Member for Whitehorse Centre, said, the report of

Canada's Veterans Ombudsman and its recommendations should be supported by elected political leaders in this House and in the House of Commons.

The Premier said a few days ago that there was no formal link between the Yukon Party government and the federal Conservative Party government. Today we see their words then are different from their actions today. The Yukon Party government is not willing to send a message to the Government of Canada that closing nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada is a disservice to veterans. Yukon veterans have said so; Canadian veterans have said so. Why is the Yukon Party government quick to defend the federal Conservative government's cuts? I'm puzzled by that. The Government House Leader said he wants the Government of Canada to reconsider that decision to close nine Veterans Affairs offices, but he wouldn't support the amendment calling on the Government of Canada to reverse its decision to abandon veterans and close nine Veterans Affairs offices. He referred to that decision as a "detail". I'm disappointed by that.

Considering this motion is that we as the elected members of this Assembly want to urge the Government of Canada to respect the service and sacrifices of Canada's veterans by working with organizations representing veterans to enhance services and improve service delivery to Canadian veterans, we must speak out in support of that service. Only veterans and their families truly know the horrors of war. It was as a result of the World War II atrocities and genocide practiced by the Hitler regime in Germany — the slaughter of Jewish people in the gas ovens; the torture and death of homosexuals, lesbians and gypsies; the so-called "medical experiments" that resulted in so many deaths — that nations around the world met to try to ensure such atrocities would never occur again. Sadly, war and atrocities do continue around the world today.

I would like to conclude by quoting Eleanor Roosevelt who worked hard for peace in the efforts to form the United Nations and who contributed to the adoption of the United Nations declaration on human rights, incorporating the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* principles into the daily work of government and the social fabric of our communities as a way to achieve peace. Eleanor Roosevelt said this: "It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it."

Mr. Tredger: I just want to add a few things to the discussion. First of all, I would like to honour and respect all our veterans — all those who committed to Canada and put their lives on the line for Canada. Such a commitment has a deep and lasting effect on those who made it and who are making it this day.

I had the honour to be at a Legion dinner on Friday night and to hear various veterans stand up and quietly speak of their service. I emphasize quietly, because with great dignity they stood up and spoke of Kosovo, of Somalia, of Afghanistan — places around the world where they served.

I grew up near Cold Lake. There is a Canadian Forces base there. My playmates' parents were in the Canadian Air Force and later the Canadian Forces. Some of them served overseas in the Cold War in Lahr; some of them did tours of duty without their families. I saw first-hand some of the effects and sacrifices that not only the veterans made, but their families made. I can remember coming in from the hockey rink with one of my friends and his dad was in the living room crying. But he never reached out for help; he believed in keeping it to himself. He believed that he needed to be strong for his family.

I want to thank the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin for bringing forth this motion. I want to thank all those who spoke to it, but it concerns me that we even need to debate this issue and that all of us here feel a need to urge our government, our federal government, to live up to its obligations. It concerns me what the implication of that is — that our federal government needs to be reminded to respect the service and sacrifices of Canada's veterans.

We made a bargain. We made a commitment. We made a covenant with those who serve in our military and our RCMP. We made a pact with those who chose to serve Canada, willing to sacrifice up to, and including, their lives. We made commitments to their families. That we are here debating and all supporting a motion that we should live up to it, is somewhat concerning.

I want to commend the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for her commitment and her complete representation of veterans. As she said, two or three years ago she was a newbie at it. I stand beside her impressed with her commitment, with her belief, and with continually striving to improve the life of her fellow citizens.

I've heard people talk about post-traumatic stress. My friend's dad — had that term been invented — probably was suffering from it. One of the consequences is that it is not a visible affliction. It is something inside and people are very reluctant to talk about it, to bring it forward, and that strikes to the very heart of what happens when we close agencies, when we shut off the opportunity for face-to-face talk. When we tell people they can apply on-line, they become another number. They become something in the system.

The people I met don't want to be a number. They want to be listened to. They want to be heard. Some of them need to be talked to and helped to get the energy to apply for a pension, for help with something, or for things that we committed to give them and now we're putting them in a position where they have to ask for it and where they have to suffer their pride.

Some people are able to go on-line and fill out a 20-page form or to sit on hold for one or two or three hours while they wait for an answer. Many people aren't. Many people get frustrated and give up. I commend the Member for Takhini-Kopper King for bringing forth her motion because she listened. She spent time with veterans and heard from person after person. They needed a caseworker. The last caseworker who came helped with this person or that person — if only.

And she had the courage, after having listened, to bring it forth as an amendment and I thank her for that.

I will keep my remarks brief.

I do support this motion, but I urge everyone who votes in favour of this motion to make every effort possible that it not be a platitude, that it not be an empty motion. As I said, I wonder why we had to spend an afternoon urging our own government to respect veterans, but we did. All of us here thought it was important to do that. I would urge each and every one of us to take it to the next step and to have the courage, the strength and the fortitude to ensure that this is indeed a meaningful motion, that the Member for Vuntut Gwitchin who brought it forth is supported, that this government is supported in our urging, and that we know and we show each and every one of our veterans that we support them, that we respect the service and the sacrifices that they have given to us and to our country.

Speaker: If the member now speaks, he will close debate.

Does any other member wish to be heard?

Mr. Elias: It is my hope that passing this motion unanimously today, with each and every member in the House voting to send a united message with very strong words like “respect”, “working with”, “enhance” and “improve” service delivery to our Canadian veterans in itself — because it’s coming from our elected Legislature — is going to be able to say something.

I listened to each and every member in this Assembly today, but I have issues with one member’s words, Mr. Speaker. It’s the Leader of the Official Opposition when she suggested that the motion that I thought about for a long time is skirting around the real issues with regard to Canadian veterans, and I’ll challenge that anytime, anywhere, and any place.

The only amendment that she suggested to strengthen this and to send a message to our Government of Canada was to reverse their decision of the shutting down of the nine Veterans Affairs offices across our country. She neglected to mention the cutting of red tape to reduce waiting times for veterans. She neglected to mention eliminating 2.5 million unnecessary transactions between veterans and Veterans Affairs Canada. She neglected to mention the issue of making it easier to get reimbursed for travel to medical appointments. She neglected to mention the issue of working with Service Canada to make veterans services available in more than 600 additional locations across Canada. She neglected to mention, Mr. Speaker, that veterans can go down to our Service Canada representative right now and receive 29 different services that are addressed to veterans.

Those issues she forgot to mention in the motion. The Member for Whitehorse Centre also neglected to represent the issue of communicating clearly and in plain language so that veterans can get the information they need quickly and easily as possible. That’s an issue, but it wasn’t in the motion. She also neglected to mention supporting research into other ways

to help veterans, including the study of post-traumatic stress disorder and the benefits of therapy animals. That wasn’t an issue, but it is an issue to veterans. Changing how the war veterans allowance is calculated so disability benefits will not be deducted and veterans will receive increased support — that’s an issue but it wasn’t in the motion.

Reaching out to homeless veterans, to help give them the support they need — that’s a veterans’ issue, but it wasn’t suggested in the motion. Encouraging the major companies in our country, universities and our top employers to join in the hire a veteran initiative — that’s an issue to veterans, but it wasn’t important enough to go into a motion of the Leader of the Official Opposition.

There are a multitude of gaps and issues around this country and we wanted to send a united message — not just picking one and being prescriptive to the nine offices that were closed; we wanted to leave it open. However in saying that, I am encouraged by the reverence for our veterans I see emanating from members of this House, Yukoners young and old.

We can never fully appreciate the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform because we can never fully understand the realities of war. Most of us will never know what it feels like to make a covenant with our country that pledges our lives to its defense should that should that sacrifice be necessary.

There were many veterans who were mentioned today by name. I also want to mention some veterans and their service to our territory. Many of the aboriginal veterans — I might miss some, but I’m going to do this anyway because I think that it’s important to recognize the efforts of many aboriginal veterans who have served their country — Mr. Pete Sidney, Mr. George Sidney, Mr. Bobby Austin, Mr. Edward Good, Sandy and Malcolm McLeod, Mr. Harry Davis, Mr. John Adamson, Mr. Elijah Smith, Mr. Charlie Craft and of course Mr. Alex Archie and Daniel Van Bibber.

Archie Van Bibber is the great-grandfather of my children. One day we were watching this six-part series that was about the Second World War. I believe it was even called *Apocalypse: The Second World War*. So I was watching The History Channel with my sons this past summer and there was a veteran on there who was speaking about his experiences and this quote resonated to me because I was in disbelief of the newly released classified footage that The History Channel made a six-part series about. In talking about his fallen patriot, when he got home to Canada, the veteran said, “He was everything a young man wanted to be. He wanted to get married and have children and grow old enough to see his grandkids. And then someone shot him right beside me. I guess there was no mercy. And I said, ‘Dad, I made it home. And I’ve seen things I never want you to see. I will never speak of this again to you because I also killed my fellow man.’”

We call on the Government of Canada to make that pledge with us and respect the service and sacrifices of Canada’s veterans by working with the organizations representing veterans to enhance services and improve service

delivery to Canada's brave veterans. We will stand up for them and may we never forget.

Speaker: Are you prepared for the question?

Some Hon. Members: Division.

Division

Speaker: Division has been called.

Bells

Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please poll the House.

Hon. Mr. Pasloski: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Cathers: Agree.

Hon. Ms. Taylor: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Graham: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Kent: Agree.

Ms. McLeod: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Istchenko: Agree.

Hon. Mr. Dixon: Agree.

Mr. Hassard: Agree.

Mr. Elias: Agree.

Ms. Hanson: Agree.

Ms. Stick: Agree.

Ms. Moorcroft: Agree.

Ms. White: Agree.

Mr. Tredger: Agree.

Mr. Barr: Agree.

Mr. Silver: Agree.

Clerk: Mr. Speaker, the results are 17 yeas, nil nays.

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

Motion No. 509 agreed to

Speaker's statement

Speaker: As the Speaker, I can only speak on behalf of the Members of this Legislative Assembly and as directed by those members. Today, I would like to indulge your privilege. Allow me to take the liberty to speak just quickly as a veteran — as a veteran who has served, suffered and continues to suffer. I want to thank you all for your very impassioned support for those who currently serve and those who have served.

I'd like to leave you with something to think about. The book I have here is entitled, *What It Is Like To Go To War*, by Karl Marlantes. In his preface, I found something that has given me reason to think long and hard this past Remembrance Day and all the way through your debate. In the words that I heard today, I felt I needed to pass on and give you something else to think about. I wasn't going to do this originally.

It says in here: "All conscientious citizens and especially those with the power to make policy will be better prepared to make decisions about committing young people to combat if they know what they are about to ask of them. ... The violence of combat assaults psyches, confuses ethics, and tests souls. This is not only a result of the violence suffered. It is

also a result of the violence inflicted. Warriors suffer from wounds to their bodies, to be sure, but because they are involved in killing people they also suffer from their compromises with, or outright violations of, the moral norms of society and religion."

Thank you again for your committed, impassioned and very emotional support.

Motion No. 510

Clerk: Motion No. 510, standing in the name of Mr. Hassard.

Speaker: It has been moved by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to continue to implement the housing and land development commitments outlined in the Yukon Party's 2011 election platform, "Moving Forward Together," by:

(1) developing a housing action plan that builds on strategic investments and addresses the needs of Yukoners for a variety of housing options; and

(2) seeking innovative ways to partner with the private sector, NGOs and other governments to meet the housing needs of Yukoners.

Mr. Hassard: It's a pleasure to rise today and speak on behalf of Motion No. 510. Mr. Speaker, in October of 2011, the Yukon Party government won its third consecutive majority government and this win was based on our platform, "Moving Forward Together."

This "Moving Forward Together" document held housing as a very high priority. In that document, we identified five major points on housing: to implement a comprehensive strategy to address the housing needs of Yukoners, including working with an NGO to establish a youth centre in downtown Whitehorse; working with the Salvation Army to expand or replace their existing homeless shelter in Whitehorse; ensuring further housing options are available to those most in need, such as seniors and persons with disabilities throughout the territory; making Crown land available to the private sector to ensure new rental accommodations are made available in the Yukon; implement the recommendations of the Select Committee on the *Landlord and Tenant Act* to modernize the legislation; explore options to assist Yukoners who are in social housing to their own homes; and to work with First Nations to make their land available for residential development.

It's hard to expand on housing without land, so also in our platform we discussed the issues of land. In the platform it said that we will continue to make land available to Yukoners for community, residential, recreational, agricultural, commercial and industrial purposes, while respecting the interests of existing landholders as one of the highest Yukon government priorities by streamlining the land application process and ensuring that appropriate policies and administrative structures are put in place to manage Crown land in the territory, to modernize the legislation related to the

land titles process, to utilize technology, to improve the timelines of transferring land titles, to work with the city to ensure the provision of the land protocol that requires a constant supply of residential lots is followed, and to work with other municipal governments to make land available for residential and recreational lots. We committed to these things in our platform, and we are carrying through on all of these commitments.

In 2006, the Government of Canada provided \$50 million to Yukon through the northern housing trust. In recognition of the housing needs of First Nation citizens, \$32.5 million went to the First Nations. The remaining \$17.5 million went to the territorial government. It was allocated under the northern housing trust. The Yukon government invested approximately \$4 million of that money to construct a 10-suite, second-stage housing facility in partnership with Kaushee's Place.

This government did not waste the rest of that money. In fact, it is hopefully able to leverage the remaining \$13 million into at least a \$26-million investment in affordable rentals. Both NGOs and private sector proponents are eligible, and there are provisions to ensure that the funds are not expended solely in Whitehorse.

Just recently, the Yukon Housing Corporation put out an RFP to seek proposals to construct new affordable housing in the Yukon. The process was to ensure that proponents provide at least 50 percent of the total cost, effectively doubling the housing investment. Yukon Housing will not be an owner or a proponent and, as such, there will be no ongoing O&M costs to the Housing Corporation. The target is affordable housing, not social housing, and the objective is to fill the gap in rental housing that has been an issue for several years.

This government recognizes that adequate, available and affordable housing is fundamental in building and maintaining strong Yukon communities. We are striving toward ensuring everyone has shelter, helping homeowners through repair, upgrade and financing programs and working with our partners in the communities to assist vulnerable and at-risk people who require additional services and support to live independently.

We continue to build on our recent accomplishments and ensure our efforts are coordinated and meet a range of housing needs for Yukoners. The government is currently developing a housing action plan, and Yukon Housing will be leading this initiative and will seek contributions from a number of organizations and stakeholders.

The action plan was announced in March 2013 and will take into account strategic investments in housing and land already initiated or completed by the government. These include land development, an expanded youth shelter, new second-stage housing for women and children fleeing violence, expansion of the Options for Independence facility for adults with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and seniors housing, such as the replacement at the former Alexander Street residence and the recently announced seniors housing facility in Mayo.

Some of Yukon's most vulnerable citizens are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless due to poverty and other

barriers to living independently. The Yukon government is working with agencies and organizations to assist vulnerable and at-risk populations that require additional services and supports to live independently. Emergency shelters are a place for people to sleep on a temporary basis and they are usually a last alternative.

The Health and Social Services department, with the work of the Minister of Health and Social Services, has been working the Salvation Army to support their plans to consolidate, expand and relocate its shelter and other services to a larger facility. Health and Social Services has provided the Salvation Army with the seed funding to develop a functional plan for this new facility. I believe it is somewhere in the neighbourhood of about \$100,000. It is anticipated that this plan will be completed before the end of the year. Health and Social Services provides funding to relocate and expand the number of youth shelter beds at the Sarah Steele facility to a different building. The youth shelter is operated by the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, and Yukon Housing Corporation actually provided a house or a unit so that they could move and get that opened up.

Health and Social Services and Yukon Housing also worked with the Dawson Shelter Society to expand the women's shelter to provide increased space for programming and more bed capacity for women and children in need.

In terms of transitional housing, which is intended to be short- or medium-term housing provided on a temporary basis, the Yukon government via the Women's Directorate has committed \$4.5 million for the construction of a second-stage housing facility in Whitehorse. Betty's Haven is providing 10 units of supportive, secure and affordable transition housing. This housing is intended for 12 to 18 months for women and children who are fleeing abusive relationships.

The new Salvation Army facility will include a transitional housing component and this will provide residents with individualized assistance and support to develop skills for independent living.

Supportive housing is medium- to long-term housing, combined with on-site support services to assist people with more complex needs to live independently. The Yukon Housing Corporation provided funding for the Options for Independence, or OFI, to build a 14-unit supported independent living project for adults with FASD. This will be an expansion to their existing complex and the project will be owned, managed and operated by the Options for Independence. This project also received capital funding support from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation under the affordable housing initiative. Health and Social Services is providing the O&M funding for this project.

The Women's Directorate, as well as Yukon Housing Corporation, received funding for a full-time employee to continue with the implementation of the programming at the Whitehorse affordable family housing complex for single-parent families in Riverdale. This was a commitment to run through 2017-18 and includes a program coordinator on-site at half-time to provide programming and support services.

Health and Social Services has provided funding for group homes and a range of other housing options for persons with disabilities who require additional assistance and support to live independently.

They also provided funding to open the Takhini Haven, which is a supportive housing project for persons with a disability who have complex care needs. Takhini Haven is operated by Challenge Community Vocational Alternatives and is located in the former women's transitional living facility.

Social housing is something that is normally owned by the government or non-profit organizations and rented out to people with low to moderate incomes. Here in the Yukon the government provides social housing in most Yukon communities through the Yukon Housing Corporation. It's on a rent-g geared-to-income basis. This sees tenants pay 25 percent of their gross monthly household income for rent and heat. However, victims of violence receive priority consideration on the waitlist for Yukon Housing Corporation units by applying under the Yukon Housing victims of violence policy.

Some of the new social housing over the past few years put in place by the Yukon Housing Corporation include: a seniors complex in Watson Lake; two seniors complexes — one in Teslin and one in Faro — and those are in my riding — as well as Haines Junction and Whitehorse; the Turner Street apartments in Dawson City; the Whitehorse affordable family housing project and the Whitehorse family six-plex in the Ingram subdivision.

In terms of social housing, since 2005 this Yukon government has constructed over \$90 million worth of social housing. This includes nearly \$37 million between 2005 and 2008, which included the seniors housing in Haines Junction and Whitehorse, along with the affordable housing for students at the Yukon College.

Since we don't want everything to be about the government, there are also a variety of housing options that are available through the private rental market. However, the vacancy rate in Whitehorse has remained low over the past several years. In June 2013, the rental vacancy rate was at 1.4 percent and the median rent was approximately \$875.

While the government usually has no role in regulating the cost of private rental accommodations, the Yukon Housing Corporation does offer several programs aimed at increasing the number of units and improving the quality of accommodation. Some of these initiatives include a rental rehabilitation program, which helps owners of rental housing upgrade their accommodations. Another one is the rental suite program, which helps homeowners to either build a rental suite or upgrade an existing rental suite within their place of residence.

The Yukon Housing Corporation also has a rent supplement program. This is only available in Whitehorse, but it's where tenants in private markets pay 25 percent of their gross household monthly income for rent and heat and the supplement makes up the difference to the landlord. This program does not increase the number of private market rental

units, but it does make units more affordable to program participants. Though this is operated through the Yukon Housing Corporation's social housing program, it is an example of rent subsidy in the private market.

Many people choose or desire to own their own home and, while the Yukon government also doesn't have a role in regulating the cost of real estate, several programs are offered to assist Yukoners with the purchase or renovation of their own home.

Yukon Housing Corporation provides mortgages to eligible persons who are not eligible for traditional bank financing. Maybe someone — young people — don't have a credit rating yet. They also offer loans — below bank interest rates — to homeowners who need to renovate their home to address safety or structural issues or overcrowding or energy deficiencies in their homes.

All clients benefit from the financial expertise of the Yukon Housing Corporation staff to ensure that their housing goals are consistent with the family budgets. Yukon Housing has a down payment assistance program. This is intended to assist households that may be eligible for bank financing but have not accumulated a sufficient down payment. This can work toward homes, condominiums or townhouses and assistance is provided in the form of a deferred loan and registered on title as a second mortgage.

Under the mortgage financing program, Yukon Housing Corporation offers mortgages of up to \$360,000 to clients who are not eligible for bank financing, with a minimum down payment of only 2.5 percent compared to five percent, which would be the minimum down payment required by a bank.

The owner-build program offers tiered interest construction financing and technical assistance for those people who want to construct their own homes in rural Yukon. The home repair program is a longstanding and well-utilized loan program that helps qualified applicants address safety, structural and space issues, while improving energy efficiency in their homes. Clients can also receive technical assistance from the Yukon Housing Corporation staff and applicants may qualify for a subsidy to reduce their loan payments.

As well, there is the home repair enhancement program, the home completion program, which offers rural clients funding to complete construction for those who maybe started their house and then, due to circumstances, were unable to finish.

I spoke about land a few minutes ago and we understand that increases to the Yukon's population in recent years have increased pressures to provide land for a wide range of housing projects and the Yukon government, I'm happy to say, is working to increase the availability of land in all communities.

In 2012 Community Services and the City of Whitehorse completed the first phase of the Whistle Bend subdivision — 90 single-family residential, 14 duplexes and seven multi-family lots were all made available through a lottery and tender sale process. As of September of this year, 23 single-family lot purchasers have entered into agreements for sale, all seven duplex sites and three multi-family lots have been sold.

In October of 2012, as part of its commitment to increase land availability, the Land Management branch held a builders draw for the Whistle Bend subdivision phase 1 to make the remaining single-family lots available to contractors. This draw allowed the opportunity for contractors to purchase up to 10 lots. The lots remaining from this draw, as well as the multi-family lots, were made available for sale over the counter at the Land Management branch office.

In September of this fall, the second phase of Whistle Bend subdivision was released to the public through a lottery and tender process where we saw 57 single-family lots, 20 restricted residential lots, 11 duplex lots and 11 townhouse sites offered up for lottery on September 18. Tenders for five multi-family lots were opened on September 20 and a pair of duplex lots from phase 2, which will accommodate a building for two families, was set aside for Habitat for Humanity.

As there were no applicants resulting from the lottery and tender process, phase 2 lots are now publically available over the counter in the Land Management branch. The Land Management branch will also be releasing three residential lots and two industrial lots in Carmacks, along with 21 country residential lots in Teslin. I hope to see those all out before the end of the year.

As a part of a wider initiative, the Land Management branch has completed the first phase of a multi-phase inventory of vacant Commissioner's land within municipalities and unincorporated communities, and this will be used to identify sites for potential future disposition of land and subdivisions.

Phase 1 focused on Whitehorse and identified several undeveloped lots of Commissioner's land for potential sale. Land continues to be made available for a variety of purposes, including rural residential and areas outside municipalities, and these are all delivered by the Land Management branch.

Energy, Mines and Resources is working with First Nations on a variety of projects to encourage development of settlement land for recreational and residential purposes. A couple of examples of that would be in my riding of Teslin with the Teslin Tlingit Council where we just finished a subdivision of country residential lots, as well as the recreational lots on Little Teslin.

Mr. Speaker, recommendations of the Select Committee on the *Landlord and Tenant Act* to modernize legislation were taken into consideration and built upon as this Legislature debated and passed that *Landlord and Tenant Act*. I'd also like to add that the bill was passed unanimously.

We've heard on numerous occasions from the Opposition that the government needs to do something about the fly-in/fly-out workers as we tend to call them and ask why they don't live in the Yukon.

Why do we have fly-in/fly-out people? It seems to be criticized that a lot of it is due to the fact that there is no housing or they can't afford the housing. This is kind of interesting because the Department of Economic Development put out a competitive RFP and they engaged Ecofor Consulting in February 2013 to complete a project to explore issues related to residency. Specific requirements of that

project included: examination of potential barriers to residency; review of initiatives, programs and benefits that are already in place in Yukon to address residency issues; and a review of external programs used in other jurisdictions to address the issue of residency. These external programs and initiatives would be reviewed in terms of their applicability to the Yukon context, provide baseline context of Yukon in terms of the current costs of living in comparison to other communities, a description of the current composition of the mining labour force and how an increase in population may impact the territory, and a summary of findings and recommendations related to promotion of Yukon residency and increased employment capture.

The report provided to the department identified several perceived barriers to residency in the Yukon, including a high cost of living, climate, access to larger centres, and employment for spouses and families.

The report also notes that many of these misconceptions are not based in fact. Housing costs, for instance — the report suggests that housing costs of Yukon are actually somewhat comparable to similarly sized and located jurisdictions. If I could just quote from that report: "There is clear indication that Whitehorse is not as expensive as commonly perceived. Although the SPS indicates that specific cities/regions within BC were less expensive to live, it also showed within the CPI tables that Whitehorse is rated one of the more affordable places in Canada (when comparing the provincial averages in major cities). In addition, the average cost of housing when purchased through a realtor is significantly less expensive in Yukon than in provinces such as BC, Alberta and Ontario. The cost of living comparison indicates that although the majority of B.C. locations are less expensive to live than Whitehorse, the majority of other cities/provinces in Canada are not. When housing costs are factored in, it would appear that Yukon is in fact more affordable than commonly perceived. The research indicates that there are differences in costs of living across the country. It is recommended that strategies to attract workers from outside Yukon should be strategically directed to provinces and cities with higher prices. This strategy eliminates the barrier of 'cost of living' and potentially increases the financial benefits for the individual and family."

The report also notes that for a sizable portion of those surveyed — about 35 percent of them, in fact — no type of incentive would result in relocation to the Yukon as they simply prefer to live elsewhere. Several recommendations are included in the report, such as targeted recruitment and strategies, increased accessibility to urban centres, and investment in employment options for spouses and families.

In closing, I'd just like to say that to me — and I hope to everyone out there listening — it's quite obvious that this government has taken the issue of housing very seriously. This government will continue to work with NGOs, other governments and the private sector to continue to try to find ways to improve not only housing, but the quality of life for all Yukoners.

I look forward to hearing ideas and the debate from others in the House here today. I hope that, time permitting, we'll be able to take this motion to a vote.

Ms. White: I thank the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin for his thoughts, for his informative walk through the services offered by the Yukon Housing Corporation and various other government departments.

This is the third time we will be debating what this territory needs in terms of a housing action plan.

This shouldn't come as a surprise that there is still a homelessness issue in the territory. There are still more than 100 people on waiting lists for social housing. There is still a desperate need for supportive housing. There are still people couch surfing, sleeping rough. There are still people who pay much more than 40 percent of their monthly income toward rent. It turns out that the government's debates and press releases are not actually helping house the people who are in the greatest need of housing.

As this is the third time, I don't mind reiterating the Yukon New Democratic Party's position regarding housing. I will continue to speak to the first such motion we debated, the one I brought forward in December 2011. I just wish that the words we speak in this Chamber would make a difference for those living with either no housing, unsecured housing or housing they can't really afford. One thing I notice about today's Yukon Party housing motion is that they are starting to follow the NDP lead. In December 2011, the motion I brought forward read:

THAT this House urges the Government of Yukon to work with all governments, including First Nations, as well as non-profit and private housing providers, to develop a Yukon housing strategy and policy framework that will:

- (1) include all Yukon communities;
- (2) have performance and risk management measures;
- (3) be comprehensive, innovative, practical and achievable;
- (4) increase the housing supply;
- (5) improve housing affordability; and
- (6) support individuals and families in greatest housing need.

In today's motion, we see reference to innovation, to the private sector, to NGOs, and to other governments — all points brought forward by me in December 2011. Mr. Speaker, the Yukon Party platform in 2011 was pretty weak on housing and the crisis of homelessness continues to worsen under their watch.

They didn't actually have an action plan or strategy until last spring, when it was announced that one was going to be developed. When I asked a question about the Housing First approach last week, I referenced *Groundhog Day*, Mr. Speaker — the film where Bill Murray lives the same day over and over again. In his case, eventually repetition led to an increase in tolerance and compassion. As I debate another housing motion, I too hope that repetition leads the government to a more compassionate and effective approach to housing.

On April 17, 2013, we debated this motion:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to continue to implement the housing and land development commitments outlined in the Yukon Party's 2011 election platform, "Moving Forward Together," by developing a housing action plan that builds on strategic investments and addresses the needs of Yukoners for a variety of housing options.

Well, Mr. Speaker, it's verbatim actually from today's Motion No. 510, we have both the urge part and number one. So we've been on this ground before. So, in April 2013 we debated this motion.

The Yukon Party and Conservative ideology alone is not delivering results, like actual affordable housing or living wages. I'm talking about the persistent trickle-down theory the Yukon Party favours. When it comes to housing, the trickle-down theory goes like this: currently, housed Yukoners will upgrade their house and buy bigger houses or build on new, expensive lots like those we find out in Grizzly Valley. As they vacate the houses that they are in right now, that upward mobility will supposedly lead to an increased supply of more affordable vacancies to rent or to buy.

It didn't work then and it isn't working now. The trickle-down theory, it turns out, does not hold water. So, once more through the spectrum of housing needs we go. Many workers with well-paying jobs are flying in and out of the territory because, even though employed in good jobs, they cannot find affordable housing. We heard the member's thoughts on that. For low-income workers, there are not affordable rental units. Prices continue their upward climb and landlords can raise the rent as much as they like, though now they can only do it once a year.

For people looking to buy, real estate prices simply are not affordable for many Yukoners even with the new down payment assistance program, especially in this economy that is creating a growing gap between the rich and the poor. There are still more than 100 people in Whitehorse who are homeless or tenuously housed. Housing challenges exist in almost every community in the territory. Vulnerable seniors looking for appropriate housing get put on a wait-list of over 100 people with no knowledge of where they are on that list or how long the wait will be.

And then there is supportive housing. We question whether the minister knows how many Yukoners are wait-listed for supportive housing. We encourage the minister responsible to get a clear sense of the need for supportive housing. What are the numbers of people in need and what are the supports that will enable them to live with dignity?

From our casework letters, the minister may recall some questions we have asked about evidence pointing to the need for more supportive housing. We asked if the minister is aware that there may be a population living in social housing that may not reasonably be expected to comply with the tenancy agreement. For example, people with brain injuries are likely to have a hard time remembering rules and following them at all times. The minister has not yet answered

that correspondence, but hopefully the minister will commit to determining Yukon's need for supportive housing.

One reason why all of the talk about how housing is not delivering results is that this government refuses to establish meaningful targets and timelines. One-off projects do not a strategy make. How will progress on housing be measured? What are the benchmarks? To be effective, a plan needs a clear starting point and baseline information about housing needs. We need numbers of homeless in the Yukon. We need a clear, accurate number of how many people are living on the streets and then with that we can make a to-do list and resource it adequately.

When it comes to partnering with the private sector, we do not relish repetition. The Yukon Party approach to partnering with the private sector was first seen on Lot 262, and that was a total fiasco. We all remember that, but what has changed to date? What did the government learn?

Now we have a new announcement addressing affordable housing, and I hope it turns out differently than Lot 262.

We urge the government to work well with the private sector, but here's the thing: the housing crisis is a societal problem. It has causes beyond actual housing stock. Whether it is poverty, lifelong disability or old age, many people simply cannot afford housing. Why should the government step in to deal with homelessness? If it's not for compassionate reasons, then surely it's for economic reasons. The Housing First approach is based on evidence that it costs less to end homelessness than to perpetuate it through inaction. Homelessness costs in terms of suffering and in terms of costs to other parts of our public services — health and justice services, for example.

This side of the House has no issue with effective partnering. We cherish it; we look forward to seeing its successes. But the results for homeless Yukoners depend on baseline knowledge. What are the needs in each community? What kind of housing supports will serve? What are the roles of the government and the roles of partners? What are the targets? Is it housing for seniors, for disabled folks or for low-income people? What are the baseline needs? What are the targets and those timelines? Then, potential partners need the government to be clear in the expectations of what they need to do. The housing crisis in the territory is wide, so plans and strategies need to consider different challenges between rural communities and their requirements for housing.

We've heard today concerns around partisan politics and right now I'll raise my own. Just like the last time, I tried to amend Motion No. 509, making it stronger by removing reference to the Yukon Party's 2011 election platform, I'm going to try again. I believe that Motion No. 510 will be stronger if it leaves partisan politics aside.

Amendment proposed

Ms. White: I move:

THAT motion No. 510 be amended by removing the phrase, "to implement the housing and land development commitments outlined in the Yukon Party's 2011 election platform, Moving Forward Together, by".

Speaker: The amendment is in order. It has been moved by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King:

THAT Motion No. 510 be amended by removing the phrase "to implement the housing and land development commitments outlined in the Yukon Party's 2011 election platform, Moving Forward Together, by".

Ms. White: As amended, the motion would read:

THAT this House urges the Yukon government to continue:

(1) developing a housing action plan that builds on strategic investments and addresses the needs of Yukoners for a variety of housing options; and

(2) seeking innovative ways to partner with the private sector, NGOs and other governments to meet the housing needs of Yukoners.

I believe that by removing the reference to the 2011 election platform, it makes the motion stronger. I believe that this is a way to move forward in a non-partisan fashion.

Hon. Mr. Kent: It's my pleasure to rise to speak to the amendment introduced by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King. Of course, the government side won't be supporting this amendment and I think there are a number of reasons that I'd like to speak to as to why we won't be supporting this amendment introduced by the Member for Takhini-Kopper King.

The commitments that were outlined in the Yukon Party's 2011 election platform, "Moving Forward Together" — many of them were addressed by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin in his opening remarks.

I think that when the election was held in 2011, each party had a plan for housing that was put forward. Some of those commitments overlapped, but many were unique to the party that proposed them. I know for instance the Yukon Liberal Party proposed something similar to the home-owners grant, but for renters. I can't remember exactly what it was. We spoke in December 2011 and the NDP wanted to introduce a housing plan. I think one of the biggest problems with that was that there seemed to be an expectation that we would stop doing housing while we developed a housing action plan that the NDP brought forward in that motion.

On the amendment that I brought forward at the time, there was a very emotionally charged debate in the House that day. The amendment that I brought forward at the time, I believe, strengthened the motion, but you know that wasn't agreed to by all parties in the House at the time.

I think there are a number of commitments — Mr. Speaker, perhaps I could speak in my experience as minister responsible for the Yukon Housing Corporation up until early August of this year when there was a reassignment of portfolios. I have quite a bit of experience obviously at the forefront of addressing the housing issues and implementing the Yukon Party's 2011 election platform. I think it's important to speak about those issues and why government members and I feel that it's important to leave this reference

to our platform in the motion as presented by the Member for Pelly-Nisutlin.

First and foremost, the Options for Independence project is nearing completion. I believe it's nearing occupancy, and that is certainly a commitment that we had made. I'm very pleased and proud to have delivered on that from a number of standpoints — with Yukon Housing Corporation following through on my mandate letter from the Premier to assist that particular NGO with the construction of the new building on Fourth Avenue here in Whitehorse, and the Minister of Health and Social Services with the commitment on the operation and maintenance side to that organization to ensure that that facility is a tremendous success. We were pleased when it was able to get off the ground and pleased that the individuals involved in constructing it were able to get that work completed.

One of the commitments that we made in our platform that I don't believe the other parties made — certainly not the NDP; I'm not sure if the Liberals spoke to this specific project or not — was a commitment to build the Mayo seniors complex. Members will know that work continues under the current minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation, who will be more up to date on this. We've identified some land; there is some remediation work that needs to be done. I know that when the Premier, the Minister of Health and Social Services and I travelled to Mayo and talked about that particular parcel of land, there was quite a bit of excitement generated with respect to that project. We are looking forward to the remediation work being completed and design work and construction proceeding during this mandate of our government — a much-needed commitment that was made in our platform for the people in Mayo.

Much has been said about the Alexander Street project, but I'd like to elaborate a little bit more because that's tied to a platform commitment of ours to ensure that more housing is made available to seniors in particular. As mentioned, there has been a substantial amount of investment over the past — I would say, since about 2007 — with the initial construction of the seniors and student facilities, which was the athletes village at Yukon College, through to where we are right now as far as investments in seniors housing.

The Member for Pelly-Nisutlin mentioned many of the communities where those investments were made, such as Teslin, Faro, Haines Junction and Watson Lake — new social housing not directed specifically for seniors, but social housing development in Dawson City.

Then of course there is the development of the Alexander Street housing project. The tender calls went out in late May as was announced. At the time, as minister responsible for the Housing Corporation, I was able to put out a press release that spoke to addressing the housing needs of seniors and providing high-quality, affordable housing options for them as their health and mobility needs change.

One of the interesting aspects that we introduced with respect to that project was — I guess turning the clock back a little bit to an early time as the minister responsible for the Housing Corporation, I spent a lot of time in the early days

after the election travelling around to different communities and visiting many of the projects that had been constructed. Of course, one of the things that was a big issue for the residents was accessibility.

There were calls by members opposite, even members in the government caucus, for the Yukon Housing Corporation and me to address things on a one-off basis. Rather than do that, I thought it was — working with the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors and their staff, we came up with a housing accessibility advisory committee. We implemented it. The first project that that was implemented was again for the Alexander Street replacement. Perhaps what I'll read into the record is a quote from one of the members on the committee. Dorothy Drummond, who represented the Yukon Council on Aging, said, "Accessibility is one of the key values seniors look for in order to live independently. The accessibility features in the new Alexander Street facility will be welcomed by the senior tenants."

Design features include accessible suites with storage and balconies. The four-storey, 34-unit building will include two elevators, common rooms, and a large lobby area facing Alexander Street, and parking will be off the lane at the back of the building. Four of the suites will include wheelchair-accessible showers. There is obviously a commitment to energy efficiency and using low-maintenance materials to reduce operation and maintenance costs — again, following up on our party's election platform and really enhancing some of those commitments that we made so that we can address this very important issue.

This is for individuals who are going to be moving into our new facilities like the Alexander Street residence or the new Mayo Seniors housing residence, but it is also addressing existing facilities as well and looking to ensure that they are accessible for individuals.

Mr. Speaker, again, building on commitments in our platform and "Moving Forward Together" and looking also for new and innovative commitments that come from individuals — individuals who are serving Yukoners on the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors with the very dedicated and talented officials who work for the Yukon Housing Corporation and departments like Community Services and Health and Social Services — we came up with ideas such as the down payment assistance plan and helping individuals.

Again, updated information will be available from the current minister, but I believe there were over 20 or 25 families who were in various stages of application or approval for that down payment assistance program. Again, it's something that I think we can all be proud of as we try to stretch the dollars that are available in the loan portfolio and ensure that we can assist more Yukon families in meeting their housing goals.

For many Yukoners, home ownership is that ultimate housing goal, and I know that's shared by many families. That's something we wanted to build on from our platform "Moving Forward Together".

Again, another innovative approach that we have taken — and it's really coming out of the Housing Outside the Box, the northern housing conference that was hosted here in March. At that, I was pleased to be able to announce our housing action plan and the work that is going to continue on that as we move through the next year or so. We are looking to having that plan in place.

One of the most important things that we need to keep in mind is that housing can't stop while we develop and implement that plan. That's why programs such as the northern housing trust request for qualifications and request for proposals have been implemented during that time. Yukoners don't expect us to just halt all housing while that plan is being developed.

I think it is going to prove to be a very inclusive exercise. We have a number of committee structures, as well as senior officials who will be overseeing the development of that plan. There is very much a lot of grassroots input into it as it is being developed by a number of NGOs and groups, including someone from the mining community who is going to be engaged and involved.

There has been much talk about reducing the number of employees who don't live here in the Yukon, and that's something we are committed to through our platform commitments with respect to training. Looking at the housing issues that face those workers, the Minister of Economic Development commented last week during Question Period, I believe, that one of the main issues for people is the weather. Some things we can't change, but we do want to change the other opportunities for Yukoners.

I know that the private sector is also getting involved. In recent meetings with senior officials from Capstone Mining, who own the Minto project, they have a number of senior managers and senior officials who have relocated to the Yukon through incentive packages that they've offered. Of course, we've communicated some of the opportunities that exist here for home ownership or rentals, where they would qualify to relocate to the Yukon.

For instance, the mine manager at the Minto mine and his family live here in Porter Creek — Porter Creek South is the riding they've chosen to live in. His wife is a school teacher here in the Yukon and I believe there are three children — so they are very much making the Yukon home and adding to the fabric.

What we've been able to deliver on coming out of our election platform, as well as the new programs that have been built and the innovation shown by members of the Yukon Housing Corporation Board of Directors and other officials, has been very important. I sit on a committee that's chaired by the minister responsible for Community Services and in his portfolio as minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation, joined by the Minister of Health and Social Services, and me in my role as Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. We have a committee that deals with housing and land availability issues. Again, that's Cabinet ministers getting together with senior officials to address specific issues related to housing and land availability.

The work is very much done at a senior level as we look for new and innovative ways to build on our platform commitments and deliver housing and address land-availability needs for Yukoners.

In closing, and why I think it's so important that this stay in the original motion — I know that the Member for Klondike wants to speak to this amendment as well, so I won't take much longer. One of the issues I'd like to talk about is the availability of lots. The Yukon Party government from 2002 to 2013 has made over 1,300 more lots available, or developed 1,300 lots for Yukoners. Currently, there are 350 available that are in inventory in communities, ranging from five in Carmacks to 17 in Dawson City, four in Destruction Bay, five in Faro, and 17 in Grizzly Valley. Haines Junction has a variety of lots available — 62 in total; and there are 20 in Watson Lake and 220 in Whitehorse — 219 of those are in the City of Whitehorse-planned Whistle Bend subdivision that we were pleased to assist them in delivering.

When it comes to the commitments that we made in the election platform, I believe we are delivering on them.

One last thing I'd like to mention is the recent announcement of the expanded reserve for Yukon College. Again, another commitment we made in the election was to provide additional land to the college, not only for the expansion of the Centre for Northern Innovation in Mining, but also potential expansion of the student residence building.

As you can see, Mr. Speaker, we're moving forward together on these election commitments, but not putting an end to all housing by any stretch of the imagination. We need to continue to work for Yukoners and deliver for Yukoners on their housing and land availability needs.

Speaker: Does any other member wish to be heard? Are you prepared for the question on the amendment?
Amendment to Motion No. 510 negatived

Speaker: Does any member wish to be heard on the motion as presented?

Mr. Silver: For Hansard, I'm going to blow the fingers off the keyboards. We don't have a lot of time left and I have a lot to say.

Item (1) of this motion states that we will be "developing a housing action plan..." I must be having a bit of déjà vu, Mr. Speaker, for I thought that the minister responsible for Yukon Housing Corporation already launched a housing action plan. This was his response to questions on housing last spring. So it leads me to ask this question: are we scrapping that action plan and are we starting over with a new one? That's surely how this motion reads. Or are we to assume that no work has been done over those eight months since we first started hearing that an action plan was in the works?

I hope that the new minister responsible for housing can shed some light on that. I have a press release right here — March 26, 2013: "Housing action plan to be developed for Yukon". It goes on to state the process and so I'm just very confused as to why the new motion here has item (1) basically

saying that we are developing an action plan. Maybe the new minister can speak to that. Here we go again. A new minister responsible and a new kick at the action-plan can. It's kind of like Fred Flintstone breaking into a run. The feet look like they're moving, but he hasn't moved an inch.

So, here we go again. I will support this initiative through this motion — absolutely. It was a good idea almost a year ago and it still is a good idea. I really don't think that we need a day in the Assembly to rally behind this. The Yukon Party has a majority. Let's just do it already.

I do have some recommendations though. I do have faith in the public servants on this file as well. Two years ago, NGOs in Dawson who had spent much time and effort mapping out available lots and who owned them were doing consultation in the form of surveys and analyses had to wait a year for a response for their action items.

The team over at Yukon Housing Corporation is new and this is a new push but, by all accounts and by all reports that I have received, they are moving in the right direction.

I'm just going to read a quote from people working in non-government agencies on housing and how they're working with this new team — and I'm quoting: "Yukon Housing Corporation has some very well-intended and smart people at the top right now who have been excellent to work with to date over the last several months and have been listening and have been learning. They have built good relationships and they went out of their way to invite us to a meet and greet when the Yukon Housing Corporation Board was in town, and they actually have come a long way and they get it."

So hopefully the Yukon Party will allow this good work to get off the ground this time, and hopefully they are going listen to recommendations. The recommendations that I will put forth today are largely about allowing for the free market to do their jobs. Previous government involvement in real estate development has left taxpayers funding Yukon's very own billion-dollar Area 51. We have confidential lawsuit settlements adding another half a million dollars to that tab.

We have been told that Whistle Bend lots were put up to market value, and that is not correct. Market value is the price at which something will actually sell in that market. It is what a reasonable person will pay. We have seen no response to the second-stage of Whistle Bend lots. They are clearly overpriced. With no uptake from residents, the City of Whitehorse has no interest in taking these burdens over either. This leaves the liability in the hands of the Government of Yukon and of Yukon taxpayers. Past performance tells us that we cannot leave it to government to tell citizens what they want and we can't leave it to government to effectively deliver what these citizens want. Pass this on to the private sector.

Now that I've gotten this off my chest, I will ensure to take a positive tone here and I'll have my comments being constructive criticism. This file is way too important and way too troubled for us to use.

As far as access to land, my first recommendation is to make progress on access to land for development. I speak regularly with people who have money to build houses and

who also have the skills to build these houses. I'm sure that other people here will also do that. I'm sure you've heard these conversations too, Mr. Speaker.

The first group would like to pay the second group to get what they want. This is called free commerce. However, successful governments have taken control of access to land. In Dawson alone, the combined Yukon and municipal bureaucracies have not seen fit to facilitate a new urban subdivision on that land in nearly 20 years. There is zero inventory for sale and it has been that way for years. Now there is nowhere to build houses with no work for our talented builders who are driving to Mexico for the winter.

Across the Yukon, increasing land prices have contributed considerably to the overall price increases. Land costs, as a percentage of single-detached house prices, increased from below 25 percent in 2002 to almost 40 percent in 2012. This results in higher prices for citizens and lower returns for Yukon companies and their employees. We need to actually fix land development instead of talking about it. To do this we will be a long way forward in addressing our housing issues.

Next I want to discuss reform in government housing. This one is a political hot potato, I must admit, but we need to be bold and we need to rethink this. I have personally seen this effect in Dawson. We give houses to citizens with good jobs and then we charge them well below the market rate at \$600 a month with no fixed end date. This rent is way below the cost of operating and a replacement, so the taxpayers foot the bill.

I'm guilty. When I first arrived in Dawson City to teach at Robert Service School I was very thankful for Yukon Housing Corporation. I needed the housing. I would say, however, after two years I really didn't need that housing. As I made many connections in my community, I rationalized with myself: why would I leave — \$600 a month for a three-bedroom house?

I rationalized myself out of a mortgage in Dawson, out of growing roots — and for every one person like me who finally, after six years of Yukon Housing housing, decided to grow roots and actually to build, there are many, many others who never do and there are many who also leave because they can't find land to build on.

Meanwhile, social housing tenants frequently pay more than these citizens with well-paying, stable jobs. The current policies leave no incentive for those who can afford it to move out into the private market so their units can be freed up for newcomers. Practically speaking, staff tenants should be moved to the 25 percent of the income social housing rate after two or three years or simply be required to move to the private sector like everyone else. I know this would not be popular in some circles, but the current program is an intervention and distortion of the marketplace.

Finally, Yukon Housing Corporation lending will also need to be reformed. The bulk of the money under these programs goes to Whitehorse, even though the private lenders are active, competitive and fully able to meet borrowing needs. There is no need for the government to be tying up tax

dollars and meddling in the Whitehorse lending markets. These programs could be qualified and restricted to rural areas, unusual circumstances and unconventional housing situations where private lenders truly won't go.

In conclusion, we need to allow the free market to do its work on housing. We need to ensure that when we say "partner" we mean "partner" — that we share the risks and the rewards. Government can support, but it should not replace, the private sector. Too often partnership in this territory has meant, "We'll give you the money and we'll take the risk," as opposed to a real partnership of shared moil and toil, through thick and thin, to achieve mutual goals.

With true partnership, however, we can really do something. My recommendations are clear. We need improved access to land and to encourage development. We need to reform government staff housing to give more fair access to housing, especially for those in need, and finally we need to reform Yukon Housing Corporation's lending programs to allow access to funding and financing in communities that do not have independent learning institutions.

I will be supporting this motion, Mr. Speaker. If I were to amend this motion, I would only add that we're really going to do it this time.

Ms. Stick: As mentioned earlier, we've had this debate in the past. I'm not sure why we're here debating it again. But in listening to all of the housing that the government likes to expound on that they have provided, there is a group of people that has been left out and I think this is important to consider.

There is information available. We've all heard it; we should have read it, and I think this government needs to consider it as part of their housing strategy. Even the federal government of Canada, through Canada's Minister of Social Development, has held up the Housing First approach as a good, economic approach to homelessness. This is a group we have not addressed. We are still having individuals at the Salvation Army in crowded, sometimes mixed groups, sleeping on mats on the floor. That is not housing. That is emergency shelter, but we have not addressed the housing needs of these individuals.

Housing First is a hard one for some people because it means providing shelter to the hardest to house with few strings attached. It means allowing homeless alcoholics, drug addicts, to continue drinking in subsidized housing. But the result of that — and this is what the Minister of Social Development spoke to — was the economic benefits of this and the human benefits of this.

First, someone has a permanent roof over their head — something we all deserve. We know there is proof; there is research that this improves health outcomes for these individuals. We know it encourages individuals to consider other healthier options. We know it improves access to mental health services. We know it reduces ER visits. All of these are economic pluses and beside that, it's providing housing. Everyone deserves a roof over their head. Every individual should have a safe place to live.

We're not asking for big things. We've seen projects in the past in other jurisdictions where it's just a room with a bed and a small kitchen area. Those individuals — many, not all — are able to see themselves doing better because they have a safe place to live, because they have a place to call home.

We know about this in Alaska, in Calgary, in other jurisdictions across this country. We've had an NGO — and they spoke to this in the motion — seeking innovative ways to partner. We've had private sector, we've had NGOs come forward with good plans, with financing, with land, with the support of Yukon Housing, or CMHC —

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

Debate on Motion No. 510 accordingly adjourned

The House adjourned at 5:30 p.m.